**Lammas Sunday 2nd August 2020**

**Reading Reflection and Prayers.**

**Collect**

Eternal God, you crown the year with your goodness and you give us fruits of the earth in their season: grant that we may use them to your glory, for the relief of those in need and for our own well-being; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen

**Reading Joel 2 (NRSV)**

21Do not fear, O soil;  
    be glad and rejoice,  
    for the Lord has done great things!  
22Do not fear, you animals of the field,  
    for the pastures of the wilderness are green;  
the tree bears its fruit,  
    the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

23O children of Zion, be glad  
    and rejoice in the Lord your God;  
for he has given the early rain for your vindication,  
    he has poured down for you abundant rain,  
    the early and the later rain, as before.  
24The threshing-floors shall be full of grain,  
    the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

25I will repay you for the years  
    that the swarming locust has eaten,  
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,  
    my great army, which I sent against you.

26You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,  
    and praise the name of the Lord your God,  
    who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.  
27You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,  
    and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other.  
And my people shall never again  
    be put to shame.

**Reflection on Lammas from the Arthur Rank website.**

Pious Christians sometimes look very nervous when they are reminded that many Christian festivals are based on, or rather superimposed on, earlier pagan ones.

The ancient Celtic world gave thanks as the harvest began to be brought in, and the first bread from the first flour from the first wheat was baked. The first day of August was the date of their festival, and the first Saxon Christians simply took it over and renamed it ‘loaf mass’, which in time became ‘Lammas’. And Lammas was celebrated up to the Reformation and beyond, until the Industrial Revolution began to drive a cast-iron wedge between the people and the land and its ancient rhythms. Gradually Lammas, like Plough Sunday and Rogation, began to die out except in the most rural communities, and no longer were the first harvest loaves brought to church at Lammas-tide to be offered on the altar as a thanksgiving for the first fruits of the harvest.

It fell to an eccentric priest of the Church of England, Robert Hawker, to revive something of the ancient Lammas tradition in his little parish of Morwenstow in Cornwall. Hawker was a highly colourful figure in more senses than one. He habitually dressed in a claret-coloured coat, a blue fisherman’s jersey, long sea-boots, a pink brimless hat and a poncho made from a yellow horse blanket. He talked to the birds, invited his nine cats into church – which he kept liberally strewn with herbs – and kept a pig as a pet. But in 1843 he introduced the first ever Harvest Festival service, inviting his parishioners to give thanks to God for a plentiful yield from the land. He moved the service from the traditional beginning of harvest, 1st August, to its end – 1st October, which is why Harvest Festival is now always at either the end of September or the beginning of October. For from that remote Cornish parish the custom rapidly spread until nearly every church of nearly every denomination in nearly every part of the country had to have its harvest festival.

1 August is Lammas Day - an English Quarter Days. These were the days on which rents were paid and servants were hired, and the day on which the clergy stipends were due. In old fashioned terms, it was a day of reckoning. A day when the tabs were all added up. The balance sheets balanced. Debts were settled. And a line was drawn under what had gone before in order to provide for a clean sheet to begin business again. So Lammas was more than just a day of reckoning and settling up. It is also a traditional harvest festival day and it was a celebration of the first fruits of the harvest. Most people think that Harvest Festival should come in autumn but Lammas predated harvest festivals as we know them by SEVERAL hundreds of years!

So what is Jesus saying in the gospels?

Jesus certainly seemed to be speaking about the day of reckoning that comes of each of us and about the nature of the balance sheet that we are left with at the end of life. He is asking us to question our systems of giving value to what we encounter in this world.

It is quite likely that he may be encouraging us to recognise that our wealth can be better measured by what we give than by what we retain.

And Jesus is asking us, and not for the first time, to ask real and serious questions about what we do about with what we own.

When Jesus thought about ethical questions, he does seem to have thought in terms of property, possessions and what we do with what we have. Jesus, and those who first witnessed to his radical good news, seemed to care a great deal about money and possessions and what we do with them.

I don’t think that possessions in themselves are wrong. I don’t think that security in life is a bad thing. I don’t think that saving for a rainy day is a bad thing.

But I do believe that God calls on us to think about what we do with what we have. I do believe that God calls on us to offer everything we have in life and not the measly first-fruits of the harvest. And I do believe that we need to build for ourselves, not merely a pension fund of cash to see us through old age, but also another fund that we need to invest in that will see us through spiritual austerity when that seems to come. Into that pension pot, we need to store up things that will tide us through.

Into it go the wisdom we have learned, the ways of being spiritual we have been taught, the kindness we give and the kindliness we have received.

We need that sort of pension fund to lighten us up on dark days and to bring light to those around us whenever we need to crack it open.

We need to collect up the things that teach us that God loves us and store them for a rainy day. Those times when God seems close, those snatches of beauty and courage that we encounter, and those glimpses we sometimes get of God’s love and intimacy and delight.

In the name of God, Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer. Amen.

**Prayers of Intercession**

May your peace shine among us and your love set us free, Lord, we pray. Keep us persevering in faith and set in our hearts the desire for your Kingdom. Guide your Church along the way of the Gospel; may your Holy Spirit keep her welcoming...

We pray for our Queen and all the leaders of the nations; may they have the will to promote justice and freedom. For honesty in political life, for justice in society, Lord, we pray.

For those who toil to earn their daily bread, Lord, we pray,

For those without work or resources, Lord, we pray.

For those with no family or home, Lord, we pray.

For those who suffer from loneliness or abandonment, Lord, we pray.

For those who are oppressed or maligned, Lord, we pray.

O Christ, you have take our weaknesses upon yourself and taken charge of our illnesses; support those who are going through trials...

We entrust to you our families and friends, all who have asked for our prayers and who pray for us...

We bring to God someone whom we have met or remembered today, and for whom we want to pray.

We bring to God someone who is hurting today and needs our prayer.

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world tonight.

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust.

We bring ourselves to God, that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection. For our country, our community of Land’s End churches, that the Christians here may be witnesses to truth and creators of unity, Lord, we pray.

Bless and heal us, Christ Jesus; in you alone our hearts find rest and peace.