

Sermon on Wednesday 7 October 2020

by Rev. Bill Church

(Readings: Genesis 3. 17-19; Mark 4. 26-29)

We are coming to the end of the period we have called Creationtide and coming up to Harvest Festival on Sunday. In a way, Harvest celebrates Creation in the service of mankind but it also marks mankind's struggle with nature to yield what we eat.



In the story in Genesis of the expulsion from the garden of Eden and the curse placed on Adam, some people find not just a powerful theological statement, but also a hint of nostalgia for the move from hunter gathering to

agriculture; the move from just getting in whatever nature provided in that season, to tilling the soil and managing animals. And that is hard work – the thorns and thistles are still there and it is sweaty work to overcome them.

Some years ago, someone took on a nearby allotment plot. They turned up in March, rotavated the plot, put in seed potatoes and went away. They came back in September expecting to dig their spuds but, of course, the weeds had won. Or, to recycle an old one, the Vicar was visiting the allotments and congratulated old Tom: "Just look at what wonders you and God have done on this

plot." To which he replied: "And you should have seen it when God had it to himself."

It is one of the dilemmas of our day how much land we need to work and how intensively. A modern speaker could repeat the words in Genesis on ever-present weeds and the hard work of cultivation and still sound up-to-date. But Jesus' parable would have to be qualified by our enormously increased knowledge of what happens when seeds sprout and plants grow.

There is an encyclopaedia of specifications for the best germination, the best growing conditions, the highest yields; and a whole catalogue of techniques to achieve them.

And when the grain is ripe he puts in the combine, for the harvest has come.

There is a lot of unease about how economics and an ever-growing population are leading to forest clearances and are pushing towards larger, more mechanised farms which find it difficult to leave room for countless creatures great and small which used to live there.

The harvest is bountiful, but how much of it is really needed and is it sustainable and who is getting most benefit out of it?

Maybe that is all too gloomy.

Maybe we should remember that however much we know about nature, there is always more to know and always much to wonder at.

Maybe we should use Harvest Festival not to worry about the coming dark and stormy winter but more to give thanks for the bounty of summer and autumn; to relish all the harvest hymns we will not be able to sing together and aim to share our enjoyment as best we can and share as best we can what we enjoy.