

## **Sowing good seed in time of adversity**

This year is the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christian Aid. Reading a review of their activities across the decades, I came across a photo of an aid worker from 1975, discussing with a pastor of the Burkina Faso Evangelical Church his work on drought-resistant farming. It struck a chord, because that morning I'd heard a farmer from Mundesley on the radio, setting out the effect this year's lack of rain has had on the sugar beet crop, and how the changing climate was leading him to consider whether they needed to switch to other crops, such as quinoa, or more drought resistant varieties. 50 years on, and the problems of sub-Saharan Africa are now bearing on East Anglia. Global heating / climate disruption truly is global.

The point was made on the interview that farmers are adaptable. I can remember during the 1970's the novelty of bright yellow fields in the Kent countryside, with the widespread take-up of oilseed rape. None of us can remember the arrival of sugar beet (Cantley factory opened in 1912) but it hasn't always been grown here. I guess consumers may have to be adaptable as well. My choice of sunflower spread disappeared with Russia's invasion of Ukraine: it's now made out of rape and palm oil – it says the latter is certified sustainable: I hope it is. I buy organic milk: not because I believe it's better for me, but because I think it's better for the environment than intensive dairy farming. I gather most of British Sugar's production goes into processed foods, where the almost universal addition of sugar is questionable from a health point of view: witness the Government's justification for the sugar tax. Perhaps we will see less of it grown in the future.

I imagine farmers plan what crops they are going to grow next year well ahead, informed by their experience of previous yields and prices. When something doesn't work out too well, we can still seek to harvest something from the experience: perhaps we can learn from it, asking what we might do differently next time; perhaps we've gained something in the process: a supportive relationship, maybe; perhaps we are stronger for it, building our resilience.

Each of our Bible readings connects harvest with the sowing of seed as an illustration of wider, spiritual issues. St. Paul likens giving and generosity to sowing, yielding a harvest of righteousness and thanksgiving. While the foolish farmer in Jesus' parable decides there is no need for him to sow any more seed: he has enough for his needs for many years to come: he, Jesus says, was not *rich towards God*. The psalm prayer in *Common Worship: Daily Prayer* at the end of Psalm 126 (*those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy*) contains the line, *help us to sow good seed in time of adversity*. When things are not going well, it is still possible to invest in a different future: it's a positive thing to do; and it may bear fruit in times to come. Christian Aid has been doing that for 80 years: responding initially to the devastation and displacement caused by the Second World War, but growing into a global charity. Helping found *Voluntary Service Overseas*, the *Disasters Emergency Committee* and the *Fairtrade Foundation*; helping get international debt relief over the line through the Jubilee 2000 Campaign; and working with partners to gain basic rights, dig wells, withstand cyclones, or grow drought resistant crops.

As Christianity continues to experience adverse conditions in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain, *sowing good seed in time of adversity* is what we in the Church need to do. We mustn't give up and turn inwards, hoping there's enough stored up to see us out. We need to continue to sow seeds of faith and love in our local communities (and further afield) even if some falls on stony ground (another of Jesus' parables). We may feel poorer in terms of numbers and resources, but we can still be rich towards God.

Here is that psalm prayer:-

Lord, as you send rain and flowers even to the wilderness,  
renew us by your Holy Spirit,  
help us to sow good seed in time of adversity  
and to live to rejoice in your good harvest of all creation;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.