

My usual place on a Sunday morning is over there, with my fellow choristers in the choir. Now, many church choir members have a guilty secret. In spite of all their efforts to hide it, they really do love the music of John Rutter. John Rutter is, as many of you will know, a composer of popular church anthems. His music is so familiar at Christmas that there was a famous cartoon which we had on the noticeboard in the choir vestry and it shows two choir boys in the week after Christmas looking at their music and one saying to the other "I can't believe it's not Rutter".

It's quite common among choir members to be a bit disparaging about this music. I have been guilty of this myself. But when the choral singer is in the shower and knows that no one is listening, what is it then that he sings? Is it the exalted glories of Herbert Howells and Thomas Tallis? No, it's the Shepherd's Pipe Carol or Rutter's version of All Things Bright and Beautiful.

A few weeks ago I was in Hamburg, visiting the famous Michaeliskirche. The place was filled with tourists. Up in the gallery a German youth choir was rehearsing for a concert. They were being generally ignored, it was, after all a rehearsal.

And then they started singing a piece called *Look at the World* by John Rutter. And within half a minute the place fell silent and everyone was listening intently. I must admit that I've have been known to describe this piece as "the one that sounds like a Coca Cola advert". And yet it held the attention of a random group of tourists so effectively that they were almost spellbound. At the end they all burst into rapturous applause.

The words that all those tourists were listening to are hardly great poetry. But they contain one of the basic truths of our faith, and one which it is particularly good to think about at harvest time.

Look at the world, everything all around us
Look at the world and marvel every day
Look at the world: so many joys and wonders
So many miracles along our way

Praise to thee, O Lord for all creation
Give us thankful hearts that we may see
All the gifts we share, and every blessing
All things come of thee.

In Bromley in 2018 we don't live to the rhythms of the seasons and the agricultural year like our ancestors did. The harvest festival does not come at the end of a long process of sowing and tending and harvesting. But we too have a deep need to pause at harvest time to marvel at the miraculous world around us and to give thanks for the generous love of the God who holds us in his hands and to remember that all good things come from him.

And perhaps in the modern city we need to pause and marvel and give thanks even more than they did in past centuries, as these things are not as obvious to us as they were to our country-living grandfathers.

When we are thinking about the generosity of God, it's good to hear again the words of Jesus: *Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?*

Our former vicar Michael Camp used to say that first thing that every Christian ought to think of doing is to give thanks.

Apart from anything else, thanksgiving makes us realise that if the world around us is a gift from God, then it is sacred. And so in a way it's a sacrilege if we just simply exploit the earth for our own purposes. It isn't ok to trash it in the way that we have been doing for so many years. If it is a gift from God then it is a gift for all his people, so it isn't ok that in this world of plenty so many go hungry. Being thankful isn't at all the same as being satisfied with things as they are. If we recognise that the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, then we must feel compelled to try to ensure that it is

used for good, that it is used in a way which brings honour to its creator and reflects the way he longs for justice. That's one of the reasons why we will be bringing gifts up to the altar, bringing honour to God by sharing what we have, just as he wishes us to do.

A few weeks ago George spoke to us about thanksgiving. If I remember rightly he said that if we give thanks for something, we recognise it as a free gift from God and so we completely change the way we think about it. It becomes like a sacrament - no longer just one of the ordinary things of this life, but a sign of the coming of God's kingdom, just as the bread and wine which we share in communion is the bread and wine of God's kingdom.

In a short while, Anne will be taking that bread and wine, the ordinary things of the world and the fruit of our harvest. Just as Jesus did, she will break the bread and give thanks for it and she will say *And, as Jesus offered thanks for the gifts of the earth, let us also celebrate God's goodness.*

In that moment of thanksgiving we will not only give thanks for the fruits of the earth, but in the breaking of the bread we will also remember Christ's body, broken for us, and in the pouring of the wine we will remember his blood, shed for us. So that will be a moment of great thanksgiving, both for the generosity of God in the way he sustains our lives and also for the salvation through which he removes us from the clutches of sin and death. And this is precisely what that word Eucharist means. Thanksgiving.

How wonderful that these ideas can be expressed in a simple and catchy song. It will be a great privilege for me to assist in the Eucharist - there is really nothing I would rather be doing. And yet, a tiny part of me will be longing to be under the organ with my fellow basses, singing:

Every good gift, all that we need and cherish
Comes from the Lord in token of his love
We are his hands, stewards of all his bounty
His is the earth and his the hands above

Praise to thee, O Lord for all creation

Give us thankful hearts that we may see
All the gifts we share, and every blessing
All things come of thee.

Amen