

The vision which leads us

Lord of the growing seed, you reach to the roots of our being and quench our sea-deep thirst: help us to know ourselves through the eyes of the other who calls us to answer and serve and, in the end, be filled; through Jesus Christ, the Master of the Table. Amen (Prayers for an Inclusive Church)

Harvest Sunday is a time to give thanks to God for abundance, generosity, richness of colours, smells, flavours; a time to give thanks for human effort in the process which transforms the fruits of the earth, the air, the waters for the benefit of creation. It is a wonderful time in so many ways.

Harvest Sunday is also a sad time because we are confronted by the brokenness of creation, the pain, the vulnerability, the needs that need to be met. It is a disgrace that in our country there are so many people in desperate need, that we have brought to church to celebrate will be going to help those who have less than needed to live. The world is in a terrible state when this happens. In this sense it is also overwhelming – what can we do that will have any influence?

These past days I have gone back to the two services held here at Immanuel last week – on one hand the Jubilee service when the Moderator reminded us that “small” is an important part in God’s plan, and does make a difference, and small doesn’t in any way meaning useless. And then I listened to the Sunday Service led by Geoff, which included a thought-provoking challenge. Geoff asked each of us think of how we are followers of Jesus, each of us in our own way. And he said – In the next week think how you in the past and will do in the future, to reveal Jesus in your words, actions, thoughts...

My question today, is – what is the vision that leads us in this revealing of Jesus in our life today? And to seek answers we turn to the prophet and a short reading from the Gospel.

Biblically it is clear the prophet is living in a time of deep crisis, things are changing – in his case the Babylonians (also referred to as the Chaldeans) are rising to power. It is a time of lamentation, and in the Bible we hear many laments - There is violence, and the book begins with a sense of God not listening to the cry of the people, but in the reading this morning, there is a slight change of tone: The Lord does listen and does answer, the proud and arrogant never have enough, they are doomed, but “the righteous live by their faith” (vs 4).

God cares, God is clear – there is a vision, and even if it takes a time, it is true. But we humans are not good at waiting, we want things to happen quickly, and if they don’t, we sound like Habakkuk in his chapter 1: ***God why don’t you listen? How long? how long?*** We are currently hearing lamentations in our country, which are a sign of brokenness: economic shortfalls, injustice, corruption; as we can read in Habakkuk, the big questions, will this always win over and above goodness, over kindness? How Long Lord? How long?

I know I have shouted these words out; I have also cried calling out these words, and I can guess many of you here have done something similar. IS there hope? And then Jesus disturbs

our thoughts in brokenness – when the apostles ask for an increased faith, he tells them that is not the issue – what is needed is faith the size of a mustard seed, the smallest of known seeds at the time. So how can we live in a way that seeing such grief, we are not overwhelmed by a sense of defeat and can cling to our faith, even our small, fragile, little faith.

And this is why in the midst of the difficulties of our times, of challenges, of violence, of corruption, we are called to live the kingdom values, as followers of Jesus – not as magicians, not as those who have all the answers, probably just questions. Simply as human beings who have our failings, our doubts, and our small little faith. So our actions, if done in faithfulness (*the righteous live by their faith*), don't need to be great, they can be small, simple but need to be filled with love for the others. And these needs always happen during tough times, times of crisis (as Habakkuk experienced), where questions are asked even to God: how long? And when Jesus says: just the size of the smallest of seeds – that is all he asks for.

That is why the box that will go to the Food Collective is overflowing – quite literally-, that is why our commitment to Tools for Self-Reliance will once again surprise us. But it is not only the giving, but it is also the questions we must ask. Why is this needed? What is happening that we must do these things? And please bear in mind that asking questions can be dangerous, because those who benefit from instability, chaos, violence prefer questions not been asked.

It is at a time like this Sunday today, when our Harvest Appeal, and our Harvest service – when we connect in a very particular way with the needs of so many, that I am reminded of the famous quote of Archbishop Helder Camara, from Olinda and Recife, north of Brazil. His ministry during the military dictatorship in Brazil, and his commitment to the welfare of the people: “*When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist*” – in those days being called a communist was a threat to life, particularly under a military dictatorship.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we don't only share what we have and what we are, we must also ask questions, sometimes dangerous questions, because the vision that leads us is the one which speaks of healing of the sick, of food for the hungry, hope for the hopeless. It is the vision of the Kingdom – and each time we are asked why we do what we do, why we live like we live, we have only one answer – the Kingdom preached by Jesus leads our words, our actions, our hope, our questions, our search for answers, our thoughts, our giving. Amen