

A Homily by  
The Reverend Jo Popham

“God will provide, so don’t worry”  
Thanksgiving Sunday  
October 7, 2012  
Joel 2:21-27  
Psalm 126  
I Timothy 2:1-7  
Matthew 6:25-33

All of our lives are dependant on the fruits of the earth that God permits us to produce and reap by our labor. In spring we ask God’s blessings on the land, and in autumn we praise God for the blessings we have received. And so we gather to give thanks for good crops, berries and apples, pumpkins and corn. We have seen God’s glory in the endless fields of canola and the rich golden Alberta wheat waving in the wind. We thank you, God, for all these blessings. **Amen.**

When Jim and I flew here in July of 2007 we came in from the east, over the prairies. It has been a very dry summer and the earth was brown. It appeared to be dead. I leaned over to Jim and whispered: “I cannot live here. There is no life. There is no green.” But when we got into Calgary, we drove through downtown then past the church where we soon would working on our way to where we were billeted in a home off of Highway 8, and it looked very different. We crossed the Bow and the Elbow. We saw home.

The next month we crossed the border and drove through southern Alberta. The fields were bare, but there were mounds of golden wheat that had been harvested – and to my delight, the wheat really is like gold. Every year I try to experience more of the country that we call home. I have seen by the golden fields of canola from horizon to horizon. Last year we drove west and north to Jasper to get away for two days and saw the change of the seasons in the mountains for the first time. It was a glorious site.

How blessed we are to see God’s beautiful creation. But this year we also have been blessed with abundance, especially here in western Canada. We had favourable weather. Many were concerned about the heavy late spring rains, but that water limited the

potential damage from the summer heat. CBC reported that we could anticipate a bumper crop for Canadian farmers this year. Their forecast has come to fruition. Canada has had large increases in the size of their canola, wheat and barley crops this year. According to some traders and analysts, Canadian farmers will harvest a record-smashing 16 million tons of canola this year, and the biggest wheat crop in three years.<sup>1</sup> The agricultural bounty here is a stark contrast to drought stricken farms south of the border. And in Western Africa they are in the “Season of Green Hunger” for while the country is finally green, the granaries there are empty. There is nothing in reserve to feed the people – to bridge the gap, so to speak – in the meantime as they wait for the harvest. After suffering drought and many assaults by insects, they pray for the first crop later this October.

The prophet Joel described a plague of locusts that had invaded Palestine with devastating effect. Indeed a great destruction had come from the north in the year 1915 BC.<sup>2</sup> All the crops and livestock had been destroyed. The devastation was so great that there were no grapes with which to make sweet wine for celebrating a feast. The priests were to mourn, for there were no grain offerings to make to the Lord in the Temple. Where was joy in the hearts of the people? Even the sun and the moon and the stars refused to shine. All joy was gone; joy had withered like the crops. Joel prophesied that it was a foretaste of the day of the Lord when God would punish the people. He called for the *shofar* – the ram’s horn – to be blown to warn Judah that they were under attack. Turn to God, he told the people, turn back to God and repent. Then the shofar was blown again to call for a fast so that the God would have pity on the people and return fertility to the land, to return honour to the land, to destroy the locusts and soften the parched earth with rain. Trees would then bear fruit again. Joy would return, the fortune of the people would be reversed, and they would cast off the sackcloth they had worn as a sign of mourning.

Is this the Day of the Lord? Or have we been spared drought and locusts? And if so to what end? Ought we to worry about how much we have stored up in our granaries? What if next year does not provide such a bounty as this year? What if the rains had not come, then we might be suffering from the drought just as our near neighbours in Midwest in

the states or, worse like our neighbours far away in Western Africa who do not have anything left from last years' crops to sustain them until the harvest? What if the rains are not so timely next year? What if the land becomes parched before we can harvest our wheat and canola? What if we share our bountiful harvests with others who are in desperate need, and we don't fully prepare for future shortages? Would we lose heart? Would we be left without any joy in our lives?

My friends, we can be paralyzed by "what if's." In his sermon on the mount, Jesus taught the disciples and his followers – and we today are again being taught – that worry and preoccupation about the future is futile. In the Greek the verb we translate to worry does not mean anxious but rather to consider or think about. Jesus said we should not be preoccupied with what we are to eat or what we are to wear. Nor should we be so absorbed with the length of our lives. If we worry about whether our lives are long or short, will our worrying lengthen our lives? Worry surely will not bring joy to our lives, whether long or short.

I would like to offer alternative " what if's." If we did not know that God would provide, we could seek security in our possessions. But what if our security were to lie elsewhere? What if we were to seek God first? How might our lives be changed? What if we were to seek union with God instead of our bank accounts? I suggest that we do not neglect God. Could we not find the joy and the security we so long for in following Jesus's advice not to worry? God know our needs, my friends. He knows before we know. One of my favorite actors, Sir Anthony Hopkins has said: "Talk bold steps and almighty forces will come to your aide." I believe that. So let us be at peace and walk boldly into the future.

O God of heaven and earth, we ask your blessing on us, as we walk into the future. May we set aside our worries so that we may be united in your love with all creation and that we ourselves be fertile soil, producing abundant growth rich in the fruits of the Spirit.

Lord, may it be so. **Amen.**

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<sup>1</sup> With the severe drought in the US, Canadians are poised to capitalize on the misfortune of their neighbors. With bumper crops, Canadian farmers are set up well to benefit from a drought devastating the agricultural sector south of the border. Feedlots in Texas are taking the rare step of buying usually much higher-priced Canadian wheat to fatten cattle, given limited supplies of U.S. corn available. Canada should export a record volume of canola, and some of those sales will likely come at the expense of U.S. soybean exports, said Anne Frick, an analyst at Jefferies Bache in New York. “Canadian farmers facing better conditions will really cash in,” said Earl Sweet, senior economist at BMO Capital Markets.

<sup>2</sup> Historians have reported the stench of the smell of the rotting carcasses from the 1915 BC plague.