

In preparation for the Harvest Thanksgiving (all age service of Holy Communion) the chaplain prepared a sermon, which he delivered without notes using visual aids and interacting with the congregation.

Year A, Proper 20, 2023; 1 October 2023
Joel 2.21-27; Psalm 126; Matthew 4.25-33

Harvest Thanksgiving, Family Eucharist, Hybrid Sermon

I have a fondness for this day, Harvest Thanksgiving, as some of you already know all too well. Why? Today I get to wear this mighty cape (cope) reminding us of what Jesus says about the great Hebrew king Solomon in all his glory. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." Jesus is asking us to consider its beauty. Perhaps like me you have a fondness for the wild flowers of the Alps or meadows... Superman puts on a cape and he can fly, but we as Christians are put on the Lord Jesus and become strong in him. (Romans 13.14)

On this last day of our observance of Creationtide the reference to the soil and the animals invites us to look at these closer, to consider the soil and animals. In Matthew's gospel Jesus invites us to look at the birds of the air and the lilies in the field. We are to look up and we are to look down. We are to observe nature. We are to learn from it. We are to consider. I like particularly like the consideration emoji. Let me see if I can do a good impression of the consideration emoji?

CONSIDERATION EMOJI

Let us continue with a few questions moving from easy peasy to difficult? Which river flows through Vienna? What is the name of the river that flows through Innsbruck? Through Salzburg? Through Graz? And, because I was born there, through Hamburg?

In today's psalm meaning song, a Psalm of Ascent we hear the people ask God that He might restore the watercourses meaning riverbeds of the Negeb. Where do you think the Negeb or Negev is? Is it in Narnia, Adventure Bay or Israel? Yes, Israel! The Negev is a large desert area south of Jerusalem. The Negev has a very dry climate, but when there is a sudden downpour the dry riverbeds (called wadis) are filled with water sometimes rushing water. The riverbeds fill up with so much rushing water they turn into torrents making it necessary to warn people, especially tourists not to walk in them as they can be swept away by the water should it have rained higher up and further to the West or East. After the rain has passed through the desert and the riverbeds, grass and wild flowers spring up that have lain dormant sometimes for years.

I am holding in my hand a desert rose. Some of you here may have seen one before? It is very dry. It seems to be dead. However if I place it into a bowl and pour water over it and into the bowl the desert rose will in a short time unfold its stems and the stems will turn green. I am going to pour water into this bowl and by next week you should see how the stems have uncurled and turned green.

The reading from the Book of the Prophet Joel is upbeat! The soil is to rejoice! The animals are not to be afraid! The children of Zion are to rejoice! (400-300 BCE). God has acted and the outcome is good, indeed it is very good!

In my family Lucille and Alexandra get somewhat excited when in Canada we hang out a bird feeder and the humming-birds begin to come for food. In our courtyard in Vienna we look for the woodpecker who comes to feed off insects in the oak tree. We observe the blackbirds, who have made their home in the courtyard. We hear the ravens screeching and we shudder, especially when they are agitated and start dive-bombing us. We see bats swerving at night and wonder where they live, and in the

morning small birds who to my shame I cannot name. I welcome their presence in the garden, their flitting to and fro and their chirping.

I said above that the reference to the soil and the animals invites us to look at these. Only the other day I was reminded of just how dry the soil is presently in and around Vienna due to much sun and a lack of rain. I am conscious that soil even in its sheer abundance is a finite meaning limited resource. And I am aware that even in these days a farmer must have an eye to crop rotation, the use of manure, the amount of pesticides used and the necessity of leaving the soil to rest for a year so that it can recover and yield its goodness.

At Christ Church we as a chaplaincy, we together are committed to being good stewards of God's creation. This will mean that we will have an eye for the soil, the water (again in abundance but water needs to be managed well) and the animals (again in abundance but nature reserves and good husbandry are required).

The council recently affirmed our desire to be good stewards of God's creation at our planning day and will present the revised Mission Statement to next year's Annual Chaplaincy Meeting. We thank Monika Weber-Fahr for her services to the church as the local environment officer (LEO) and pray fervently for a successor. In the mission statement we read of our wish to be 'stewards of God's creation' and 'work together to embed environmental concerns in our worship, teaching and action'.

The psalm that in my Bible is called a Harvest of Joy tells of a people full of joy and laughter after God has restored the fortunes of Zion. To a large extent our fortunes are in our own hands when it comes to the soil, the water and the animals. Each one of us has a part to play, be it close by and far away. How does the Bible put it again in the Book of Joel,
Gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation;
assemble the aged;
gather the children,
even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.

Stewardship is to be global. We should never be too busy or distracted. Dictates handed down are one thing and becoming the change you desire another.

In each reading we have been considering we detect that God is the focus. He is in control of the fortunes of Zion and the people know this through the prophets. God is good to them when they follow his ways. It is implied that they flourish. Our ways are to be the same as God's ways. Life is always gift and it is to be protected and nurtured. This is why in the readings we have been considering we see the Hebrew people being called to repent, to turn away from their wrongful and hurtful ways and to be seeking God in all they write, say, and do. If God is not the focus we lose sight of the essential, the fundamental. We lose ourselves. What matters is looking to God. God acts. God creates. God sustains. Thanks be to God.

End

* Danube, Inn, Salzach, Mur, Elbe