St James the Less, Penicuik, Harvest, 4.10.2026
Dtn 8:7-18; Mt 6:25-33

Faithful Creator, whose mercy never fails:
by your Spirit, deepen our faithfulness to you and to your living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Dee dee dee …

I wonder how many of you remember the Bobby McFerrin song from 1988: Don't Worry, Be Happy.
"In every life we have some trouble,
but when you worry you make it double…"

I can't help it: ever since 1988, I have thought of that song whenever I read this particular Gospel passage.

It was a feel-good hit – and perhaps rather cheap at the price compared with the vast industry of pills, potions and techniques we now have for combating stress and anxiety. But perhaps it became a hit because, somewhere deep down, most of us recognise two things: that we worry quite a lot – often about the wrong thing that's not really worth it, and that sometimes we worry too much.

We live in a culture that can encourage us to try to eliminate every risk and insure ourselves against every possible uncertainty.
And there is certainly plenty to worry about.

Our world feels more unstable than ever, with all the uncertainty of war and peace and the economic turmoil, globally and with the cost of living for many here. Climate change and the pressures it places upon our world – with particular consequences for those whose livelihoods depend upon farming. And then there are our

personal worries: about our families, our health, our relationships, our jobs; about the pressures placed upon younger people by social media, and the many things that can leave us anxious about the future.

So **who** is it who says, "Do not worry"?
Some single preacher, with no family dependants, wandering around the sunny shores of Lake Galilee with his mates!

And yet Jesus was speaking to people who, in the great majority, lived at or below subsistence level. They lived in a rural economy where the life and opportunities of Galilean peasants were being squeezed by the expansion of new urban centres and the demands of the Roman world. Their lives were full of uncertainty and tension. So Jesus' words are not naïve. Nor are they a command to pretend that everything is fine.

And Jesus certainly doesn't say, "Don't worry, be happy."
We need to take a step back.

Our reading from Deuteronomy is wonderfully earthy. It is full of water, wheat and barley, vines and figs, olive trees and honey. It speaks of a good land and of the abundance of creation, expressing continuing trust in God.

Deuteronomy reminds God's people that life is fundamentally about a relationship of commitment and loyalty to God. All that we have is gift. And yet we also need to recognise a limitation in the Deuteronomy passage: it can sound as though faithfulness to God will inevitably result in material prosperity and success.

Jesus takes us somewhere deeper.

Just before today's Gospel passage, he has said that "you cannot serve God and wealth." And that is the context in which he says, "Do not worry."
He is not riding roughshod without compassion over people who have genuine worries. Rather, he is asking a fundamental question – one he asks again and again, of his contemporaries … and of us:
What is your priority? Really? What is your purpose?
What, in the end, are you living for?

In 1984, Alice Walker wrote a poem which puts this rather beautifully:

We alone can devalue gold
by not caring
if it falls or rises in the market place.
Wherever there is gold,
there is a chain, you know,
and if your chain is gold
so much the worse for you.
And then:

Feathers, shells
and sea-shaped stones
are all as rare.
This could be our revolution;
To love what is plentiful
as much as
what's scarce.

When Jesus asks us to look at the sparrows and the lilies, I think he is inviting us into precisely this kind of revolution: to rediscover the grace in the ordinary; to notice what is already around us; to

receive creation not simply as something to possess, exploit or insure ourselves against, but as gift.
And perhaps this is one reason Harvest resonates so deeply with us.

A gift goes with gratitude. There is something powerful about expressing gratitude together. Perhaps especially at a time when so much of our public discourse is angry, with obnoxious leaders pretending that rage against others is empowering and improves one's own situation – rather than teaching appreciation of others, so together we can make a positive difference.

And that is exactly the kind of thing that is taking place here with you in this church in Penicuik and will take place in the future and we can today embrace and include in our Harvest Thanksgiving: the gifts, time, energy and practical skills that God has entrusted to each of us. Thank you to vestry members and wardens, flower arrangers and PVG officers, minute takers and cleaners and pastoral visitors etc etc etc
A lot that happens is unseen: the things that simply get done, the doors that are opened, the tasks undertaken, the help offered, the quiet faithfulness that enables a church community to flourish. Not seeking recognition or reward, but using what we have been given for the good of others. Because the life of a Christian community is built not only through great initiatives or grand words, but through countless acts of faithful, practical love. And for that, today, we also give thanks.

Perhaps coming together today for Harvest Thanksgiving, alongside people with whom we may have very different opinions about the issues of the day, can itself be a kind of school for us: a place where we learn again to let go of some of the destructive

anger, fear and worry; a place where gratitude can reshape the way we see the world and one another.
For when Jesus asks us to look at sparrows and lilies, he is inviting us back to the original dream that God dreams for us: a truly sustainable purpose for our lives.
To live not simply for ourselves but for others.
To have an eye not only for what we can store in our own barns, but for the harvests of others.

We are stewards of the land – as all good farmers will tell us, and demonstrate to us – entrusted with something that we are to hand on to future generations.
But we are stewards not only of Scottish land, but of the whole globe we share, and of the fragile web of life within it.

Yes, Jesus' words are not simply "Don't worry."
They are an invitation to change what we are looking for: "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

Choosing love over hostility, forgiveness over resentment, generosity over accumulation, peace over division, and care for creation over its exploitation.
God's kingdom is present whenever we allow ourselves to be loved and forgiven, and whenever we use what has been entrusted to us for God's purposes of peace, justice and the flourishing of creation.
And that is how the words of Jesus can begin to come true: that no one need endlessly strive for what they are to eat or drink or wear, because enough of us are striving instead for God's kingdom – a kingdom in which there is enough for everyone.

Thank you, Lord, for the harvest, for creation, for the people whose work sustains us, and for those whose faithfulness sustains the life of this church. Amen.