

Sermon: St Andrew's Corbridge, Harvest Thanksgiving, Sunday 14 October 2018.

Text: Matthew 6. 25-34

Theme: Transformation

May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Transformation: Jesus transforms the way we think.

The words of today's gospel are so important I try always to keep them before me in my daily living. At first sight, we might think Jesus is being very idealistic.

'Do not worry', he says, 'about your life - what you eat or what you drink or what you wear'. And yet, it seems hard for us to banish worry and anxiety. Most of us, I suspect, do at times become anxious about life, about our income, about the cost of living, about debt, and certainly about health and ageing, both for ourselves and for those we love. And none of us lives in a bubble – we are caught up in bigger issues of world economics, fluctuating markets, long-term financial sustainability, uncertainties about Brexit - what it will mean, for example for our farming communities and the rural economy? And we know that millions of people in God's world have every right to worry about food and clothes and shelter because they are the victims of great poverty - think of the agony of the Yemen or the tens of thousands of refugees and displaced persons.

But do you notice how Jesus very cleverly moves the emphasis from us and our human concerns, to God? And he does it by beautiful illustrations.

'Consider the birds of the air.'

'Consider the lilies of the field.' He was a man, as Thomas Hardy wrote, who 'used to notice such things'.

But more than that, consider God – who feeds the birds, who clothes the lilies.

Of course, the birds search and scavenge and look and swoop. It's not that everything is provided on a celestial bird-table, and yet the birds are fed.

The lilies – the Greek word covers a variety of flowers – just look at the wonderful flower arrangements in this Church today – the sheer variety, texture, delicacy, scent, the myriad colours – as William Wordsworth said:

*To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.*

The flowers are painted and given scent by God.

Jesus transforms the way we think. He reminds us that the source of everything is the goodness and creativity and sheer abundant generosity of God our Father.

Creation, in its fruitfulness, in its diversity, in its benevolence – is a sacrament, an outward and visible sign, of the loving care of the God we worship.

And I think Jesus had a twinkle in his eye when he said these words. He wants us to be set free – the word ‘worry’ comes from the root ‘to strangle’. There is a worry that is all too human, earth-bound, wrongly self-sufficient. It squeezes the joy and happiness and even the faith out of us. Spiritually, it strangles the life out of us. Jesus transforms the way we think. He sets us free by inviting us to set our eyes on God and to exercise faith and trust in the goodness of God.

That is why the Church celebrates Harvest Thanksgiving. This is the anti-self-sufficiency Festival.

All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above.

And when we grasp God’s generosity, God’s loving-kindness in giving us the gift of life, in giving us remarkable bodies with the capacity to work and develop skills and aptitudes, then God’s generosity spills over into our generosity to others. We have an open-handed God, who inspires us also to be open-handed.

And again, I think it is with a twinkle that Jesus says – ‘you of little faith’. It is when we put even our little faith in God – that suddenly, we discover just how faith grows, and as faith grows, our attitudes change – we are transformed.

St Andrew’s is a community of faith. That means that together we keep our eyes fixed on God – we attend carefully and obediently to the words of Jesus and receive them as good news, and it also means that we become joyful and content, and truly happy because God is at the centre.

Do not worry about your life – seek first the Kingdom of God, Jesus says to us today. In other words, when we begin to reflect something of the life of heaven on earth –

when a hungry child is fed, when as Messy Church are doing, we fund-raise to provide a poor community with something as basic as a toilet – look at the poster at the font - when people are given dignity, when burdens are lifted, sins forgiven, broken relationships mended, lives turned outwards in glad service to our neighbour, then suddenly we find also that bread is on the table, our cups are full, our bodies are clothed, and we have enough and to spare.

And as well as finding the secret of true freedom and happiness and contentment, we will also be people of thanksgiving. And we symbolise that this morning. At the offertory, we will give to God of our substance, our money, as we take up the collection. We will bring forward the gifts of bread and wine, bits of creation that God will transform by the Holy Spirit to become our sacramental, spiritual food. And we will bring up a loaf of bread and some of our harvest gifts, not to boast before God of our own efforts, but rather to say to him: all we receive, *all* we receive comes from you our Creator, because our God is good, he is a good Father to us all, the source and giver of every good gift. And then we will pray our Eucharistic Prayer, our great thanksgiving. And as God shares the gift of his Son Jesus with us again, we learn to share Christ's love with others.

Transformation: Jesus transforms the way we think. Jesus transforms the way we act. Jesus transforms the way we live.