

## **Sunday 5 October – Harvest festival**

### **Sermon by Christine Newmarch**

*An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk)*

Today, as we celebrate Harvest Festival, St Paul reminds us to rejoice in the Lord always. He is quite emphatic about it. 'Again, I will say, Rejoice,' he writes.

Harvest Festival is a time for rejoicing and giving thanks, not just for the food which sustains us, but for all the gifts we receive from God.

It is a special time, when we recognise all the hard work of farmers and food producers, and to remember that none of this would be possible without God's creative power. At Harvest Festival we bring gifts to symbolise our rejoicing and thankfulness.

Yet each week we have a mini-Harvest Festival here in church, when we offer a collection which is raised up before the altar. We use various prayers for this, but I think this one best sums up what we are trying to say. It goes like this:

***Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power,  
the glory, the splendour, and the majesty;  
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours.  
All things come from you,  
and of your own do we give you.***

And then we raise up the bread and wine, the elements of Holy Communion, recognising the way they come from our efforts and God's blessing.

You may recognise these words. They are said by the priest, but on behalf of everyone.

**Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:  
through your goodness we have this bread to set before you,  
which earth has given and human hands have made.  
It will become for us the bread of life.**

**Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:**

**through your goodness we have this wine to set before you,  
fruit of the vine and work of human hands.  
It will become for us the cup of salvation.**

These words, these prayers, rejoice in God's goodness, but also point towards teamwork. We need God, and he needs us.

Jesus had concern for the poor and the hungry, and divine power, but he still needed the help of others to feed thousand people on a hillside. He needed the little boy to offer his loaves and fish. Yes, Jesus gave thanks to God, but he needed his disciples to share out the food among all the people. He needed them too to gather up all that was left over, so none was wasted.

In gathering our Harvest Festival gifts here, we are symbolising God's goodness and our willingness to work with him to support the work of our local food bank.

Every item we have collected is the result of teamwork. While we are thinking about it, let's pass these sweets around.

[Pick up item, maybe box of cereal]

Let's think about how this was made:

We have the packaging, the box, the bag and the cereal.

Just thinking about the cereal, what had to happen to make this?

[Ask questions, acknowledge and discuss answers]

Eg Farmer – plough – seeds -tractor (how was that made?) – water, weeding, Combine harvester – mill – etc

There are more things we don't know about making the cereal too, but it took a lot of people, a lot of cooperation and teamwork. And that's just for one of these gifts here today.

But life is about more than food.

Jesus was upset when he realised that the crowds were following him only because they had been fed with bread and fish. Feeding the hungry crowd was important – but the words he taught were more important. He was trying to explain that he himself was, and is, the bread of life.

Jesus' teaching, his goodness, and his sacrifice of himself on the cross for us is the food which never perishes.

His teaching was not just about himself, but how we should respond. Jesus taught how in response to God's love we are to Him and our neighbour as ourselves. Those two great commandments which summarise everything else which Jesus said.

Today we are thinking of others in our food bank collection. Thinking and acting to help others is not just for Harvest Festival, but sadly is needed throughout the year. Food banks – there are around 1500 across the country – can only provide emergency food and essentials for people at their hardest moments. They are not a long-term solution as hunger is not a food problem, but a much deeper poverty problem. Even so, supporting the food bank as often as we can is how we can help those in great need locally.

It is teamwork. It's more complicated than sharing the sweets – how did that go, by the way? Did you work as a team to make sure everyone who wanted one had the chance?

I'll finish with the conclusion from the reading from St Paul:

'Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard... and the God of peace will be with you.'

Amen.