

“GOD’S AWESOME GOODNESS”

Psalm 65

We’ve been singing our songs and hymns, offering our prayers and gifts, thanking God this morning for his faithfulness to us through another year as we celebrate our harvest festival. It may well be that most of us have little or nothing to do with the actual production of our food. It’s not even really seasonal any more as we take what we want, when we want it, from the shelves of the supermarket rather than tending it all in the cycle of the year in our gardens or allotments. Nonetheless, it’s good to mark a point in the turning of the seasons when we remember all God’s goodness to us.

And the words we’ve just read from *Psalm 65* remind us that this kind of celebration has been happening for thousands of years. Here’s King David, the great poet of Israel, writing words for the Director of Music to arrange so that God’s people can once again offer their thanks to a God whose provision for them is faithful and abundant in every way. Strangely, for a song sent to the Director of Music, it begins by referring to awed silence. The Hebrew is a bit tricky to translate properly into English – and it’s quite different in the NIV, which is why I read from Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* today – but it’s really saying that even silence is praise to God when it is the awed silence of those who cannot find words adequate to express their thanks. Our God is an amazing God. His being is magnificent and his activity is mind-blowing. This Psalm highlights that in three areas.

1. A GOD OF PLENTY (vv9-13)

We’ll start at the end, with this section that is particularly appropriate for harvest. We say it so often, don’t we, but our God is a God of real abundance. He lavishes us with good things. These are words of great lyrical force, with the rhythm of the words and the vocabulary itself emphasising God’s astonishing goodness year by year. Close your eyes as you listen to these words read again, and picture the scene that the poet is building up. You may even be able to envisage the carts overflowing with goodness as they roll home in the warm evening sunshine, the weary workers sitting on the top of the corn or the vegetables. Think yourself up onto the top of Cannock Chase, looking out over the green fields and the swaying trees. Or out into the Peak District with the flocks of sheep rippling over the hills in the distance. C S Lewis writes of these verses that they are about “*weather seen with a real countryman’s eyes, enjoyed almost as a vegetable might be supposed to enjoy it*”. The Psalmist writes of all this landscape shouting for joy and singing. [Re-read vv9-13] Now that’s what we’re thanking God for today. It’s all from him. It’s his goodness overflowing from heaven and into our lives. We cannot but praise him for it all.

2. A GOD OF POWER (vv5-8)

But God is not just some Divine Farmer or Celestial Greengrocer delivering someone else's produce. He is the God who has put all this together in the first place and who holds it all in place and in check. He holds creation together and tempers its excesses. This is an amazing world that he has created in which to produce the food and provisions that his people need to exist day by day, but it can be a difficult place, a dangerous place (as you'll know from watching any wildlife of nature documentary). God limits that power so that we are not all blown away by the force of the wind that waves the corn and the rain that fills the furrows – although instances of natural disaster seem to be more frequent these days they never affect everyone. This is how Eugene Peterson translates v6: *“Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer, Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser, Muzzler of sea storm and wave crash.”*

This is the God of whom the Psalmist writes that he communicates with us through *“awesome deeds of righteousness”*. And *“awesome”* here is not used in that way that it is so often used today – “that cake was awesome”, “that song is awesome”, “I’ll meet you at eight: awesome!” This is jaw-droppingly amazing stuff. This is beyond our capability of truly describing. This is about power and majesty and splendour and glory that knock you off your feet and leave in a heap of blubbering wonder. That is the God whom David is praising. That is the God whom we are worshipping this morning.

3. A GOD OF GRACE (vv1-4)

It would be easy to regard this God of plenty and power as a fearsome figure, someone away beyond our experience, someone remote and unapproachable. V8 mentions those who *“fear your wonders”*, but the good news (in every sense) is that this is a God of grace who wants to touch our lives. He draws us close to him and makes it possible for us to connect with him, insignificant and sinful as we are, because he reaches out to us when we are beset by evil and drawn into the web of sin – and he offers us his forgiveness.

His provision for us ensures that we can live day by day. His power prevents us being overwhelmed by forces beyond our control. And his amazing grace draws us closer to him, restoring that original close relationship which he intended us to have with him before rebellion and disobedience drove a wedge between us. Here is a hint of what is to come in Jesus. Whatever is going on in our world, God finds a way to deal with it for the good of his people. Whatever is happening in our hearts, God has provided a way for us to be reconciled to him. Our harvest festival reminds us of the God of plenty who feeds and clothes us. Our very presence here is a witness to the way in which God's power protects us from forces

that would otherwise have overwhelmed us. The cross speaks of the greatest gift that God could give – his only Son whose death, resurrection and glorification guarantee that our sins can be forgiven (v3) and that our eternal future in God's presence is secure. Now that is worth anyone's awed praise!

For reflection and discussion

- 1) Have you ever been left literally speechless by some aspect of God's creation? What caused it and how did you respond?
- 2) In what ways are we called to reflect God's abundance and lavish generosity? How can we express that as a church? How can we balance extravagance and good stewardship?
- 3) God limits the power of creation (v7), so how do we explain natural disasters? Are we in some way responsible ourselves for such things?
- 4) If you have access to a copy of *The Message* read the Psalm in that version and in the NIV or similar. Which do you prefer and why?
- 5) Has anything particular about this Psalm struck you? How will you respond?