

Harvest 2024 – TALK – Isaiah 58:9b-11

Part 1 Talk

Often at Harvest we talk about the gifts or the Harvest of the fields: fruit and vegetables, flowers, honey but today we are going to think about the gift, or the Harvest of water. Living in MK we are all possibly more aware of the importance of water – all the balancing Lakes and expanses of water we have here that keep our buildings and city mostly dry. We enjoy the lakes too for leisure: what lakes can we think of? Caldecotte, Willen, Furzton, Teardrop, Lodge, to name just a few.

But talking of water, following the week of weather that we have just had is probably not going to cause us all to burst into spontaneous Hallelujahs, like it might in some parts of the world. In fact, this past week talk of water will elicit groans, sighs, frustration or sadness as you think about localised flooding that has affected you or maybe severe flooding in other parts of the world...rain at this time of year is generally considered negatively. Too much rain, is sometimes as bad as too little.

So a few quick-fire general knowledge questions about water:

How much of the earth's surface is water? 70% (approx. – exact figure is 71%)

How much of our bodies is water? 60% (average)

What is the wettest city in the UK? Cardiff

So if we now look at our passage..... there is a promise from God for us. A promise based on the theme of water. It says in verse 11 “You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails” – that’s a beautiful image isn’t it? Our gardens change dependent on the season don’t they? In the spring new life bursts from the wet ground, but in the autumn most colourful plants and flowers disappear, it’s too cold for them. In summer, our gardens can get rather parched, our flowers wilt, our lawns go brown and without water things tend to die. It’s a bit like life really, sometimes life is colourful, fun, vibrant, new things burst in, but sometimes lots of challenges come our way, when friendships aren’t working, or family life is hard or money is short or health is poor and it can sometimes feel like the garden of our heart is scorched and dry. But God’s promise is that through every season of life “We will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails.”

So let’s take these flowers. I might need some help with this – children could I get a few volunteers? Can you hold these in your open hand – are they growing? No don’t be silly. What about if you put them into this silver tray which is our garden – let’s watch them grow - is anything happening... but let’s see what happens if I water them. Children can you tell the adults what happened? Great you can go and sit down now thanks!

The flowers open and grow bigger with water. It’s all to do with the paper expanding as it absorbs the water. But what about in our lives, how are we watered? I think the Bible gives us a clue elsewhere...in the gospel of John chapter 7:38 it says “Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this he meant the Spirit” – so for those who believe in God, our strength, our spring, the river that refreshes our souls is God’s Holy Spirit.

So **this** Harvest whilst we thank God for water: for its beauty, how wonderful it is to drink and bathe in and play in and that it enables our food to grow; I also want to encourage us to seek God’s life-giving waters too, His Spirit: that we might be a well-watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails –

and so in THIS moment let's just pause and ask God to send his Holy Spirit, who is the living water. You might like to shut your eyes, open your hands as a sign that you want to receive God's gift for you.

Let's pray : Come Holy Spirit and Revive me, Come Holy Spirit and Refresh our church, Come Holy Spirit and Renew our Land. May we all be like a well watered garden, able to produce a harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. May our springs never fail, because you Lord sustain us. Amen.

We're now going to sing a simple song in response. It's number 681 in the St Mary's hymn book (620 in All Saints hymn book) it's a song about God's love filling us, stilling us and being our fountain of life. Please stand to sing

Part 2 Talk

We've looked at God's beautiful promise, but the challenge is that it is based on an **if**. **If** you do this...**then** you'll be a well watered garden. So what's the **if**: in verse 9 "If you do away with oppression, pointing of fingers and malicious talk".

Just take a moment and think this week has there been a time where you have judged someone else, blamed someone, where you have said something a bit mean or when choices you made were about getting your way, not thinking about others?

God challenges each of us to put others first, he says if you spend yourself on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed then your light will rise in the darkness.... and a little bit further ...The Lord will guide you always, he will satisfy your needs in a sun scorched land and will strengthen your frame. It's another beautiful image, isn't it? Your light rising in the darkness.... but it is based on an if – if we spend ourselves on others, then our light will rise in the darkness.

It's an important lesson for all of us. God longs to guide and satisfy us and he can do that best when we satisfy the needs of others. As we give out, he replenishes. We're not called to be stagnant ponds holding everything in that is ours. We are called to be channels of God's blessing, like a stream – so the more we spend ourselves on others, the more God refills us. And even when the landscape of our lives is tough, the Bible says that God is there to strengthen us.

So as we look at all these food items that we have gathered and these amazing water projects produced by the children, and as we remember the BIG suitcase of clothing that we collected that will be heading off to Kenya, let's celebrate that, as we give away, our glorious God gives back in even greater measure! No-one can outgive God! And may Christ, the Light of the World shine His light through us in the darkness. AMEN.