

## **Addington Fund Carol Service**

St Edith, Monks Kirby, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011

### ***'Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy'* Ps 126**

Tears and joy are as much part of true human life as sowing and reaping is part of farming life. Human life cannot be separated from the earth. This indeed is what *Adam* means *'the one hewn from the earth'*. When human beings become separated from the earth, from the rhythms and reality of God's creation, that is when the trouble starts. The language of God's revelation is intimately connected to nature and agriculture. This morning's readings for Anglicans across the world included the parable of the sower, the parable of the weeds, the parable of the mustard seed and these words from Isaiah: *'Listen and hear my voice, pay attention to what I say. When a farmer ploughs for planting does he plough continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? When he has levelled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin? Does he not plant wheat in its place and barley in its plot?'*

God's revelation is rooted in the earth. The good news of Jesus Christ is communicated in the language of farming and fishing, of vineyards and olive trees. How western 'so-called' civilisation, now largely urban dwelling, has lost touch with God's good earth which both gives us life and teaches us about life and for those with ears to hear and eyes to see, teaches us also about the kingdom of God. This blindness or blinkeredness to the rhythms and realities of nature, this distance from the soil from which we were hewn and to which we will return leads to all kinds of neuroses and dis-ease of body, mind and spirit. William Temple once described Christianity as *'the most materialistic of all religions'* by this he meant not greedy for material possessions but that matter matters. God communicates to us through the physical stuff of creation. The ultimate expression of this is the incarnation: *'The Word became flesh and dwelled among us'*. God works in and through his creation. As creatures *'hewn from the earth'* we need to be reconnected in a right relationship with the earth. A wonderful example of this is *'Care Farming'* where people struggling with life in a whole variety of ways, among them, mental health, addictions, criminality discover a wholeness and healing through working with the land and animals. I was reading last week of the town of Todmorden in West

Yorkshire which is now almost entirely self-sufficient in vegetables, fruit and eggs. Food is grown not only in private gardens but in public places all over the town. A new sense of community and belonging and sharing has grown and the crime rate has dropped significantly. This is all through people reconnecting with the earth. *'The earth is the Lord's and they that dwell therein.'* God's kingdom is not *'pie in the sky when you die'* but comes on earth as it is in heaven. Occasionally we glimpse heaven breaking in to earth. In our first reading we find Moses looking after his father-in-law's flock in Sinai, he sees the glory of God shining out of this bush aflame with the fire of God. Eternity breaks in to time, heaven to earth. God says to Moses *'Take off your shoes, the ground on which you are standing is Holy ground.'* The ground on which we stand and on which we walk and with which we work is *holy* ground.

Advent is a time when we are reminded of the holiness of God, the glory of God. There is danger for us of missing out on the gift and the opportunity of Advent. The tendrils of commercial Christmas stretch backwards for the money makers even into October. But we miss out on Advent at our spiritual peril. To move into Christmas bypassing Advent is like a farmer not waiting for harvest before harvesting. Advent is a time for renewal, just as the earth needs renewal, *'But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest.'* (Lev.25.4) - 'set aside' has biblical precedent - so we need Advent for the renewal of our relationship with God. Nothing is more important than this.

As we give thanks and pray for the land and those who work it, the gifts of God's creation, so we give thanks above all for the Giver, the Lord himself. Advent is a time, as our collect reminds us for *'casting away the works of darkness and putting on the armour of light'*. We look forward to the coming of Christ in great humility, born in a stable and laid in a manger, so we look ahead at when *'he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.'* And so it is a time of putting things right in our relationship with God and in our relationships with one another. Some thirty years ago I went down the deepest mine in England and spent a shift with the miners underground, when I came up out of the darkness into the daylight which was dazzling, I could see how covered in grime, in coal dust I was. I could not see this in the darkness underground, I could only see this when I came into the light. Advent is a time to come in to God's presence and in His light to see that in our own lives which

needs to be healed, which needs to be forgiven. We can do this, because the Light of Christ is the Light of His Love, repentance, sorrow for our sins, or simply turning to Him opens the door not only to his forgiveness but new life, to joy, to freedom.

Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. This is God's promise to us all. It is true of each of us and our lives. Something of this wonderful truth is expressed in very practical and earthed ways by the Addington Fund, which helps to meet farmers in their needs, whether through Foot and Mouth, or flooding or bovine TB, or finding accommodation for tenant farmers having to leave or other needs. The Addington Fund expresses in practical service something of God's love and concern for the land he has given us and for those who farm it for the benefit of us all. As we remember and give thanks for the Addington Fund and pray for the farmers in need it so faithfully serves, let us not forget it was sheep farmers, shepherds, who were the first to hear of the good news of the birth of Jesus and the first to *respond* to the news and worship Him.

+John Stroyan