

Harvest Rich and Poor

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; Luke 16:19-31

The support our Church, alongside many other churches and groups, gives to the South East Edinburgh Foodbank is always phenomenal. Over the years we have been collecting, something like 1 metric tonne of food has been donated by the members and friends of our congregation. Alongside the money that others donate which also helps make a difference.

How do you measure such love, kindness and compassion? It is one of the ways we in this Church not only say in what we believe, but put our belief into action. This combined fusion of people working together with one goal in mind - to help - is humbling and exciting. New members and long-standing members working together is something for which we should be thankful.

I am told it is as nothing to the joy of the co-ordinator and staff of the South East Edinburgh Foodbank when they see box after box coming out of cars and into the Foodbank.

Our harvest thanksgiving service maybe an annual event, but the box for the Foodbank, alongside the box for the Edinburgh Clothing Store, is to be found and used in the Braid corridor. The need to provide food, clothing and shelter, to show that we care and we want to help, is a year-round responsibility.

It is beyond wonderful that people choose to give voluntarily to these good causes at harvest and the year round. So many of you make such significant contributions to charities that truly change worlds. The tragedy is, however, that such charities are needed at all.

In a world where there is enough food to go round to feed everyone if we shared and managed things better globally; in a world where clothing is worn once and then thrown away by so many; in a world where a commitment to affordable housing should be a priority for every Government;

in a world where so many are caught in food poverty, fuel poverty, any kind of poverty, the scandal remains that charity is required at all.

Jesus' commandment alongside loving God that we are to love our neighbours as ourselves has never been more crucial.

In the parable of the rich man and the poor man, or Dives and Lazarus as it is sometimes called, the reality in Jesus' world 2,000 years ago, and in our world today, is that poverty still exists. Maybe it has even grown. It has certainly not gone away. We may not be dressed in purple and fine linen and feasting sumptuously every day like Dives, but with all the complexity of today's world, how many people in our city alone sit on our streets hungry, homeless, and just as bad, lonely.

There is no particular curse on being rich or poor, as there is no particular blessing on being rich or poor. It is how we use whatever money and kindness and compassion that we have that will count. Jesus knew that the poor of the world would be with us always, and He also knew that the kind of compassion and courage and generosity expressed by us on a day like this at Harvest was also going to be needed until that time when heaven does come to earth, and all the hurts and sins and wrongs and injustices are removed forever.

The Dives and Lazarus story is an uncomfortable one, exaggerating a point to get it over, but it is a timely reminder that good causes like food charities, or clothing charities, or churches, cannot survive on good wishes and hot air. If our faith is to be real, then the action it impels us towards, to make that difference, to give as generously as we dare without expectation of a return, becomes constantly pressing.

Robert Frost's poem, *Mending Wall* wrestles with the irony of neighbours who long to have clear boundaries on their neighbourliness. Frost wonders aloud why it is that we divide ourselves. "On

a day we meet to walk the line and set the wall between us once again.” There is something about us that likes those clearly defined boundaries of what’s my place and what’s yours.

The rich man Dives (who is not named in the parable, it comes later) and the poor man Lazarus (who is named) sparks other discomforts. There is little interaction between the two men. The rich man is not disdainful of Lazarus; he simply does not notice him. What we know about Lazarus is his name and his need.

When death comes for them both, the one who was afflicted is comforted. And the one who was comfortable is afflicted.ⁱ The message is fatal. It is too late for Dives. He had every opportunity to help, but chose otherwise. All the evidence requiring the need to help, to respond, to notice, to care, was all there. You shouldn’t need to be told. We shouldn’t need to be told.

On Harvest Sunday we have this invitation, or is it a command, certainly a responsibility, from Jesus. To notice, to pay attention, to decide what we’re going to do, and to respond.

You may not cure every famine, or clothe every naked person, or house every homeless person, but by God by doing what you can you make a difference, soul by soul.

Which is why for you here in Church, and you watching online, for all who are members and friends of Morningside Parish Church, we make our Harvest Thanksgiving today.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

ⁱ *Helen Montgomery Debevoise, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol4, p118*