

# CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

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| Date:     | 4 October 2026                          |
| Service:  | Eucharist, Harvest                      |
| Preacher: | The Revd Canon Vanessa Baron, Treasurer |

Earlier this week a perceptive 'reel' or short film came up on Facebook. Someone had filmed a woman in aristocratic early 18C dress walking round a large supermarket, looking in wonder at the piles of vegetables and shelves of bread. She was asking questions of her guide. 'So anyone can come into this shop and buy goods?' 'And all of these items are on sale today?'

The choice and scale of food items on sale in a modern supermarket are indeed extraordinary and possibly unsustainable. But, here in the West, we have grown very used to such abundance and generally take it for granted, becoming irritated if, one day, we find we can't buy mangetout and have to 'make do' with sugarsnap peas!

Today is our Harvest Celebration, which gives us an opportunity to reflect on the beauty and diversity of the natural world; to ponder God's bounty – his generosity that surrounds us and to give thanks for it. But also, to consider the connection between God's creation and our moral and spiritual wellbeing – because they are inseparable.

There are various themes that run through all our readings today. First and foremost, the generosity of God – the abundance of blessings that he gives us through the natural world: 'he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food' writes St Paul to the Corinthians; the plentiful harvest in Jesus' parable that made the greedy farmer plan to build bigger barns; the fruitful prosperity

envisaged in Deuteronomy 28; the psalmist's declaration, 'You crown the year with your bounty.'

Second is the sense of tender care that God has for his creation – he 'softens the earth with showers'; he feeds the ravens and 'clothes the lilies of the field' with glory. 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it' proclaims the Psalmist in Psalm 24.

What are we to make of this?

a) To begin, it should affect our attitude to creation. I don't suppose there is anyone here who was not concerned by the extreme heat and drought we experienced over the summer. Most of us will have mourned as we drive through the Downs and see the dying ash trees or felt impotent rage as we walk by Chichester Harbour and see the sewage washing up on the beaches and marshes. If we grieve the destruction of the natural world, how much more does God. Back in Genesis 2, God placed Adam in the Garden, to 'till and to keep it' – to quote from *Laudatum Si* (Pope Francis' Encyclical on the Care of the Earth), "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.' (Para 67)

The Ecumenical Patriarch, who was here in this Cathedral less than two weeks ago, has 'spoken in particular of the need for each of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet, for "inasmuch as we all generate small ecological damage", we are called to acknowledge "our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation". (Para 9)

Each one of us is called to what *Laudatum Si* terms an 'ecological conversion', whereby the effects of (our) encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in (our) relationship with the world around (us). 'To live out our 'vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork' .... 'it is

not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.’  
(Para 218)

I find that really challenging – to think and pray carefully, ‘What can I do?’

b) The generosity of God should also affect our attitude to one another - we are called to reflect God’s character – if God has been generous to us, we are to be generous to one another. The farmer in Jesus’ parable wanted to keep the profits of the land for himself, so that he might ‘relax, eat, drink and be merry!’ Instead, to quote the Patriarch again, we are asked to replace ‘consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing’; to learn ‘a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God’s world needs.’ ( para 9)

c) Finally, an awareness of the beauty and diversity of creation; of God’s ‘power and divine nature’ seen through it (Rom 1:20) should affect our attitude to God himself. Jesus calls us to pause, to look, to ‘consider the ravens, the birds of the air, the lilies of the field’ - to be attentive. Our response must be both wonder and thanksgiving. A gratitude and awareness of our dependence on God that ‘overcome(s) that unhealthy anxiety which makes us superficial, aggressive and compulsive consumers.’ ( Para 224)

As we celebrate Harvest today – ‘Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!’ Amen