

Luke 12:16-30. Deut. 8:7-18. 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Harvest Thanksgiving.

Bird Poo! If I had a quid for every bit of bird poo I've had to clean up, I'd be rich!

Where I work as a cleaner at a pub, there is a huge beer garden and a massive pine tree. It towers way higher than the pub's rooftops.

The tree is home to countless birds! Which inevitably means countless amounts of bird poo! It is a thankless task, a never-ending supply as the birds are well fed and healthy due to the natural success of the tree!

The birds aren't satisfied with that though, no, they have to land and poo on the chairs in the garden aswell, lazily eating easy pickings of discarded food rather than the effort of hunting for worms or insects.

There are also countless pine-cones that drop, many of them just missing my head by inches.

One day, I was grumbling under my breath and throwing the discarded pine-cones into a pile underneath the tree. I saw a woman and a little lad looking around as if they had lost something. I asked them if they had, and the woman explained that "my son, (pointing to him), is looking for pine-cones, he loves collecting them. We decorate them, hang them up, and give them to others as gifts!" I pointed to the huge pile I had collected.

Well, the beam of the smile on that little lad's face as he said "wow, cool" really did shut me up, and made me feel suitably ashamed of my grumbling attitude.

Call myself a Christian who is supposed to remember God's gifts and blessings daily. That lad was doing it even if he didn't realise it in a belief, faith or trust in God's beautiful harvest. He hadn't forgotten that being truly rich was to share it with others. When focussed on God's harvest, every smile witnessed becomes that rich gain that Jesus teaches us about.

My spiritual lesson learned was fleeting because after work, I went home and guess what was the first thing I was greeted with, on the path, all over my wheelie bin, outside my house? Yep, more bird poo!

When I first moved in, the trees had just been planted. One of those trees now towers well above my house roof and due to its success, it is home to countless birds. I very rarely get to see or enjoy any of them, I just get the constant abundance of their poo!

I cleaned it all up, again, and as I looked at my lovely clean path and bin, huge splatters of poo instantly covered everything again!

I went into my house saying "those birds can see me, I swear they're doing it to me on purpose. That's it, your cleaning it up from now on".

My husband, being the practical and logical man that he is, very calmly answered, "Why don't you do what our old neighbour did years ago when they tied their washing line around the trunk of that other tree which resulted in strangling and killing it! Problem solved!

That shut me up! Again!

I certainly had no problem feeling far more important than birds, especially in the attitude of piling all my tiredness and worries onto them!

But God's harvest doesn't mean we are assured a problem or worry-free life even though we are worth more than birds in God's sight. As many of us learn in our faith journeys, our walk with him is very much like the process of harvest.

He doesn't work like we do as we often see a worry, a beginning, then we *will* an instant end, a solution. Yet most of our spiritual insights are gained from the journey with God in between those points. In times of sorrow and joy.

Proverbs 10:22 tells us "it is the blessing of the Lord that makes us rich, and He adds no sorrow to it".

We would not keep watching a field expecting to reap a successful harvest out of it if we still had the seeds or the hard work needed to even begin to make it happen, still hoarded in the barn. Yet we can end up approaching God in that way.

Learning how to remember daily how to not want God's blessings without God, wanting the benefits without the being, the rewards without the relationship is not always easy. That is why Jesus says "what little faith you have" because we expect to receive blessings without the effort of getting to know the blesser.

Getting to know a different kind of harvester. One of love and grace. Once we do decide to commit to knowing him, we grow to realise we are stewards of his harvest. We have been entrusted with it. We don't own it, we are to focus on getting to know God so that we learn how to manage it wisely. Stewardship isn't always about money.

I loved Anne's reminder to us a few weeks ago that success (like a bumper harvest) isn't in numbers by merely being about getting more "bums on seats" in a business-like attitude. The rich fool had fallen for that one.

Spiritual wealth, feeling the riches of the kind of harvest God has entrusted to us, comes when we remember daily, as Anne said, those "bums on seats are connected to souls". It is us humans who complicate things through our judgements, worries and insecurities that what we own could be lost.

Harvest is the perfect time for us to remember that we are sowers and planters of God's grace and love towards others. No matter what we are going through.

God's grace is a free gift, already promised, we can't simply get it from anything we do, we can't buy it, it isn't for sale, we cannot manipulate God for it. God's presence isn't a prize you win for good works." (Tony Evans).

Paul calls it an "indefinable gift" (2 Cor.9:14-15).

Our church mission statement is '**knowing, showing and sharing God's love**'.

The knowing God is like the seed stage, which is already full of God's freely given grace. It is like being baptised for eg.

The showing stage is where we respond in worship, wherever we are. Where our hearts respond in a way determined to know him well enough to access His grace. To walk with others to learn how they grow God's love and grace in their hearts. How they are shaped and transformed into a growing faith and trust in him.

The sharing stage is where we gain the confidence in our faith to run! This is where we can learn to store up our spiritual wealth and gains, but not only to be kept by us. Not to be stored up hidden away, but to be shared for the abundant harvest of others. Especially those in need.

Where we learn that even during our own worry which detracts our focus and our trust, God always adds. Where knowing, showing, and sharing God's love becomes clearly intertwined, connected, with God always right at the centre, daily. If we do that, grace keeps on coming like waves.

Someone I know is going through a tough time. She felt like she was overreacting because she is unable to go and spend time sitting near the sea. She felt guilty considering what people are going through right now.

Then I read this:

"Grace is more than a theological doctrine. It is a person. In Jesus is found grace upon grace. The picture of these words is like water flowing in a shore where one wave comes after another wave, and it never stops. Christian author Max Lucado recently shared how he was sitting on the seashore with his Granddaughter watching the waves roll in, when she asked him when it would be turned off. He smiled and replied "it keeps going. This doesn't get turned off".

Neither does God's grace. Wave upon wave of his grace has been given to each of us through the life of Jesus Christ. You can't use it up. You can't exhaust it. You can't lose it. It's always there. Always free. Always available. But you do have to access it with faith. You have to know it's there and believe it's yours to receive it. (Kingdom Stewardship by Tony Evans).

A few years ago we had a questionnaire in our congregation, one of the main striking results when asked how they feel closer to God, was that they see him in nature. Some in their gardens. Some on walks. Some watching and listening to birds. The most popular answer however was in prayer. We have to always consider those in our community and in our wider world who don't have that access to nature, who are only left with worries about food and clothes and failure of crops, even wars.

During harvest, and every day, we can remember that it is not an overreaction to want to spend time to stop, to quietly reflect, so that we can access the spiritual wealth of God's grace through his Holy Spirit. What are we going to do to help others access it?

Amen