

## **SERMON: Sunday – 3 October 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **'The harvest is plentiful'**

**Leviticus 19:9-10, 23-25, 33-34**

**Matthew 9:35-38**

'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'

Jesus may have spoken those words 2,000 years ago but they might as easily apply today.

The harvest is still plentiful. The workers few. And the Lord is still Lord of the harvest and we are still calling on the Lord to send people to help gather in the harvest.

Jesus was of course prompted to make that statement by the crowds he saw flocking to him, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Perhaps there's nothing worse than to live life without direction, aimless, nothing to hope for or work towards.

God, in Christ, longs to shepherd people whose lives are harassed and helpless. When he sees the crowds, he has compassion on them.

If we read Matthew 9 and Jesus comments about the harvest being great yet the workers few we notice that what Jesus was doing immediately before saying these words was proclaiming the good news and healing every kind of sickness and disease. This is the work Jesus has come to do, the work of ushering in the kingdom of God. This is the work I think he wants his followers to continue. The harvest comes about when proclaiming the good news of the gospel and the curing of disease and sickness.

This is the work that God in Christ wants us to be involved in.

Thinking about harvest and fields, Catholic author Judy Cannato recently wrote a book called, *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life* (Sorin Books: 2010) in which she talks about the whole world being the arena or the field of compassion. Here's something she wrote:

(SLIDE)

"The realm of God that Jesus preached and died for was one that was known for its kindness and generosity, its compassion and healing. There was no one deemed outside the love of the Holy One whom Jesus called "Father." No one

was excluded from fellowship, not the rich or poor, male or female, slave or free. Jesus went beyond superficial divisions and called for a culture of compassion.

Compassion changes everything. Compassion heals. Compassion mends the broken and restores what has been lost. Compassion draws together those who have been estranged or never even dreamed they were connected. Compassion pulls us out of ourselves and into the heart of another, placing us on holy ground where we instinctively take off our shoes and walk in reverence. Compassion springs out of vulnerability and triumphs in unity.”

There is the good news. That the realm of God be known for its kindness, generosity, compassion and healing.

Wouldn't it be lovely if our local church was known as such a people around whom such things happened?

Even the old testament, the Hebrew Bible, had compassion rooted into it.

Those verses from Leviticus, those rules for living for the new community of God, favoured the poor and the vulnerable, and included the outsider and the foreigner.

Leave the edges of your fields. Don't pick them dry. Leave some of the harvest for the poor and the foreigner (10).

Be good farmers. Don't try to pick fruit too early (24).

The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God (34).

Love, compassion, caring and kindness are the things that matter most in the reign of God.

Think about Jesus commending the religious leader of the law who came to Jesus and asked what was the most important thing to do to inherit eternal life and answered his own question with to love God and love his neighbour.

But still not knowing who his neighbour was Jesus told him that parable of the Good Samaritan where the man who was all beaten up and left to die on the road was abandoned by the priest then the Levite who both walked past not wanting to make themselves ritually unclean.

For them, ritual purity was more important than love, compassion, caring and kindness to this injured neighbour in need.

But what Jesus teaches us about the reign of God is that love, compassion, caring and kindness are more important than ritual purity or religious righteousness or maintaining tradition at the expense of neighbourly need.

The best thing we can help harvest is to love, exercise compassion, show caring and spread kindness, with God's help, to our neighbour and to ourselves.

Love, compassion, caring and kindness are part of our new DNA in Christ and we are surrounded by fields of opportunity waiting for such seeds to be sown and, in time, to be harvested.

But it wouldn't be right not to talk about caring for the planet we live in as well as the people we live among.

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As many environmentalists say, "there is no planet B". We must care and steward the one God has gifted us with.

There is a lot of great work happening in the environmental movement and much of that takes places with a faith based focus.

For example, the work of Eco-Congregation Scotland.

Celebrating Creation: Eco-Congregation Environmental Toolkit for Churches (SLIDE 1)

"Climate change is not an 'issue' or 'outreach opportunity'. It is the biggest spiritual and moral challenge that society has ever faced and asks questions which go to the heart of our worship."

- Climate change threatens unprecedented human suffering, gravely affecting every person on the planet within our lifetimes.
- Climate change is already estimated to kill 300,000 people every year, and will grow worse for many generations.
- Climate change is caused by us, by our reliance on fossil fuel for food, travel, clothing, technology, almost every aspect of our lives.
- Disastrous climate change does not have to happen. By making deep and immediate cuts (80% by 2050) in global carbon emissions, the worst effects can be avoided.

It will be interesting to see what COP26 agrees when world leaders meet in Glasgow at the end of this month.

But we can each do somethings to help so that future harvests will be fairer and more fruitful across our world.

Can we?:

Recycle more and landfill less  
Compost organic materials  
Use less fossil fuels especially petrol and gas, not easy when our homes are mostly heated by gas  
Use renewable energy like solar and wind  
Walk or cycle and drive less  
Reduce water waste  
Only buy the food we need  
Eat less meat and dairy  
Use energy efficient light bulbs and appliances  
Not leave appliances on 'standby'  
Air dry washing  
Fly less or not at all  
Buy pre-loved items (from Reuse and Thrive)  
Share items  
Plant trees

Use your loaf  
Christian Ecology Link's LOAF campaign encourages you to choose food which is:

- Locally produced
- Organically grown
- Animal friendly
- Fairly traded.

Affirmation  
(SLIDE 2)

We join with the earth and with each other  
To bring new life to the land  
To restore the waters  
To refresh the air.

We join with the earth and with each other  
To celebrate the seas  
To rejoice in the sunlight  
To sing the song of the stars.

(SLIDE 3)

We join with the earth and with each other  
To recreate the human community  
To promote justice and peace  
To remember our children.

We join with the earth and with each other  
We join together as expressions  
Of one loving mystery: for the healing  
Of the earth and the renewal of all Life.

(UN Environmental Sabbath Programme )

(SLIDE)

A Prayer

Creator God – maker and shaper of all that is, seen and unseen;  
You are in the expanse and depth of Creation, and in the processes that make  
life possible.

Yet we are distracted by the gods  
we make ourselves and our  
lives become fractured and fragmented.

In our brokenness we disturb the Earth's capacity to hold us.  
Instead we find climate uncertainty and global injustice.

Call us back from the brink.

Help us to choose love not fear,  
to change ourselves and not the planet; to act justly for the sake of the  
vulnerable;

and to make a difference today  
for life tomorrow.

In your name – Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.

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