

DIOCESE OF ST ALBANS

BISHOP'S HARVEST APPEAL 2009

BIBLICAL THEMES AND IDEAS.

STANDING UP FOR THE VULNERABLE

EXODUS 2 vv 16-22

There are several stand-offs over water supplies in the Old Testament. This often overlooked story sees the vulnerable initially being driven away from much-needed water before the gallant Moses (who is shortly to meet God at the burning bush) comes to their rescue. He stands up for them against the strong, in a way that prefigures his role in the Exodus from Egypt.

Millennium Development Goal 7 aims to reduce by one half the number of people in the world without access to safe drinking water.

Apart from supporting the Bishop's Harvest Appeal financially, in what ways might you be able to follow the fine example of Moses in this story?

INVITATION TO THE THIRSTY

ISAIAH 55

This passage is more commonly used to talk about God's revelation: the Word of God, which we often assume to be very cerebral. Yet here in fact, it is portrayed in the context of physical blessedness (vv 2, 12-13). The fruitfulness of the Word and the fruitfulness of the earth are closely associated (vv 10-11).

How can our harvest celebrations reflect this association?

How can we best express the generosity of verse 1 in our church life?

HE SATISFIES HIM WHO IS THIRSTY

PSALM 107 vv 4-9

This passage at one level clearly refers to the Exodus story and yet the fact that it is cast in general terms invites application to other contexts. It presents the redeemer God as coming to the rescue of desperate people, who lack food and water and other facilities for a civilised existence and providing them with what they need. The relevance of this passage to people in modern Ethiopia and Zimbabwe seems pretty obvious. Note the comprehensiveness of the care provided, not only short-term need but also long-term settlement.

For us this perhaps raises the question of our longer term commitment to those people and communities, which we support in the short-term through the Harvest Appeal.

GIVING A CUP OF COLD WATER TO ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES

MATTHEW 10 vv 40-42

Jesus here promises a reward to anyone who gives even a single cup of cold water to one of his least significant followers. But it is worth noting the verses that immediately precede these ones, which emphasise the cost of discipleship in pretty uncompromising terms. The argument here is that, in the end, radical discipleship and sacrificial giving will be abundantly worthwhile and not, as we might be tempted to think, that in the words of the Tesco advert 'every little helps'.

Who might we identify as Jesus' 'little ones' in our contemporary world?

POOR WATER SUPPLY AS SYMBOL OF SPIRITUAL MALAISE

REVELATION 3 v 14-end

Laodicea was not blessed with a good water supply in the first century AD. Water had to travel there via a long aqueduct, so that by the time it got there under the Middle Eastern sun it was never cold. Nor, on the other hand, was the city blessed with the hot springs, from which other cities in the region benefitted. So, as a topical sermon illustration for the people who first heard them, these famous harsh words are hard to beat. It is much harder for us to imagine what having a defective water supply is like. Nevertheless, the critique of the church in Laodicea, which follows this graphic illustration is not necessarily wholly irrelevant to Western Christians, at least before the credit crunch and recession engulfed us.

Yet this passage also contains the wonderful invitation of v 20 and this note of grace would be a good place for our meditations and harvest celebrations to culminate.