

## Reaping what we sow

*“you reap whatever you sow”*

Galatians 6:7 (NRSV)

This short bible verse has been much on my mind recently as I have been watching the news and encountering occasional shortages of petrol, goods and services when out and about, whilst in church meanwhile we have been giving thanks for the harvest. It is one of those Bible verses that has become a well-used English idiom, so you might be familiar with it. Based in agricultural life, it expresses the idea that you will get back as the fruits of your harvest whatever you put into the Earth. If we have shared around good things in the world and in our lives through generous, loving behaviour, we will likely receive good things back in return. But if we have spread negativity or selfish behaviours, then we can expect this to rebound upon us down the line.

As I see footage of fights breaking out at petrol forecourts, panic buying in the pumps and in the shops, disruption in supply chains due to a shortage of lorry drivers, longer waiting lists in hospitals, GP surgeries and care homes due to a shortage of care workers, I begin to wonder whether as a nation we are reaping what we have sown over the past few years. Our national policy has been to protect what we see as ‘ours’, with a reduction in what we make available to people from outside Britain. What we give in foreign aid has been reduced, we have been slow to share COVID vaccines with poorer countries unable to develop their own, Brexit and tighter immigration policies have made it harder for employers to hire non-British workers, the Royal Navy are patrolling the English Channel to turn back desperate asylum seekers in place of the RNLI lifeboats that used to go out to save them.

The root causes of our current problems are complex, involving more than just government policies around implementing Brexit and responding to the COVID pandemic, but I wonder if at some level our chickens are now coming home to roost. To use another agricultural biblical metaphor, *“the point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”* (2 Corinthians 9:6, NRSV). As a nation we have sown sparingly and now we are going without. Some of what we have sown has even come back to bite us, a bit like the hydra’s teeth rising from the soil as an army of skeletal warriors in a memorable scene from *Jason and the Argonauts* (Colombia Pictures, 1963); a vivid illustration of how sowing what brings death reaps only death in return.



What if instead of sowing sparingly with an eye on keeping the best for ourselves, we were to take a different approach? What if in our daily lives and in our local community we were to sow generously and with keen attention to the needs of those who have less than us, looking to bless them with what we have rather than hoard it for ourselves alone? What differences might we see, I wonder, when our sowing of blessings really begins to take root in the world around us, and in our hearts and lives?

Jesus told a number of parables (short moral stories) featuring harvesting, reaping and sowing. In the parable of the wheat seed, he says, *“The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come”* (Mark 4:26-29, NRSV).

We may not see instant results when we begin to sow generously; we need to be patient and give time for the fruits of our generosity to grow and ripen. This can be difficult in our instant-news, three-minute video, TikTok and Instagram culture, but farmers will tell us that for long-term and lasting things to grow it will take time and we will need to stick to the task patiently and faithfully until the harvest comes. The ancient wisdom – including the Bible, as we have seen – tell us this too, rooted as it is in a closer connection to the land and the soil than many of us now know, and can tell us much more about making good things last than our here-now-gone-tomorrow present-focused society is capable of. The personal growth we experience when we adopt a more long-term, selfless attitude (what the Bible calls the ‘fruits of the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:22)) will not appear overnight or without us putting the time and effort in to nurture and grow them, but the benefits of that harvest we will reap can spill out from us to everyone around us – transmitting good news along those channels and chat groups that more often than not are filled with grumbling, anxiety, fake news and panic. Let’s instead work together to fill them and our world with the fruits



of kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, patience, self-control, generosity, peace, hope and love – and see where that gets us?

Can we sow something better in our communities than hydra’s teeth? Something life-giving and long-lasting even? For in this life, we shall reap whatever we sow. Amen.

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