

You will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man

In the name..

What have angels and vegetables got in common? It's not the start of a Christmas cracker joke I promise. But a genuine theological question.

Well most obviously we celebrate both today. The 29th September is Michaelmas- the feast of St Michael and All Angels. Michael is the Archangel identified in the Book of Revelation and features in the stained glass of the Memorial Chapel. The angels are, scripture tells us, more than we can number- as our first reading says, 'spirits in the Divine service sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation'. So we are both a little lower than the angels in the divine hierarchy and yet they exist to aid and serve us. They are a helpful reminder that models of service in Christianity are always complicated- after all we serve a master who himself came not to be served but to serve.

Today we also celebrate the harvest which we see all around us. We give thanks for the bounty of the earth, for the fact that we live with such plenty. We give special thanks for those who till the land- especially in a year when the harvest has been hard. We also repent of our misuse of the good gifts of creation, our abuse of the beautiful world around us and our failure to be good stewards of it, thus disobeying the direct command of God. We repent too of the inequity that means we have much when many have little.

Harvest then- like the angels- is more complicated than it first seems.

The two themes are linked together in a couple of ways. First there is the fact that the angels are- in the Bible, especially the Book of Revelation- and in all later Christian writing- to be responsible for the harvest. I don't mean they're a dab hand with a combine but rather that final, greater harvest reflected in Jesus's words in our Gospel reading: you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man. It will not be vegetables harvested but us: our souls finally made one with the eternal love of God.

This brings us to the second way that vegetables and angels have something in common. They can both teach us something about our souls and about our spiritual lives. The great scholar and Saint Thomas Aquinas believed angels and vegetables had much in common: and in his Summa Theologica uses them both to tell us something about ourselves. About human nature.

Angels, Aquinas reminds us, are a reminder to us that there are things above and beyond us, Divine realities not under our control. Part of their purpose is to remind us

that the way we attain wisdom is by admitting there are things we cannot understand or know, things we have to hand over to God.

By contrast vegetables are, to Aquinas, a reminder that everything comes from humble seeds. We might be limited and small, but God has great plans for us. So if angels are a reminder of our limitations, vegetables are a reminder of our potential.

There is a third way that vegetables and angels are alike. We exist within a world where we are obsessed with the categorisation of things. Like the Major General in the Pirates of Penzance- we are obsessed with matters vegetable animal and mineral. We like to pigeon hole our lives neatly.

Today is a reminder that this can only take us so far. Angels are a reminder that there are things beyond our categorisation, and vegetables are reminder that categorisation is all well and good, but that the actual growing of things takes labour, both on our part and on the part of the goodly earth which God has provided for us.

So too it is with the faith: there are things and purposes beyond our understanding but there is also the work of salvation. The knowledge that in our current form we are but seeds- as St Paul makes clear in his epistle to the Romans. God has given us the soil of his love, the fact that we grow up in the knowledge that we have been redeemed by the cross and resurrection of Christ. But there is a response for us to act on too. Soil is much, but a plant requires pruning, watering, care in order to bear fruit.

Both the angels and vegetables therefore point us to our ultimate destiny, to our ultimate task as human beings, to live the lives and love the love worthy of children of God. They undoubtedly have that in common conceptually but bridging the gap in reality, in the lives we live, is over to us. As we celebrate the harvest and remember the angels, let us look to how we might live lives that reflect the tender and caring love of Gos that we see not only in both of them, but in each other as well.

In the name... Amen.