

## Sunday Thought

23rd October 2022 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time



### Readings

Joel 2: 23 - 32  
Psalm 65  
2 Timothy 4: 6 - 8, 16 - 18  
Luke 18: 9 - 14

### *With Home in Sight*

However enjoyable the journey the greater pleasure is often journey's end – home again! Today's scriptures are linked by that theme. The prophet Joel is rejoicing in faith at the end of another period of disaster for the people of Israel. This time it has not been ravages of military conflict and oppression destroying physical structures and social life, but years of severe drought, followed by plagues of locusts. There have been similar experiences in East Africa in recent times – more devastating and life threatening than the armed conflicts which exacerbated them. Joel's remarkable trust in God's restoration work has given his people an enthusiasm for a time of homecoming with life returning to near normal. God has sorted it, sending winds from the north to drive the locust clouds into the desert and the Dead Sea. He has everything under control. The rains have come at the right time to ensure a harvest so great it compensated for what locusts had destroyed. Moreover, says the prophet, these events will prove to everyone that God really is with his people, bringing them home after the worst of times and with promises of greater things on the horizon.

God's words through Joel were true for his own time but far more, centuries later. Peter used them as his text for a Pentecost sermon to explain how the Holy Spirit had been poured out bringing to birth a universal church and a new day for all people. It is interesting to count how many times the word 'ALL' or its equivalent is used by Joel - and in the other readings today. The word is at the heart of the Pentecost experience, as it was in the Christian revival under the Wesleys when they sang – '*For all, for all my Saviour died.*' and testified to the fact that he lives again for ALL!' God's saving grace and spiritual power he preached, is for ALL – men and women, commoners and kings, young and old. I often read the words with a sense of '*You ain't seen nothin yet!*' The Holy Spirit revival has come again and again through the years. He brings his people 'home again' to basics. We pray that 'home' will loom into sight again - soon.

The words of the psalmist have another 'home' visual for some of us who will see it as trailers riding above the tops of country lane hedges, filled with grain, stacked high with bales of straw or bags of silage. The psalm is, of course, a harvest *thank you* song with satisfying *Harvest Home* scenes of pastures full of cattle and sheep, hillsides ablaze with floral displays and purple fells above valleys thick with waving corn. It seems natural at the end of a good summer season to sing praise to the amazing Creator with whom we have worked, wept and wondered since cold early Spring. Not forgetting, of course, places like Somalia where again and again the rains have not come and hunger strides the

land, accompanied by greed and even more armed conflict. If we could only bring the praise and the tears together across this whole world in which God provides enough for ALL and much more to share – and to care about!



Apostle Paul speaks to Timothy about another home-coming – the end of life's journey. He pictures it in a different way. I think he may have stopped off at the Ephesus stadium to watch the races on his way up from the harbour. He saw his own life as a tortuous race and himself now approaching the finishing line where the Lord awards prizes to ALL runners. The ALL word is prominent again. *'I've given it all I have. I've run the complete course. I've kept all the Faith. I have preached All the message for All the world to hear. Now I'm lovingly waiting with All who love the Lord, waiting for him to present the prizes.'* That's a remarkable picture too – all the runners waiting – in love – for the last one home – to see the Lord who sustained them ALL round the course!

How we arrive home is the message of Jesus' parable today. He told it to show the danger of religious hypocrisy, yet it emphasises the 'going home' of the two characters involved. I see the despised 'taxman' humbly, lovingly pushing at heaven's door. He knows he's welcome. He is *right with God*. I'm sure the Lord will not mind if I offer an extra line to his story. I would love to see the self-righteous Pharisee *'right with God'* too, not by his proud efforts but because a humble taxman prayed for him on the way home! That thought brought to mind another of Jesus' stories. I saw the prodigal son straining to run a last stretch down the farm lane into the outstretched arms of his forgiving father who runs to meet him. Now that's a real picture of the finishing line of the life-race.

#### A prayer of Harvest Praise [based on Psalm 65]

Lord, I hear the bleating of lambs in the market.  
I watch the milk tanker sucking the cows' gift tank  
to transfer to the dairy.  
I follow trailers piled high with silage and straw,  
with hops and barley, crates of tomatoes and onions,  
strawberries, cherries, and apples.



I see fork-lift trucks unloading thousands of different items at the Superstore  
And two prayers are in my heart's mind - Thank You, Lord! and *Help!*

*Thank you for your wonderful Creation – our world of beauty and plenty.  
For everyone who works with you to process it all for our consumption.  
Help us to work with you to create a fair, sharing world  
where no children ever need lay down hungry at night  
and no-one must beg or fight for daily bread.  
Lord, I want to cross the finishing line 'right with you and with your  
amazing world too.'*

