

Today we celebrate our harvest festival. I don't know where summer has gone but gone it has. Our traditional harvest service is a time for thinking about growth, about the produce of the land produced by a mix of sunshine, rain, seed, birth and water.

In our reading from Joel we read about a time about 350 years before Jesus was born. A time when plagues of locusts in Israel were doing their worst and as a consequence there were not enough crops. People were living in real poverty.

Joel saw that as a consequence people were losing faith in God. In Old Testament style Joel sees these plagues and the consequent famine as being God's judgement. Joel calls on the people to repent and to pray. If they do this all will be well. There will be abundant rain for each harvest, the mills will be full of grain and the vats will be full of wine indeed they will be overflowing.

The tradition of thanksgiving for harvest follows from this Old Testament scenario. As the children of God, God blesses us with abundance, variety and richness. Our thanksgiving though is for more than just food, it is for the peace and happiness, contentment and hope. All those things that the people, at the time of Joel had lost sight of. In losing sight of these things people had lost sight of God.

In our Gospel reading Jesus sees worry as a concern of the disciples that is drawing them away from God. Worry erodes our trust in God. If we are busy worrying then we inevitably lose sight of God. Of course the problem with this statement is that we all worry from time to time, certainly I do. This teaching is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is still sitting on the mountainside teaching his disciples. Except here he is talking about priorities — the priority for Jesus' disciples is not themselves, but God and others. That is his message for us today.

Jesus is using various figures of speech to say: Stop worrying about the unimportant things! Stop worrying about accumulating possessions and consuming stuff, that is not what life is about. Stop worrying about your superficial appearance that is not what your body is for. Your life and body are dedicated to God, to thank and praise him! But how? How can we thank and praise God? Well, Jesus goes on in our passage to give us three commands: Look! Consider! Seek!

First Jesus invites us to **look**:

“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”

Jesus invites us to pause what we are doing, come sit with him on that mountainside with his disciples. Jesus points at the creation around: “**Look** at the birds of the air,” he says. “Your heavenly Father created them, and everything else. God created you and all that exists. Just as your heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air, so he sustains you and all that exists. He provides the sun and warmth and food and water for survival. You don’t deserve this, you’ve done nothing to merit this gift. Yet you are valuable to your heavenly Father. So valuable that he sent his Son to make his kingdom come and declare you right with God. Look and remember the LORD your God, for it is *he* who gives. Be thankful for all that he freely gives to you and all creatures.”

Second Jesus leads us to **consider**: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”

Jesus again invites us to pause and sit with him on the mountain. He gestures to a nearby wild flower: “**Consider** how the wild flowers of the field grow,” he says. “Your heavenly Father not only provides all that is necessary for survival, but he also clothes his creation in beauty. God the Creator and Sustainer is also the greatest Artist and Poet. Stop and learn about the intricate beauty of this flower. Count the petals and marvel at the design of your eye. Consider your fingerprints; stop and look at them right now. God the Illustrator drew this unique pattern for you. No matter how much you labour and spin you’ll never match the splendour and majesty of the Artist and Poet.” He weaves together the story of the universe, and we are his workmanship and poem, created in Christ and saved through faith to do good works which he has prepared for us. We thank and praise God the Artist and Poet when we consider the beauty of his creation.

Lastly Jesus calls us to **seek**: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” In contrast to disciples of Jesus, the gentiles run after things: they relentlessly seek stuff, consumed with economic concerns, obsessed with superficial appearance,

gripped in a nasty cycle of accumulating possessions — because the more we have the more worried we are we'll lose it all.

Jesus calls his disciples to a simpler seeking. Not a seeking after self, but a quiet and steady trust in the Father. But what is God's kingdom that we are seeking? The kingdom is the state in which disciples live and serve as saved people, redeemed by Jesus Christ from sin, death, and the power of the devil. We are members of this kingdom by the grace freely given us, believing by faith that Jesus is the Son of God, who two thousand years ago stood on a mountain and taught his disciples that we need not worry because we are valuable and beautiful in the eyes of our heavenly Father. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is gathering members into God's kingdom from all nations. He does this through *you* — the church!

So, in everything we do — every moment, every seemingly mundane task — may we **look, consider, and seek**. May we **look** and be thankful that God creates and sustains our life and body. May we **consider** and be thankful for the beauty that is all around. We are unique works of art eternally valuable to God. May we **seek** after his kingdom now and in eternity. As we live and serve God, and selflessly love others, may they be drawn into the kingdom by God's Word and Spirit.

So I'll leave you with three challenges for the coming week.

Stop and **look** at the world around you. Think about where God has sustained you in the past? How is he sustaining you right now, today?

Stop and **consider** the beauty of everyday things. Look at your fingerprints, the wood grain in a desk, a hair, dirt on your shoes. As you consider this beauty, praise the LORD — the great Author and Poet.

Stop and **seek** God's kingdom. How are you loving and serving those around you? Who in your life needs to hear God's Word, and be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit?

May God guide and bless you this week. In Jesus' name. Amen.