

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable unto You, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Today's harvest festival is one more reminder that our church started in the northern hemisphere ... we in the South give thanks for God's gracious and generous, *abundant provision*... in the midst of our Lenten season. The northern hemisphere observes Lent as winter starts to ease its cold and damp grip on the hearts of the faithful, and they anticipate the joy and beauty of Spring. We however, head in the opposite direction. We're finishing our harvest and putting the fields to bed, storing our grain and making jams and pickles. As we step away from the cycle of Lent for a moment, we take this opportunity to celebrate a little and experience God's generous sense of humour.

It's really important to celebrate; to give thanks, enjoy and party a little. After all, Lent is a season of remembering Jesus' temptation in the wilderness for forty days, perhaps even the forty years that the Jews spent in the wilderness, while they cleansed their hearts and learned again to put God first. But Lent covers the period from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day ... *forty-seven days*... Sundays don't count because they are feast days. One commentator describes Sundays in Lent as *little Easters*, days when we can remind ourselves that the whole point of our sombre reflection and abstinence is to give thanks ... *it's not the what but the why*.

The reading from 2 Corinthians reminds us that *God loves a cheerful giver* and so we need to *give as you have made up your mind*. In other words, don't feel anxious about not having given enough, or even that you are giving too much ... instead listen for Him, and surrender yourself to God's plan. You will discover what it is you have to do. Listen and obey ... willingly and

joyfully. God not only *supplies the saints*, but He *tests our obedience* ... in good times and in bad.

The gospel story of the rich farmer who finds himself in an abundance, reminds me of another one, from Genesis 41-42, where Joseph and Pharaoh are given seven years of abundance but theirs comes before seven years of famine. There are some striking differences though:

- In Luke Jesus warns a crowd of thousands about all kinds of greed. He tells them about a farmer who was thinking of himself and not about God; "Soul" he says ... "relax, eat, drink, be merry." He makes plans to keep his abundance and not share it with others. Jesus reminds the crowd that even the ravens and the lilies and the grass ... the whole of God's creation are cared for despite not having worked a day for their portion. How much more does our Father care for us?
- Joseph also plans to keep the significant abundance, but this is in response to a vision from God. His abundance was stored away so that all of God's people would survive the famine, including the Egyptians and his own brothers despite them having treated him badly years ago. Joseph isn't above using deceit and deflection to make a point to his brothers, but his work serves the purpose of God.

I love the irony in the comparison between them. The farmer in Luke is not clearly identified but those present would have assumed that the man was an Israelite. The story about greed is one in which the

key actor ... in a covenantal relationship with God, just as Jesus' audience were ... should know better.

And Joseph the favoured son of Jacob, the father of all the tribes of Israel, was left for dead by his brothers and carried off by the Ishmaelites to the land of Egypt, Israel's traditional enemies ... the land from which they would be rescued by Moses in time to come. This favoured son banished by his brothers, is given authority in Pharaoh's house, who against all odds, follows the advice of Joseph (that he received in a vision from God).

This gospel passage raises a key question: *Can you by worrying add a single hour to your allotted span? ... of how much more value are you than the ravens? Than lilies that neither toil nor spin ... than grass, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire ... even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like these.*

What's wrong with storing things up?
 What wrong with saving for rainy days?
 What's wrong with parties and joyful celebrations? Well ... nothing! But it's never about the what and always about the why! If we are focussing on ourselves at the expense of our neighbour, then there's going to be trouble. The passage from Deuteronomy helps here:

When you have built fine houses and live in them ... when your herds and flocks have multiplied, then ... do not exalt yourself ... do not forget your God Who delivered you from slavery and oppression ... Who led you and fed you. His purpose was to test you ... to do you good.

Clearly, living in God's name and in His way is not about living frugally. It is about growing and being accountable to God, it is about sharing and looking after our neighbour, those less well-off and those on the margins ... who might look a little different from us, make different decisions

from ours, and who might at some point in the past have done us harm.

Do it anyway ... it's the right thing to do.

We cannot add to our portion by worrying about things over which we have no control ... we need to *let go and let God*. We will be tested in good times and in bad. Don't worry ... just pray ... and be happy!

Amen.