

PSALM 65

I shouldn't think we have too many farmers here in Christ Church – quite a few who have allotments but no actual farmers. For me it hasn't always been so. Previous churches I have been in there have been. I can remember one May getting a phone call from a farmer to remind me that it was Rogation Sunday and that in the same way that we would celebrate the harvest we ought to pray for the sowing and watering. She was right and we did. However, what I was being reminded was that the celebration of harvest is or at least should be a celebration of answered prayer. As we look at this Psalm we have had read for us I sense that the tremendous praise expressed here is due to God answering the expectant prayers of his people. As we glance at the wonderful words of vs9-11 it seems that their prayer had probably been to do with the fear of drought. It is probable that, faced with a time of drought, they had prayed to God and seen their prayers wonderfully answered. The barren steppes had been transformed into green pastures. So as a response they came to God in the words of v1 to fulfil their vows that is to give him the praise and presumably the offering of gifts that is a proper response to what God has done. In light of this today, as we thank God for the harvest, we may be a little humbled by the recognition that we haven't prayed as we should at the times of sowing and growing. We are perhaps guilty of taking God's provision for granted. Even so this Psalm and this harvest festival occasion help to remind us that it is to God that praise and gifts are due in a true response for his provision. He has, as it says in v11, "crowned the year with your bounty". It is a wonderful picture. "The scene is magnificent, suffused with a glow and a verdure, a heaviness of plenty and a happiness which is more than the poet can contain and to his ear more than the very mountains and meadows and plains themselves can contain. The hymn fairly blazes with the glory of the good green earth."

Doesn't it bring up a picture of ripe fields of corn, of trees heavy with apples, of a multitude of glorious colours? In so doing it points us back to the hand and work of God. The bountiful provision of God in the harvest shows us a number of things about our God that we should note.

1. God is Sovereign.

He is Lord over the whole of the created order and its history vs6&7.... The Bible gives us this clear picture of every aspect of life having its origin in God and him having control over them. He holds in his hands life and death, health and sickness, prosperity and adversity. The world depends for its order on God and as the Apostle Paul pointed out in the letter to the Romans through the created world we should be able to see clearly the nature and face of God. It always amazes me when people say they can see Jesus in a bowl of cereal or the shape of a potato. However we can in so many ways in creation see the nature of our God. I just love dawns and sunsets and here in v8, "where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy." Creation speaks of God, his sovereignty and the order he imposes on creation as the one creator.

God is sovereign, he is ruler over all creation and as sovereign we can come to him in prayer because he, as the sovereign God he alone is able to answer us. I like the story that appeared in strip cartoon in the paper of a little boy going into church with his big sister. "Who does God pray to Masie," he asked. "Nobody baby Grumplin. There's nobody above God. I mean God is the top you should know that," sister replied. "I was just checking," responded the little boy, "there's no point in dealing with middle men!"

However, that of course only gets us half way because there are many whom we recognise as being top people to whom we wouldn't want to come with our requests. I can certainly remember at school standing nervously outside the headmaster's office waiting to go in... and I was a member of staff! So to say God is the Sovereign creator is only part of the story.

2. God is active in creation

The Psalm shows us clearly that God is involved with his creation and especially in that he provides for us.

What we see in the Psalm and what we see around us is God at work within creation providing for us through it. The Sovereign God hasn't as it were set the world going and then left us to it or it to us. The Bible does not give us the picture of the clockmaker who makes his clock winds it up and then is done with it. As we look at v9 it speaks of God's action in caring for the land and specifically in watering the land. It is interesting isn't it to see that the references here and in v10 are to water. In a land where water was at a premium and at a time where there had probably been a drought then the sending of rain was very much seen as the action of God. This year has seen drought in places like Russia meaning that the crops haven't grown or have been burnt up in fires. The Psalmist was sure that God was involved in his creation sending the rain in season.

Here is a picture of what we call an open universe with God acting within it. Yes God has set his patterns of seed time and harvest, the regular return of the seasons and the natural laws but also he is involved in creation acting for the benefit of his people. Jesus described his Father in agricultural terms when he said, "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener" (John 15:1).

This providence of God is important because it would have been no good these people praying to God if he had shut himself outside the world.

There would be no good us praying if God were not capable of answering prayer. He is capable of answering prayer firstly as we have seen because he is Sovereign and secondly because he is at work in the world. But all this is still of little benefit without the third factor that stands out plainly from the Psalm and that is

3. The goodness of God.

The Psalm is a song of praise because of the goodness of God in hearing the prayers of the people and answering them in abundance. v9 "You enrich it abundantly" v10 "you drench its furrows" v11 "your carts overflow with abundance". We are not speaking here about small favours wrestled from an unwilling God we are seeing a song of joy and praise because of the abundant blessings poured out by a God of goodness. That is why we sing our praises today because of the abundant blessings poured out on us by a God of goodness. We can come to God in prayer because he not only can help us because he is sovereign; he not only will answer us because he is actively involved in creation; but because as a heavenly Father he has our best interests at heart. The harvest speaks of the bountiful goodness of God. He provides for us in abundance because he is a good and loving God. We see the goodness of God and what a bountiful God he is as we look at the fruit and vegetables, the flowers and yes at the cans and packets to be sent to the Camrose Centre. But that is only the tip of what you and I receive from God and only the tip of what we as a church receive.

As a church we receive from God many people who come here, and their service and of course our finance. As individuals we recognise the gifts of home, work, food, family, friendship, health and so on. Count your blessings name them one by one and see what a bountiful God our God is who has given us all these things richly to enjoy.

But if we stop there we would miss a large part of the Psalm for the goodness of God extended not just to providing this abundance of crops but also to restoring the relationship between God and his people. For whatever reason that relationship had broken down. The people had gone wrong and had sinned but v3.... Here is the supreme sign of the goodness of God in that he responds in mercy to a people who are in rebellion against him.

When we come to him in repentance he forgives us our wrong doing and restores us in relationship with him through the death of Christ Jesus. The crown of thorns which he wore on our behalf is the great crown of God's bounty.

The prayer of God's people had been answered in a wonderful harvest. Our prayers have been answered in a harvest, I leave it to the farmers to decide how wonderful the harvest is. It speaks of the sovereignty of a God who is able to answer our prayers, the present action of God who is able to answer our prayers and the goodness of God who delights to answer our prayers to our benefit.

But having said all this what is our response?

Well clearly the first response should be one of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving because God has answered our prayers for the harvest yet again and thanksgiving for his faithful and bountiful provision for another year. We shouldn't take for granted God's provision. One of our constant prayers is "give us this day our daily bread" but should we not give God thanks for the answer to that prayer, both as we sit at table for our meals and here in church as we celebrate the harvest.

The second response should be one of trust. The harvest should enable us to trust God more. He has again proved faithful he has again showed us he is a God of goodness. Doesn't that inspire us to trust him in other areas? Isn't the God who provides for our bodies able to provide also for our spirit? Can we who have found God faithful in looking after our physical needs not come and trust him to meet those spiritual needs and especially the need of our eternal security? It is a bit like learning to ride a bike. When you first take the stabilisers off you may have someone holding the saddle as you make your wobbly way. That is a matter of trust that they will hold you up. As they do and provide trustworthy so it builds your trust in them. The harvest as an expression of God's faithfulness and goodness encourages us to grow in our trust of God. The answers to prayer in the way that God has crowned the year with his bounty should stir us into greater trust as we come to him in prayer. The harvest and this Psalm speak of the sovereignty of a God who is able to answer our prayers, the providence of a God who is able to answer our prayers and the goodness of God who delights to answer our prayers to our benefit. Our response should be thanks and trust.