

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Harvest Sunday 6th October 2024

Text: Romans 8:18-25

It was one of those moments of childhood when my five year old daughter thought I had lost it

We were standing in the vicarage vegetable patch that I had worked hard to reclaim from the tangle of weeds that we had inherited a year before

Digging down I had discovered it had been created over a tarmac drive, but around that I hoped it was possible to plant and grow vegetables, including potatoes

And so here we were digging a hole in the deep, dark, moist earth and putting perfectly good potatoes into it and covering them up – “Really papa?” she asked!

But now in early autumn we were out again pushing a fork carefully into the dark earth

I can still remember her face and cry of delight as we found potatoes after potatoes, small round ones in abundance under the earth

And so we dug up potatoes!

There is a whole vocabulary of harvesting words. Each describes a particular action which is right for the vegetable or fruit

We “dig” potatoes but “pull” radishes and carrots – try that for potatoes and you’ll be disappointed

We also “pick” and “pluck”, different words and actions that have an important common purpose

As we twist or cut and so “pick” a tomato, a bean or peas

As we pluck leaves from a lettuce, kale or spinach ...

... in both cases we leave the plant intact so it can continue to grow and flower and produce more of what we picked

The word “harvest” not only describes all of these different actions, but also a final gathering after which there will be no more from these plants until next year – either through them successfully wintering or planting their seeds in spring

Throughout Creationtide we have been exploring what it means to pray and act with hope as described in our reading from Romans 8

The theologian Jürgen Moltmann has been guiding us.

Do you remember what he says “Christian hope draws the promised future into the present day and prepares the present day for the future.”

Last week Alison talked about the reference to “first fruits” in v23 of our passage

To us who shop in fruit and vegetable sections where we can have blueberries all the year round flown in from various destinations, we have maybe lost the seasonal rhythm of the year

Although we are well attuned to the seasonality of apples and wine here in Luxembourg

First fruits is a reference to Jewish worship, where in the time of Jesus there was not a Harvest Festival but several Harvest Festivals

And first fruits was the first of those, possibly what was called The Feast of Weeks or in greek Pentecost

Which, if correct, gives fresh insight into the way the early church, filled with the Spirit, and those who follow who share that same filling and refilling are called by Paul in v23 “those who have the first fruits of the Spirit.”

The Jewish first fruits festival did what it said on the tin: bringing your first fruits as a joyful sacrifice, and offering to God

Not second, or left over or last

First – both as an act of love and also of trusting hope

Offering first fruits implies hope that there will be second, third and more – like picking or plucking to enable more and more to grow until the final harvest

Those who offer first fruits and who pick and pluck what follows are living in a hopeful in-between time – hopeful of more

If you read on from Paul’s reference in v23 to “we ourselves who have the first fruit of the Spirit” that living in-between is characterised by two things: groaning and waiting,

The groaning is a solidarity, empathy and compassion with the pain we see around us, in the created order, in human history

It’s about longing for the promised future of God, Abba, Father to fulfilled so the pain can be ended

The hopeful waiting, he says in v25, is waiting for what we do not see, waiting for it with patience

Patience is not just a personal quality, a characteristic

It’s a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:20), a God-centred quality that the Holy Spirit is growing in us, hopeful patience, patient and hopeful in God and His promises, even when we cannot begin to imagine what He will do and how He will do it

And it works like the picking and the plucking – as we seek that fruit in concrete situations, so the Spirit produces it, harvests it by empowering us living out patience, and then begins the cycle again, grows it and then harvesting it again and again

This is not a passive waiting. It is an alert and watchful one.

Alert and expectant for the green shoots of God’s Kingdom, the setting free from and setting right of injustice, including climate injustice

For as Moltmann says we are called to join in with that not only by drawing God’s promised future into the present day through hopeful prayer

We also join in with what God is doing by preparing the present day for the future through hopeful action

I am glad that we have a banner of protest in our Church today

It’s a reminder that this eager longing is not just in our private and personal sphere – as we kneel in prayer, as we take those next steps in lifestyle

This eager longing also plays out in the public sphere – in conversation that might challenge and question in the workplace

In the writing of letters to our elected representatives at local, national and EU level

And maybe also by taking to the streets in peaceful protest

I want to end with the words of the Anglican theologian, John Stott who says: (May) God gives us a patient eagerness and an eager patience as we wait for His promise to be fulfilled”