

Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora  
Canon Paul Walker  
Harvest Thanksgiving, October 10, 2021  
Joel 2:21-27, Psalm 126, Matthew 6:25-33

Fall is my favourite time of the year. There's something so special about the colours and the smell of the earth that captures my imagination. Every where I look seems like a post card. And then there's the food! It's interesting that this fall harvest festival revolves around food that comes *from* the earth. There is of course an indigenous tradition known as the three sisters - beans, corn, and squash. Those three vegetables are still staples on many Thanksgiving tables.

All of it points to a sense of bounty, an abundance, a harvest that yields plenty. And the remarkable thing is that most of us had so little to do with its production. This bountiful harvest came from a crop that was at first planted, and then we stepped back to wait. As we waited we allowed the seed to do its work, and the earth to do its work. Apart from the planning of seeds and the gathering of the harvest, our role, if we were involved in any of this at all, was largely as a bystander, an onlooker, and an observer to this entire process that occurs, in the right conditions, within or under the earth. The energy required for the act of creating the crop is largely invisible and found within the plant and the earth itself. All we need to do is plant it, wait, and then pick it.

In fact, it's sometimes best if we get out of the way.

All of this to say that the power within the earth to create something that is good and beneficial to us, that we have little to do with, is a remarkable gift. Land is sacred. Earth is good. In fact, to take it a step further, as the funeral liturgy reminds us, we came from the earth, and to the earth shall we return. Yet even at the grave we make our song, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

The earth is a powerful gift that not only generates food, but apparently, by an act of God, it holds the capacity to generate life; and then even from the dust of death the earth holds the capacity to generate a *new life* called resurrection.

The earth is really an important gift. No wonder the climate justice activists have become the prophetic voice of a younger generation; because they understand that the earth is gift, and if this gift is being abused we need to become better stewards of it and make some significant changes to our lives.

Jesus had it right, "Look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field." In other words, look at creation to understand that *you are provided for*; and you have very little to do with that act of provision. So, Jesus asks, what are you worried about?

The earth, and the bounty of the harvest, becomes a text for us to learn from: that you will be looked after; you will be provided for; and, even more so, ultimately you will be brought into the resurrection of a new creation from the earth.

“Do not fear,” is the imperative in the text from the first reading. “Do not be anxious,” is the imperative from the second reading. These are the two commandments that are repeated throughout the Bible more than any other commandment. We hear them repeated because God knows that we naturally tend towards fear and anxiety more than anything else. And the antidote to fear and anxiety is joy and gratitude.

“I am with you,” Jesus says, “to the ends of the earth.” In other words, you don’t have to worry. But we do worry perhaps because we think it’s all up to us. But God is saying through the texts of these sacred stories that really, like the bountiful harvest, we have very little to do with any of it.

Think about the story of the exodus. It was God who brought the Hebrews out of slavery. It was God who led them by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. It was God who brought them through the Red Sea. It was God who gave them manna in the wilderness. It was God who gave them water in the desert. It was God who brought them out of shame into a promised land. God did all of this, and they received it, with a fair bit of murmuring, complaining, and grumbling along the way. But finally, and it took time, they realized that this was all a gift that was given to them, and they rejoiced.

“When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,” the psalmist sings, “then were we like unto them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with joy.”

That is the posture of someone who recognizes where all this bounty, all this provision, all this abundance comes from. So that even in seasons of scarcity; even in times of wandering in a wilderness; even in the anxiety of a pandemic we can know, deep down, that we are never abandoned. Even when you ask for 1,500 poppies, you end up with 7,000 poppies! It’s an abundance of poppies that we don’t know what to do with them all. God never lets us go, but promises to take us through the valley of the shadow of death to a banquet table where our cup overflows with an abundance. God promises to take us to a place where our head is anointed with oil as though we were a member of a royal family.

And you know that because you recognize where all of this comes from. So take a good look around and see that we have an abundance, a bounty, a provision to get us through. And when you realize that you are living out of a position of abundance then you have a freedom from fear and worry to get through anything.

“They that sow in tears, shall reap with songs of joy.”  
Thanks be to God.



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