

Readings: 1 Timothy 6: 6-19 & Luke 16: 19-31

Sermon: When we don't share...

Harvest

It's Harvest season which, in church terms, means collecting food, and a lot of school visits. I've already started asking the children, "So what do we think of at this time of year?" And without fail, the answer is: "Halloween!" Not quite the liturgical response I was hoping for.

But once we get past the ghosts and sweets, we do talk about Harvest — about giving thanks, sharing food, and noticing those who don't have enough. And that's where the gospel leads us today. Because Harvest isn't just about full cupboards. It's about open hearts. It's not just about asking what we have, but who we're sharing it with.

The Parable and the gate

Harvest is a time of gratitude — a celebration of abundance, of full cupboards and overflowing baskets. But today's gospel reading invites us to look beyond the table and ask: who's missing from the feast?

Jesus tells the story of a rich man, clothed in luxury, feasting daily. And at his gate lies Lazarus. He is hungry, sick and invisible. The rich man doesn't go out of his way to harm him, he simply ignores him. And that, Jesus says, is the tragedy.

The chasm between their lives isn't just physical; it's moral, it's spiritual and after death, it becomes eternal.

This parable isn't about wealth being bad. It's about indifference being deadly. The rich man's sin isn't his riches — it's his refusal to see, to act and to share.

And that's where Harvest becomes more than a celebration. It becomes a challenge.

Society

We live in a society that often believes there's not enough to go round. We hear it in debates about foreign aid, migration, welfare and benefits – and there are real complex and important debates to be had about these issues. We cannot get forced into binary choices – that there is only one right and one wrong – it's much more nuanced than that.

A phrase I often hear is about the need to “look after our own first.” Who is “our own”? Because Jesus kept expanding that circle — from Jew to Gentile, from neighbour to stranger, even, scandalously, to enemy.

The myth of scarcity tells us to hoard, to fear, to close the gate. But the truth of God's kingdom is abundance. There is enough — if we are generous, if we decide to see, act and share.

Harvest is a chance to ask: what kind of society do we want to be? One that feasts while others lie at the gate? Or one that opens the gate, sets another place at the table, and says, “You are welcome”?

Generosity isn't just a personal virtue, it's a public calling. It's about policies, priorities, and the kind of world we're building.

‘The Preferential Option for the Poor’

But this call to generosity isn't just about personal morals - it's a call from God. In the Church's teaching, there is a principle known as the ‘preferential option for the poor’. It means that in all our decisions — personal, political, as a church — we are called to put the needs of the poor first. Not because they are more deserving, but because they are more vulnerable and because, as we see throughout the Bible, God does.

Scripture is full of this divine bias: the gleanings of the harvest left for the poor and the stranger; the prophets crying out for justice; and Jesus himself proclaiming good news to the poor. In Luke's Gospel, he says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." And in Matthew, he reminds us that whatever we do for the least among us, we do for him.

This isn't just about charity, it's about justice. It's about shaping a society — and a church — that listens to the voices of the poor, includes them in decision-making, and honours their dignity. Jesus warned us about building a world that works for the few, while the many lie at the gate.

The rich man had every chance to change — every day Lazarus lay at his gate. But he didn't. And after death, he couldn't. And this is a real warning to each and every one of us.

Faith and good works

However, our hope of resurrection, our entry into eternal life, is not earned by our good works. It is received by faith — faith in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. As Paul writes to Timothy, "we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." Wealth, status, even our most generous acts — none of these are a passport through judgement into resurrection.

What endures is the treasure of faith. A faith that is not passive or private, but active and public. A faith that bears fruit — in love, in justice, in generosity. Paul urges the church to "do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share," not to try and win salvation, but as evidence of the life of the Holy Spirit within us.

This is the heart of the gospel: we are saved by grace, through faith. And that faith, if it is alive, will overflow in compassion — especially toward the poor. The preferential option for the poor is

not a political slogan, it's a spiritual outpouring which reveals the maturity of our discipleship, the health of our church, and the authenticity of our witness.

So when we give, when we share, when we open the gate to Lazarus — we're not earning eternal life, we're revealing it. We're living the life that really is life in the Spirit of Jesus.

Generosity within our means

Now, some of us may hear this call to generosity and feel burdened because truthfully, we're struggling ourselves. Bills are mounting, cupboards aren't always full, and the idea of giving more — even a tin or a coin — feels impossible.

But the gospel doesn't demand destitution from everyone. The disciples were called to leave everything, yes — and some followers of Jesus have embraced that radical path. But most of us are called to live faithfully within our circumstances. And within those circumstances, we can still be generous.

Generosity isn't only about money. It's about attitude. It's about how we see others, how we speak about those in need, how we vote, how we pray. It's about resisting the temptation to judge and demonise, and instead choosing compassion.

Even a generous spirit — a willingness to see the Lazarus' in our world and not turn away is a powerful witness. Because it's not the size of the gift that matters, it's the heart from which it flows.

Jesus' parable isn't just about one beggar at one gate — it's a challenge to the kind of society we build. I don't see this parable primarily about the beggars sitting on our streets – giving directly on the street is complex - and many homeless charities advise against it. The parable is a deeper call is to see, respond, and advocate for all those left out.

So, this Harvest, let's make a decision to give — not just tins and coins, but with a more open mind, and with compassion. Let's challenge the myths that keep the gates closed. Let's be a church, a community, a country that sees the Lazarus' in our community and society — and responds.

Because the kingdom of God is not built on feasts for the fortunate few but on shared tables, open hearts, and the radical, and sometimes scandalous belief, that everyone belongs.

Amen.

*Rev'd Richard Haynes 28 September 2025 15th Sunday after
Trinity - Harvest*