

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

Text: Ecclesiastes 3. 1-8; John 4. 31-38

Theme: A time for reaping

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.

*A time to be reapin',
a time to be sowin'
the green leaves of Summer
are callin' me home.
'Twas so good to be young then,
in the season of plenty
when the cat-fish were jumpin'
as high as the sky.*

Don't worry, I won't begin every sermon with a song! I don't know whether you know that beautiful lyric from the 1960's film *The Alamo*. It is reminiscent of tonight's first reading from Ecclesiastes – 'For everything there is season and a time for every matter under heaven'. So, there is a time to sow and there is a time to reap.

Whenever a new ministry begins, I'm consciously aware of the fact that I am inheriting a long tradition of faithful ministry in this parish. As your new Vicar, it's a bit like Dr Who – the face changes if not this time the gender, but the title and the calling continue. In am well aware that in my ministry here I will reap what others have sown, and for that I am deeply grateful to God.

Harvest celebrates the annual cycle of sowing and reaping. Even if this year has brought challenges – a cold spring and a hot, dry summer – great for some fruits, not so good for some vegetables and arable crops, we have still reaped a bountiful harvest. And for that we give thanks, thanks to our farmers and to all who work in the food industry to fill the shelves of our shops, and thanks to God who is the Source, whose fatherly care enables a fruitful earth.

We symbolise the harvest by this loaf of bread before you. When we pray 'Give us this day our daily bread' – we mean by that all the gifts we need to sustain us and all God's children in life and health.

But the harvest of produce reminds us of another type of sustenance. Today's gospel from John 4 begins by Jesus' disciples urging him to eat. He had sent the disciples to the village for food, while he, very unusually for that culture, spoke alone to a Samaritan woman. But in that discussion, faith in Jesus as Messiah, as Saviour, was kindled in that woman's heart. 'Rabbi, eat something', the disciples said. But Jesus replied, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about'. 'Has anyone given him a meal', they ask? 'My food', says Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work'. And then Jesus says something really important – it was four months yet until harvest-time – but, said Jesus – 'look again at the fields – already they are ripe for harvest'. Yes, the cross, still well into the future, would be the great completion of Jesus' work to bring the world to himself, but even now, long before the cross, the harvest is being anticipated. This Samaritan woman is part of God's harvest for eternal life. Already the reaper is receiving his reward – so that the sower and the reaper can rejoice together.

Here at St Andrew's there is going to be plenty of sowing. We're going to scatter the seeds of God's love everywhere we can. In time, those seeds will sprout and grow and bear fruit and we shall have an abundant harvest. But also, harvesting begins right now – I, we, will harvest what you and others have sown, in past years, so that both sower and harvester will rejoice.

And we mustn't say – its all in the future – harvest is 4 months, 4 years away. 'Look more closely', says Jesus – 'the fields are already white for harvest'. And so we must expect the living God to give the increase from today. May I invite to pray with me that we will become very skilled at both sowing and reaping; that we may receive from God bread – that inner fulfilment of participating in the on-going saving work of Jesus, who is the sower of the seed and the bringer-in of the harvest. Will you pray that as Jesus daringly spoke to a woman – and a Samaritan woman at that, that we will be able to speak to people for whom faith is simply not on their agenda, and bring them to Jesus.

We are a rural community. Sowing and reaping are part of the life we see around us daily. We are a Christian community – sowing and reaping is what we are here for. As I begin by ministry in succession to those who have ministered here before me, may we have the joy of sowing well and reaping well.