

Joel 2:21ff/Mk 9.2ff Creation is GREAT, GREATER, GREATEST is Creator Christ Church 14.2.21

I was drinking my 3pm coffee on Tuesday when I noticed the writing on the mug. "Every day is a gift from God." What a line to begin a Harvest Thanks sermon! Not only is every day a gift, but so is every gift God gives us to fill the day, and so is every moment of life God gives us to enjoy the day. There is an old saying which goes something like this: *what is the worst thing about being an Atheist? Having so many things to be thankful for, but having no one to thank!* We have somebody to thank, praise the Lord, and today we are going to move from all the great gifts of creation, to the greater gift of the Lord to whom we give thanks, to the greatest gift of the Creator whom we love and worship because **He is the Lord our God.**

1.GREAT ARE THE THINGS THE LORD HAS MADE. Our reading from Joel 2 is about God's abundant blessings after a severe drought and grasshopper plague. Sounds a lot like Aust! *A land of droughts and flooding rains...* God addresses **the land, the wild animals, and the people.** God made them all, and he cares for them all – **land, animals and people.** God knows how this land suffers, and how its animals often suffer, and its people often struggle to survive – not least in this Mallee land, but also in the Hills with their fires, and the coasts with their floods. God made it all, **and God saw that it was good.** He walked in the garden and he saw that it was good. And he calls us to do the same. To notice the Easter Lillies which began flowering in January! To smell the roses which have not been so burnt by the heat! To marvel at the multicoloured bark on the gum trees, and maybe even enjoy a Koala perched in the fork of their branches... To rejoice at sleek cattle looking at their best after late spring rains... to admire the Murray slowly meandering through this dry land on its way to the sea, but watering towns and orchards and crops along the way. And how good to step into the garden and pick some fresh tomatoes or cucumbers or zucchinis... The list goes on and on. All good gifts. *Fair are the meadows...Fair are the woodlands...Fair is the Sunshine... Fair is the moonlight. Bright the stars that gem the sky.*

How blessed we are! *God created us and God provides us with food and clothing, home and family, daily work and all I need,* even icecream and cappuccino! But we need a warning. We can take all this for granted. We can become blinded to all these good gifts. We can complain because we have less than somebody else. We can become envious of others who have more, or we can become selfish and withhold from those who have less. God's good gifts are both a blessing and also a test, even a temptation. Jesus' first temptation was to **turn stones into bread**, and Adam and Eve's first temptation was to help themselves to food that was not for them. And so people fell into sin, into *doing it my way*, displacing God and thinking they'd be better off running the world by themselves, with no submission to God.

2.GREATER IS THE LORD WHO MADE THEM. This is the lesson we need to keep learning. Every new day... every meal we sit down to... every beautiful garden we enjoy... every brilliant sunrise, and every perfect day at the beach. These are God's great gifts, and he is greater and more special than these most wonderful gifts. *Therefore we should thank and praise, serve and obey him.* These good gifts lead us to focus beyond them to the Creator.

Good as these gifts are, to stay focused on them is to turn them into idols. It would be like seeing a road sign which says Murray Bridge 20, and we stop at the road sign rather than move on to Murray Bridge. The material gifts we enjoy in life are blessings which point beyond themselves to the Lord, the giver of all good gifts: *All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above; Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love.* Joel says: **you will have plenty to eat until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God...** The gifts lead us to the giver of the gifts, to thank and praise him and to pray to him daily.

3.GREATEST IS THE LORD OUR GOD. Now we come to the Transfiguration of Jesus. **After six days...** after six days of living amongst all the troubles and stuff of life, Jesus takes them up a mountain, above all the sin and suffering and pain and vain hope in the idols of this world. And there he is transfigured before them. He is glorified before them. He became brilliantly different from the world at the foot of the mountain. The Kingdom and the King were revealed in all their glory, **and a voice spoke from heaven: this is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.** You've seen Jesus in his glory. Now focus on him and don't be enthralled by all the stuff of life which passes away. **Listen to Jesus,** and don't waste all your time listening to the chatter of people, and the bad news of the world, and the so called thrills of sport

In Exodus 24 after 6 days hidden in the cloud, God speaks to Moses. So here, after 6 days on the 7th day God Jesus speaks to Peter, James and John out of the cloud. The cloud both hides God, but at the same time signifies his presence. The many good gifts of this earth can either hide God from us or lead us to him. Often God seems hidden from us. Sickness comes, death comes, tragedy comes, and God seems nowhere to be found. We have prayed but God seems silent. We have trusted in God but he seems to have let us down. This is our problem, not God's. God is love, and he is present whether we see him, or hear him, or have our prayers answered or not. There are times when it almost seems we can see and touch God, and our faith seems strong, and we can count our many blessings and name them one by one. How we need to treasure and store up these blessings of living in the light. We need those times in the light to keep us trusting in God when the times are dark. Just like God told Joseph to store up enough grain in the times of plenty, to last through all the 7 years of drought, so he calls us to build up our faith for when the times of testing come!

The point is: we love and worship and obey God, not because he gives us so many good gifts; but above all we love and worship and obey him because **the Lord is God, and there is no other God.** Habakkuk says it well: **Though there are no figs... no grapes...no olives...no food... no sheep and cattle, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.** And Job says this after all his tragic losses: **The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised....** The Lord's gifts to us are great, and he, the giver, is greater. But the Lord God himself is the greatest and we love and worship him whether he gives or takes away, whether the times are light or dark. So on the seventh day, fill up on his love and be refreshed in faith, so that when we return to the times of testing in the clouds of doubt, we are filled with the HS to keep us going and growing in love for God. Amen.