

Sermon for Trinity 17/Harvest Festival, 2015
The Revd Edward Thornley
Ephesians 4.1-6; Luke 14.1-11
and Joel 2.21-27; Matthew 6.25-33

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. +

I usually keep this quiet, but when I was young... *thanks for that young church...* when I *was* young and at school and university, for many years I studied classical guitar. Though I was of course later “corrupted” by the blues and “heavier stuff” ... and of course, eventually, Taylor Swift. (*The Rector hasn't heard that sermon yet.*) And I'll never forget my first school concert in a small classical guitar group. There I was, twelve years old and terrified. Literally shaking at the side of the stage before the performance. After weeks of rehearsals, months of preparation, there was my first shot at performing in public. The other bands that had played were bigger, jazzier and louder, and there were four nerds walking out with their quiet acoustic guitars.

It was so quiet, you could hear a pin drop. And when we walked to the stage, I realised that everyone had a music stand in front of their chair but me. So I leant my guitar against the chair, and turned to a teacher who handed a chair to me. As I received the chair, I suddenly heard the awful sound of an object sliding slowly down, *eeeeek, bomf!* And a few small giggles, as I turned and realised that my guitar had slid down the chair and off the stage. I could

have died. But I will never forget what happened next. My guitar teacher who lead our group, retrieved my guitar. We sat down opposite each other, and he never took his eyes off me for one second. String by string, we tuned our guitars with the group. And he nodded, and we started playing. We didn't miss a note.

What on earth, you might now be wondering, has this got to do with Harvest? Or indeed anything? Well, this moment came back to me when I heard young church and our youth choir rehearsing this week for this service, and I heard that there was some nervousness when preparing for this morning. Which is perfectly natural. And it helped me, as I fumbled for a sermon this week... it's been one of those weeks... that there was one thing I should never do.

If you read all the scriptures appointed for this morning, across both services, you will find a very important message. In our 8.30 Eucharist, we hear Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, stating how even if you suffer keep on going, persevere, because God is with you in all things, at all times, and you will find your way with Him. *"...with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* I love that line. Then in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus offers the example of a wedding banquet, where when you take your seat at said banquet, sit at the lower place at the table, for then you will be invited to sit higher. As Jesus says, *"For*

whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

The message is simple; keep humble, keep looking, keep persevering and seeking God. A message which makes perfect sense of the next two readings. At the 11, "Do not fear O soil," from the prophecy of Joel, as Young Church brought to life for us; Do not fear O soil, animals, children of God, God will provide for you, and will give you His Spirit. For God always promises to be faithful, whatever the season. Which leads us finally to Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus says **do not worry**; do not worry about your life, what you will wear, what you will eat; strive for the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you.

Do not worry. Don't worry. Strive for the Kingdom of God, and everything will make sense. And that's where the guitar came in...

I wonder when you have felt that way? I wonder when you have felt worried, so worried that you felt you couldn't stand up in a crowd, or continue with the task set before you? I wonder when you've ever felt so afraid that you made a mistake, not because you weren't good at something, but because you were so distracted by fear? I wonder when you have been so stressed, so troubled by something, so nervous or afraid that the fear became the issue, rather than the subject? Or when you became so preoccupied, so distracted that the real issue remains

untouched, your vision is clouded, and you put up a wall between you and those around you, and maybe even God?

We've all been there, God knows I have. And it's hard to see beyond it. And you might be sitting there thinking, "That's too simple. Do not worry, look ahead to the Kingdom of God. It's one thing to read The Bible and say that, but how do you say "do not worry" to a homeless person, to someone who will receive the gifts we offer today and tomorrow at our school? To a refugee in crisis, to someone with cancer, to someone who is starving?" It's important to ask questions like these, because how do you say, "Do not worry" to someone in such a crisis? How is that helpful? But I think I'm prepared to go out on a limb here and say that I think even the greatest problem, the biggest pain, still requires the simplest answer. And I feel I can say this because I am utterly utterly convinced, as I learned the first time my guitar fell over, as I learn every time I look at that altar; God knows I need these things. God knows. God, if God really is God, God knows my pains, my struggles, my fears. He knows what's wrong. When Jesus says do not worry, He's not saying that God doesn't care or that God thinks we're being silly when we worry. He just knows that if we can focus on Him then we'll find our way.

It's the most wonderful feeling I think we ever experience, and we get glimpses of it whenever we hit a right note, when we receive a smile or thanksgiving, or when

something goes right. And we can still feel it even when things don't. It's why we give gifts, share what we have, and why we give thanks to God for all God gives us. It's what Harvest is about.

The next time you feel afraid or worried. The next time you're nervous about performing in public, missing a beat, missing a note. When you're wondering what to wear. When you're wondering what the next task will be or what the next day will bring. The next time you feel yourself developing feelings of frustration, anger, or even hunger. Do what Jesus says. Do not worry. Look around you. Look ahead of you. Look to the one showing you the way forward. Look at the gifts you've been given, at the people in the world. Look at the blessings you have, and give thanks, and give, freely and openly. You can give so much, when you can live those words - **Do not worry. Don't worry.** Because if you can stop worrying, you'll see clearly, and then you'll see every opportunity, every gift, every reason to give, and the vision of God's Kingdom that will give you all the courage you will ever need, even when everything falls down around you. Instead of looking for answers, look for God, and you'll find everything you'll ever need to know. **Do not worry.** The three most important words you will ever hear. *Amen.*