

## Harvest Sermon 2021.

### ***Blow some bubbles!***

1. **Welcome to our Harvest Festival 2021: 'The Fragile Harvest'!** All may be safely gathered in for our farmers have been working all day and sometimes much of the night to supply us and others with food. But we all know that this year, the harvest is a fragile business: not just because of our unpredictable weather but also the other elements which increasingly endanger our harvests: flood, drought, fire, soil erosion, overgrazing - to name just a few threats.

During November, in Glasgow, world leaders will be meeting at the COP26 Conference on Climate Change. COP stands for "Conference Of the Parties" – those nations which signed up for the UN Convention on Climate Change in 1994. This will be the 26<sup>th</sup> meeting. My hope is that in this service we can point to some of those critical issues which we must ourselves face for we too are *party* to this critical conference. We might also see how our faith is relevant at this pivotal moment in world history.

Our harvests - and our food supplies - are becoming increasingly fragile because of the encroaching climate change which is already upon us. Our bubbles are an image of this: so beautiful and yet so fragile.

2. **Our reading from Genesis Chapter 1** has a few questions to answer for here we can see clearly one of our problems:

Verse 28 says, "*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and **subdue** it; and have **dominion** over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.*"

These are strong words: to subdue, to have dominion over, as one would stamp or trample on the grapes in the wine press. Surely, we have taken these words too literally for too long? Biblical scholars tell us rather that dominion means stewardship of all elements of creation so that every aspect can thrive alongside us and other species. This is a hard lesson for us and its implications will now be uncomfortable as we unwind our domination.

Sophie is a young woman in our benefice. She has just been on a month's work camp in Truro, living off-grid. Now for a teenager, dependent upon social media on her iPhone, living off-grid was quite a challenge! She lists 6 lessons which she will attempt to take forward in her life which will help support our fragile planet:

- Firstly, growing your own veg. Not quite self-sufficient but there were 40 of them at camp.
- Secondly, composting loos; not very practical at university;
- Thirdly, Electricity from solar panels. The Diocesan Retreat Centre in Cumbria harnesses electricity from a number of becks which supplies power to the big house and most of the village in Rydal;
- Fourthly, water was from a borehole;

- Fifthly, reducing wastage. My son runs expeditions for affluent school children. At the end of their first meal of the week, they are given a plastic bag into which they tip their leftovers...and the leftovers for the rest of the week. They soon learn not to waste food!
- Lastly, most things can be reused.

Sophie will weigh these experiences – as should we – and decide which ones are practical for us today in order to help preserve the planet. The choice is ours.

3. **Matthew 6. 24 – end** is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where he explains what life is like in The Kingdom of God. It suggests that we might consider living more simply, closer to nature.

You can imagine that we are starting to sort out The Rectory and downsizing, ready for a move. Do I really need 4 overcoats, 3 anoraks and two raincoats? This raises big questions economically. What will happen to the textile industry if we all stick to one overcoat? I don't know the answer but this pandemic has taught us that a new equilibrium can be reached very quickly. I still remember, as a university chaplain, giving away a new overcoat to a shivering African student. It brought me great joy, and still does.

One way in which we can downsize the larder is to support our foodbanks and those who use them. Those who work there will remind us that they are being used by more and more people. What I didn't know is that the Trussel Trust – the largest foodbank organization – has a Christian foundation and prayers start every day at the shop or office, underlining our dependence upon God for every element in his creation.

4. James Rebanks, a farmer in Cumbria, has become something of a prophet for new farming methods. A farmer's son, he left school as soon as he could and went to Australia to discover what big-scale farming was all about. He came home very excited about it. But his father's farm was failing. It couldn't keep up with the big farms, the cost of agrichemicals and the demand for cheaper food. He is searching for a solution to this imbalance as even the big farms are now ailing. In his latest book, *“English Pastoral”*, he describes a moment of enlightenment, (p. 144). A neighbouring farmer had just died. He was old school. His farm was broken up and sold to neighbours, mainly big farmers. One farmer called in a soil analyst to examine the newly purchased fields in order that they could be treated with fertilizer to bring them up to scratch. The whole valley was astounded to find that the analyst found the fields in excellent condition – no need for extra fertilizer. The old farming methods had triumphed!

*‘Living More Simply than others may Simply Live’* is a strap-line from the 1980's coined by Ronald Sider in America. We are beginning to learn what that means. I'm sure we will hear more from the COP26 Conference in November. Remember, we are a party at that conference. May the whisper of God infuse its pronouncements. Amen.