

1 Timothy 6:6-10  
Luke 12:13-21

Harvest – Rev Paul Day – Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September

I am sure we weren't the only ones who had a massive sort out during the lockdown last year. Books, clothes, bric a brac – all sorts of things. I think half of the books on sale at the Summer fete originated from our bookshelves.

And yet the house is still full. And I remember when we moved in nearly 4 years ago – we came from a much smaller house – we were wondering how we would actually fill the many rooms in Widney Lane. Now its more like how can we actually get into those rooms, there is so much clutter.

Accumulating stuff is something we all seem to do. No matter how hard we try, it just seems to build up.

Since we have been in the house we have watched our neighbours build a new conservatory and erect 3 sheds in their garden. Each started empty and is now full. We're fully anticipating another out-house any moment. Stuff accumulation is a problem for us all.

But we all know the ultimate futility of accumulation. The sad but unavoidable fact is, as Jesus reminded the man in the gospel reading, that we all die. And who knows when that will be. And what will happen to all those things you have accumulated when it does happen?

We have just finished sorting out Kate's parents house prior to it being sold. And the sad fact is that much of what they accumulated over the years has had to be thrown away or disposed of via house clearance. As Jesus says "the things you have prepared, whose will they be now?"

At Harvest festival we take the opportunity to acknowledge that everything in the end comes from God and that we should offer him thanks. It dates back, of course, to a time when Harvest really mattered. When the success or failure of one year's harvest determined the year ahead. Would it be a year where food was plentiful, or would there be a real danger of not having enough to live on. The storing of the Harvest in barns was not a matter of accumulation, but a matter of survival.

There was a genuine desire to thank God for the Harvest – for another year's food, for survival and for life itself. There was a recognition that the future was

not just dependent on our own efforts, but on things way beyond our control – weather, pests etc. Things that were seen to be in God's control. The Harvest festival was a celebration of the possibility of life for another year..

So how can we make sense of all this in our crazy world of consumerism and consumption? That's a big question. And its one that makes us ask questions about priorities, about what is really important to us and where we put our faith and trust.

We all know about the threat of climate change. The evidence is all around us. It's the major issue facing the world today, as we have been hearing this week from Boris Johnson's speech to the UN General Assembly; as will be made clear at the COP 26 summit in a few weeks time. And one of the drivers of climate change is the constant desire to have more; the desire for continued growth in both production and consumption.

National economies are judged by growth in Gross Domestic Product. In other words an economy is deemed to be successful – healthy even - if it is producing and/or consuming more. If it is growing.

Companies judge their success by the size of their turnover and profit. The bigger the turnover, the higher the profit, the better the company is performing. This becomes the sole priority. But it doesn't have to be like that. I recently read a book about the Cadbury family and the famous chocolate company. Yes, the company had to make money, but this wasn't the be all and end all. They had other concerns as well. The well being of employees, a positive contribution to the life of the community. Bournville is a testament to this in this area. Another example would be Saltaire in Yorkshire

We can see this almost obsession with growth in the lives of ordinary people too. The desire for our standard of living to keep improving, the desire to be better off – in other words the desire to possess more is deeply rooted.

But it doesn't take much thought to realise that continued consumption, continued growth, is not sustainable on a planet with finite resources. But the continued consumption is also using more and more energy which is resulting in rising temperatures because of a dependence on fossil fuels.

The climate crisis will not be solved by simply using greener energy. It will need us to take a good look at this desire for more. In other words each one of us will need to look at our own lives, our own desires, our own priorities. Its an issue for us all.

A couple of weeks ago Kate mentioned an exercise which she had done. You may remember that she said she was invited to take a piece of paper and write a list of what was important in her life. And then to take a second sheet of paper, draw a circle on it and write those things on it again – with the more important ones in the middle. And she shared that no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't put God in the centre. Near maybe, but not in the centre.

Priorities. In whom or what do we trust. Do we trust in ourselves, our accumulation of wealth or stuff in our barns or banks, or in God himself. Are we courageous and faithful enough to acknowledge that God is at the centre and that ultimately we depend on him for everything? This is not saying, of course, that we shouldn't have possessions – these are good things in life which come from God. But it does mean that we shouldn't rely on our possessions, on our money or on anything from this world. Ultimately we are transient. The only permanence is God. God is the one in whom we need to trust.

Paul writes to the young Timothy “there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment”. Jesus hints at the same truth when speaking about the rich man.

I am sure Paul links godliness with contentment for a reason He is saying that contentment has its roots in an acknowledgement that it is God who provides, it is God who knows what we need and it is God whom we should thank.

We all – I am sure – love singing the Harvest hymns. We are happy to come to church this morning and acknowledge that everything comes from God. What seems to be difficult is to put those thoughts into practice. To live out our lives as if we really believe it.

Perhaps we approach things the wrong way round. Our tendency is to acquire more and more – be it possessions or wealth – until we feel we are content. The trouble is we are never content.

Maybe we should look at what we have, recognise that God has provided it and that he cares for us and wants the best for us. Place God at the centre of that circle. And then contentment will follow.