

Harvest 2026

In 1895 the Vicar of All Saints, Middlesbrough listed what he thought to be reasons people chose not to attend church. Reason no. 8 - it was quite a long list - read as follows - *'others do not go because they fear they would have to give up their sin; drink, lust, cheating, gambling, quarrelling...and such like, and alas, they know of nothing half so good to give them so much pleasure as they seem to derive from these. We do not want you to give up any of these...till you do get something better'*. The purpose of Church, he said, was to show that something better. Perhaps it might come as a relief that we don't need to give up any of these things! But his point was there has to be an alternative.

When Jesus tells his disciples *'do not worry about your life, do not worry about your clothing, do not worry about tomorrow'* we can read such commands as glib; if your family is suffering the consequences of rising energy prices and food bills. Or if ensuring your children don't go to school hungry means regular trips to a foodbank. Anxiety is a significant and rising problem among young people. Anyone who suffers from such challenges will testify that simply being told *'do not worry'* is about as useful as a chocolate fireguard. But Jesus offers more. There is an alternative. And it's practical.

'Look at the birds of the air' he says...*'consider the lilies of the field, how they grow'*. In pointing to the natural world, Jesus urges us to see how God is at work in creation. Of course, part of today is about acknowledging the damage we have wrought upon creation, and recommitting to new ways. But consider it unspoiled. The turning of the seasons, the sun's setting, the fact that there is actually enough food in the world to go round were it not for our greed.

Jesus prefaces this alternative with a story of a rich man whose land produced abundantly. This man has plenty but I suspect he too was anxious; anxious about his great wealth, under the illusion that what we have, what we possess, what we own is what keeps us secure. The rich man plans to build bigger barns to accommodate his wealth. But in the hour of need when, we are told, his life is demanded from him it is meaningless. *'You fool'* says God.

It's a basic warning about greed that should prompt us all to examine our own motivations. The love of money is frequently warned against in scripture, storing up treasures for ourselves, instead of being rich towards God. By contrast St Paul in our first reading encourages generosity - *'God loves a cheerful giver'*, *'you will be enriched in every way for your great generosity...which overflows with many thanksgivings to God'*. In another letter Paul is more explicit; *'For we brought nothing into the world, and we take nothing out'* words often heard at funerals...*'those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin...For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have...pierced themselves with many pains'*. 2000 years on, what has changed?

As we discover more about our changing climate, we're learning more about the delicate balance of interdependence within the world's eco-systems. So it is within our relationships. To paraphrase one medieval saint *'God could easily have created humanity possessed of all that it should need for body and soul, but God wishes that we should have need of the other, and they we should be ministers of the graces and gifts God has given to us'* (Catherine of Siena). In creation, God has ordained things as such that if we are to flourish or even survive, we must give to and receive from others with generous hearts. We are inextricably bound to one another – our welfare, our state of mind, our sense of meaning – is bound up between us. It teaches us something about the Kingdom for which Jesus asks us to strive.

St Cyril of Alexandria in the 4th century wrote these words *'Who is the one that is rich towards God? Clearly it is the one who loves virtue instead of wealth, for whom a few things are sufficient. It is the one whose hand is open to the needs of the poor, comforting the sorrows of those in poverty as fully as he is able. It is the one who gathers in the storehouses above, and lays up his treasures in heaven'*.

And so perhaps that is what harvest thanksgiving asks of us: not simply to be grateful that our barns are full, but to ask what we are doing with what we've been given. The alternative Jesus offers to anxiety and greed is not a life without trials or suffering. It is a different way of seeing: to look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and recognise that all that we have is gift; to see our interrelatedness, and to see that what God gives to one, is often intended to become a gift for another. To be rich towards God is to receive with gratitude and to give with generosity; to refuse the illusion that security is found in bigger barns, and instead to discover that life is found in relationship, in creation, in fellowship and in the generosity. As we give thanks for the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands through music, prayer and praise may our thanksgiving become a way of living; grateful for enough, generous with what we have, attentive to those who have less, and trusting that in giving ourselves to one another we discover, not what we have to give up, but the something better that God has already given us.