

St Marc Grenoble
Harvest Service
Sunday 17th October 2021
Joel 2: 21 - 27
Matthew 6: 25 - 33
'Do Not Worry'

Good Morning, Welcome to our Harvest Service, whether you're here in church, or watching online. It is great to have you with us.

Let's Pray

Today's theme 'Do Not Worry' reflects on God's amazing provision for us, and it also comes right from the heart of my faith journey.

Some of you know that about five years after I came back to faith in Jesus, (in my mid 40's) I very clearly felt God calling me to work full time for Him; but I realised that would require some 'proper' theological training.

So, after months of prayer and careful consideration, I made the decision to quit my very comfortable and secure job as a market research manager in a Bank, causing my boss to ask if I was crazy, and my dear father to have a heart attack, which he claimed was caused by his worrying about my future!

I have to tell you that decision was a very major test of faith. Julia and I decided together that we would follow God's call, take the plunge and leave the supposed security of working for a major international bank, and work instead for the Creator, and Saviour of all, and depend on His provision.

Jesus' words 'Do Not Worry' were a major part of the reassurance behind that decision. We gave away most of our possessions, rented out (and later sold) our lovely new house on the outskirts of Edinburgh and followed His call to full time Christian service.

And the reading from Joel, hundreds of years earlier, has a similar message: 'Be not afraid, O land, be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things ... Be glad O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God ... You will have plenty to eat, until you are full. And you will praise the Name of the Lord your God. who has worked wonders for you ... Then you will know that I am the Lord your God and that there is no other.

We travelled with just a few suitcases to Vancouver, in Canada, to train at a unique, international, interdenominational, post-graduate theological college. I'd never even been to university, let alone graduated, but I earned and was awarded both a Post-graduate Diploma and a Masters degree there!

That was the start of a long and winding journey with Jesus, leading to us being here today, 24 years later. That's a little flavour of our background.

It wasn't easy - in fact it was particularly difficult for me, because I always like to have everything planned and scheduled well ahead.

It wasn't like that at all: several times we thought we were going to run out of money. But, every time, just in time, the money came in - from most unlikely sources, to pay college fees, or rent. We were reminded God was working in our lives; we had to depend on those words of Jesus: 'Do Not Worry'.

So, let's get back to our reading from Matthew's Gospel: This passage is part of what we call Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount', which is a comprehensive 'Guide to Christian Living'.

Jesus' comments can sound a bit strange: 'Don't worry about your life, don't worry about what to eat, or about what to drink'.

(Let me emphasise, Jesus did NOT say be careless with your lives!)

Unlike many of the people Jesus was speaking to, most of us don't have to worry too much about our next meal; especially today, when we're celebrating harvest, I hope we'll be joyful and be able to celebrate the good things we have to enjoy.

Today of all days, as we're celebrating harvest, we should be in joyful mode, able to give thanks for the good things we're privileged to enjoy.

It was probably different for the people in 1st C Judea, many of whom were subsistence farmers, dependent on what they could grow to feed themselves and their families. With any excess to share, or exchange for other goods, or crops. But, if the harvest failed, hunger became an even greater reality.

Yet, Jesus said 'Don't worry – don't preoccupy yourselves, don't be anxious.' Easier said than done if you were facing the reality of nothing to eat tomorrow, or nothing to keep you warm, when you are cold tonight.

'Don't be anxious,' Jesus said, 'because God – your heavenly father knows what you need; and you only have to look at the birds and the flowers to see His wonderful provision for all His beautiful creation.'

Jesus explained, in vv. 32 and 33, that what is far more important than wasting time worrying about food, drink and clothing, is to spend our time putting God's Kingdom and His way of life first.

'Don't worry about the basic day to day needs for 'materialistic living,' Jesus was saying, ' because if you focus on doing what God wants, if you focus on living God's way – if you make His wishes your priority – He will provide you

with everything you need to serve Him, just as he provides the birds and the flowers with everything they need.

Yes, maybe today – what to eat and drink may not be our first concern. But, I still meet many people who have other big concerns which dominate their lives – needing papers, debt, redundancy, paying the rent, paying the bills, making sure the kids have the right clothes and shoes to wear.

Sadly, many people I meet have lost the true joy of living, and live with millstones and burdens of debt, fear and depression around their necks.

I'm often told people are just too busy to come to Church these days – 'After all the story goes, for many families, Sunday is the only day they have to go shopping' Well, I suggest Jesus' words 'Don't worry; don't be anxious about these things – Focus on putting God first'; are just as relevant today.

The things that draw us away from focusing on Him, may be slightly different; but, dealing with the real issue – focusing on God, putting Him and His wishes first, living His way, adopting His priorities were then, in the 1st C, and continue to be now, 20 C later, in 21st C – Transformational.

Make God's priorities our priorities, and we will truly become His people once again. He will care for us in exactly the same way as He cares for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, which are still more stunningly beautiful than anything humans can create.

In Matt 11: 26 – 30 Jesus says: 'Are you having a real struggle? Come to me! Are you carrying a big load on your back? Come to me – I'll give you a rest! Pick up my yoke and put it on; take lessons from me, I'll be gentle with you!

The last thing in my heart is to give you a hard time. You'll see, rest you need and rest you shall have. My yoke is easy to wear, my load is easy to bear.'

That message is just as real today as it was in the 1st C, that promise is just as important now as it was then, possibly even more important.

Finally, I want to say something about joy, the opposite of worry.

If we get our lives right and live 'Jesus' Way', we'll experience the complete joy we see in Jesus' own life.

That doesn't mean we'll all go around with silly grins on our faces, but it does mean whatever life, or the world, throws at us, we can relax in the inner peace and the support, which God provides.

He encourages us to do what's right, in the midst of everything else going wrong. The past doesn't matter – it is the future that counts!

If you are struggling to deal with life just now, if you're bereft, or lost or lonely, Jesus is here for you.

If you're worried about work, or lack of it; if you're struggling with a sick body, or a sick mind, if you're carrying a heavy burden - Don't worry. God knows about it! He loves you and wants to shine His love into your life.

Be open to allowing Him in, and He will lift your burden.

If we can go away today celebrating God's provision for us, and having been reminded of this promise of Jesus, and refocussing ourselves on God's priorities, rather than our own; then, I'm certain we will have a truly remarkable Harvest to celebrate

Let's Pray ...