

Harvest 2015: Tales of Hunger and Greed

Joel 2:21-28 / Luke 12:13-21

In preparation for our celebration today, I looked at some recent news stories and articles which make us think about harvest:

- Refugee Crisis – large number of people heading for the European Union is expected to continue, as they flee from conflicts in countries such as Syria and Afghanistan. But the political climate and the weather in the continent are more changeable.
- Food Poverty – over 500,000 people are now reliant on food aid in the UK. There is clear evidence that the benefits sanctions regime has gone too far, and is leading to destitution, hardship and hunger on a large scale throughout the country.
- Wine Row – Ukrainian prosecutors are preparing charges against the head of a Crimean winery for allegedly opening a 240 year old bottle of wine worth more than £58,000 for Vladimir Putin and Silvio Berlusconi during a recent visit.

We turn to our Bible readings for today, and there we find yet more tales of hunger and greed.

In Joel we read a story of hungry people. After plague, drought and fire had swept through the land, the people of Israel were starving to death. Then from the heart of their heart, the Temple of Jerusalem, came a vision. Yes, a vision of the soil bursting forth into a rich harvest, so that there was food enough for all, and more besides. “You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you.” (v.26) But then the prophet Joel continues by saying that once the people have been fed they can think about other things; in other words, if you are hungry all you think about is food, but if your stomach is full then you can concentrate on other things, like building a better world: “Then afterwards (after they have eaten) I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old folks shall dream dreams, and your young ones shall see visions.” (.28)

On the other hand, Luke 12 is the story of a well-fed person. Jesus tells us about a self-centred individual who has no concern for his fellow human beings, instead he builds bigger barns to store his bountiful crops. Once his barns are built the man says to himself, “And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink and be merry.” (v.19) But God has other plans for him, because ‘Wallop!’ that very night he meets his Maker, and not a penny of his wealth can save him. To the person who had brought a legal problem about property inheritance to Jesus, the punchline of the parable is addressed: “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich before God.” (v.21) That is to say, you can’t take it with you, so you better get things right with God and each other in the here and now.

At this time of a growing Refugee Crisis, of Food Poverty in Britain, of £58,000 bottles of wine being guzzled by multi-millionaires, at this time of harvest, we the people of God, who are not hungry, are commanded to have visions and dreams of a better world. A better world where all of God’s bountiful harvest is shared equally with all of God’s children. Yes, in this time we are commanded to prophesy, to challenge the values of this world by living in God’s New World here and now. This means celebrating the harvest of life, a daily gathering and offering of all the good gifts around us.

So today we give warning to this society that allows hundreds of thousands of people depend on food aid. We give warning because we are the people of the God of harvest – the harvest of life.

Neil Johnson

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