

Sermon Preached by Chris Wedge 28 October 2018 – Harvest Eucharist

In today's Gospel Jesus says 'do not worry about your life'. Again we have it in the reading from Joel 'do not fear...for the Lord has done great things' and again in our reading from Timothy we are warned that chasing after the rewards of this world will lead us into distress, fear and anxiety. Today God is reminding us to trust in him and him alone.

This is the most common command in the Bible; do not worry, do not be afraid, fear not. It is easy to say but so much harder to live this command. I've spent the last year of my life tussling with God's call to me, I have prayed like never before, I have contemplated, I have tried hard to really listen, I have sought advice and above all I have waited in the silence to see what God would do.

Today is about God's harvest and that is what we must think about but first some thoughts about the news I have shared this morning.

After almost five wonderful years I am moving on. My time here in this parish has been a time of great personal fulfilment, I have been incredibly happy here and I have loved sharing this time of growth and renewal with you. God has been good to us, he has blessed us and he has drawn us into a time filled with hope, optimism and deep joy.

When I went on my 30 day retreat last year I said to the PCC that I expected it to be life changing but I had no idea in what way God would change my life. I expected to be here for a good while longer but God has other ideas, God always takes us by surprise and if we dare to listen God always invites us into adventure and change and life in all fullness.

The next phase of my ministry will be spent with individuals talking and praying one to one. My main focus will be spiritual direction, working with people who want to deepen their life of prayer, who want help in discerning where God is calling them and trying to find ways to enrich their lives in prayer. It will be very different from being a parish priest. I don't really know what it will feel like, what the joys and challenges will actually be but I am convinced that this is what God is calling me to and so I am willing to follow that call.

I will still be a priest of this Diocese and Bishop David will still be my father in God but we will be based at our house in Lincolnshire and that is where most of the ministry will take place.

If you look at the list of Rectors of this parish, which is on the wall near the kitchen, you will see that for almost a thousand years clergy have come and gone. Some of them have stayed for decades and some of them were here for just a short while. There have been priests here since long before the Reformation, since before the Church of England even existed, they prayed in Latin and when the reforms came some of them went to prison in defence of the faith they had inherited. Always they tried to be obedient to God. The

priests of this parish have prayed through wars and disasters of every kind. Countless babies have been baptised on this very spot, love has been hallowed in marriage and the dead have been sent safely on their final journey from this world. Day in and day out the Eucharist has been celebrated, sometimes with twelve candles and incense and sometimes in the simplest of ways. But throughout all of this God remains unchanging, ceaselessly present and ever holy.

So what is the harvest that we give thanks for today?

Yes, we thank God for the food of the fields, yes we thank God for the material blessings of our lives, yes we thank God for the riches of the earth and we renew our commitment to treasuring this fragile planet and to playing our part in Christian stewardship of the earth.

But what is the harvest of our souls? What is the harvest of this community of faith gathered here in prayer?

I am convinced that God always engages with us in gentleness and mercy. God does not bully us or wag his finger at us or coerce us into following him and doing his will. But God longs to be at the heart of our lives, God longs to see us pray and to put our faith into action. God wants to see us grow in love for Him and of each other. This is the purpose of our lives.

It is in the Eucharist that we are strengthened to live that life. It is at the altar that we meet God in flesh and blood. It is in the Eucharist that we remember all that God has done for us and it is when we kneel together that we are renewed in hope and love so that we might gather in the harvest of our souls.

So today we thank God for all that has been, for all that is now and we look to his future with confidence and joy because he is the God of the harvest, he is the God of all blessings and he will never abandon us, he will never let us down and he will give us the courage that we need to journey on together.

Do not be afraid. God's love for you knows no limits. You are God's treasure and God has adventure and joy and love in store for you. Trust him, let him guide you and guard you and know that God is good.

God has renewed the life of this parish, he has led us into growth, he has led us into love and he isn't going stop now. For over a thousand years there has been Christian worship on this site and God isn't going to fail us now, God will go on blessing you and calling you into life in all fullness. Follow that call with joy and delight.

Jesus said 'Do not be afraid'.