

## **SERMON: 7 October 2018 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

Exodus 23:10-13

Sabbath Rest

The 7th Year was designed to be:

- Rest (for people and animals)
- Produce for you, the poor and alien (then the animals)
- But also (Deuteronomy 15), cancelling debts and setting slaves free. This means letting go of the past arrangements we've had and forgiving everybody for everything.

Our culture encourages greed and consuming more than we need. It says there's never enough which can result in us thinking 'I'm not (good, beautiful, wealthy) enough'. Consumer society says people's identity is seen in what they own or what they wear. Whereas give us today our daily bread is a refreshing, liberating alternative society. As is forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

We can make the word SHARE from the letters of HARVEST.

God has made sure that this planet we live on is plentiful and generous. There is enough for everyone's need, not everyone's greed (Ghandi). When people are hungry it's not that there isn't enough to go around, it's that it's not fairly distributed. It's a question of justice and how people organise the growing of crops, the harvesting, buying and selling.

Luke tells us that the early church held everything in common. There was no one in need because they shared what they had. That's how God wants us to live.

Matthew 9:35-10:1

On Earth as it is in Heaven

Jesus taught an amazing prayer when he taught us how to pray. It's a call for heaven to appear on the earth. For justice. For bread to be properly shared out. For an end to poverty.

Jesus helps us to see that we can dream of a better world and he can help us to act to make heaven a reality on earth. He has started to make this world anew, where things are ordered properly and wrong things are set right.

Jesus and the harvest of souls

- Announcing good news
- Healing every ailment
- Moved with compassion

Lord of the Harvest, send out workers!

Bluegrass - While I was praying I felt somebody touch me it must've been the hand of the lord; Hallelujah I'm ready

Just as there are moments when people of faith have doubts, so there are moments when people of doubt have faith.

Story about the lady who told me this week she always believes and never has any doubt. She just doesn't 'do church'.

This week I attended a conference called Faith Formation in a Secular Age - Why is it so difficult?

Prof Andy Root from Luther Seminary helped us to understand the secular age we live in as one where there has been a "melting of both work and love". We've moved from work to consumption and from love to intimacy.

Every human being defines for themselves what it means to be human. "What speaks to me is what matters".

However, he argued that people still need space to wrestle with questions of meaning and identity and to ask disturbing questions. And we still need places to tell our stories of encounters with the living God, in an authentic way, which describes both the presence of the Divine, the Holy as well as the absence.

There were no magic solutions but these simple ordinary practices have got real potential. How can we create an open and safe atmosphere where

it's good to ask questions and at the same time where we can share stories of presence as well as absence.

I'm sure that as we make space for such simple practices we can see a growing harvest, we can see God move, and we can see faith grow.

Jesus pointed his disciples to the Lord, who is in charge of the Harvest, to send out workers. May he send us out. May he work through our faith, our doubts, our stories. And may we see more of heaven appearing here on earth.

May we pray.