

Sunday 10th October – Harvest Festival

Sermon by Jenny Cass

Today is our Harvest Thanksgiving service. In the United States they celebrate a Thanksgiving Day every November which is a National holiday. In September 1620, a small ship called The Mayflower left Plymouth, England, carrying 102 passengers- an assortment of Christian people who were seeking a new home where they could freely practice their faith and some other folk who were hoping for prosperity and land ownership in the New World. They had a treacherous and uncomfortable crossing that took 66 days and dropped anchor near the tip of Cape Cod, far north of their intended destination at the mouth of the Hudson River. They set sail again and arrived at the Massachusetts Bay where they began to establish a village which they called Plymouth. In 1621, these Plymouth pilgrims together with the Native Americans shared an autumn harvest feast that is acknowledged today as one of the first Harvest Thanksgiving celebrations in the colonies.

Harvest Festivals or Thanksgivings are the time when we thank God for the wonder of his creation and his rich provision for us, a time to thank him for his gifts to us; a time to reach out in prayer and giving back, remembering those both local and afar who are in need. It is a time also to focus on the spiritual harvest of our lives and ministry.

Living in a rural neighbourhood where we see first hand farmers growing crops, fruit growers for our famous Tiptree jams, those with livestock, the abundance of local produce including eggs, honey, flour and so much more.... We are reminded that we are all caretakers of this wonderful earth and there is much work for all of us to do.

I noticed that one of our neighbouring parishes recently celebrated their Harvest Thanksgiving by doing something a little different. Their service was held outside in the church garden and churchyard where both adults and children were invited to make seed bombs. Soil was mixed with wildflower seeds and rolled into little balls. I am sure all those who enjoy getting muddy really enjoyed this! Later in the service the children went to the back of the garden and threw the seed bombs. How exciting it will be for them next year to see what flowers have grown, encouraging the bees and butterflies into the churchyard and garden.

We have been worrying lately about the possibility of food shortages on our supermarket shelves. We are so dependent on the harvest being safely gathered in, whether in Britain or the many other countries we import food

from. There is often a fine balance of nature, harvests can be affected by disease, drought, excess heat, floods, earthquakes etc which can drastically affect hundreds of acres of crop. The effect of a bad harvest in one part of the world can have a dramatic impact worldwide.

Do you remember God's promise in the story of Noah. After the flood God promised "As long as earth endures, seed time and harvest ... shall not cease." We worship a God who is faithful to his promise but expects us to play our part too.

I came across this children's talk about Harvest which I thought was great so I am going to share it with you. Let's think about the word HARVEST.

Let's spend a moment thinking what words we can make out of this one word: There is Save; Vest; Hare; Sat; Rat; Hat; Have; Share; Eat; Starve.

There are four words in particular that help us think about Harvest.

1. HAVE. Harvest gives us the opportunity to remember and thank God for the many things we have. We can go to our shops and buy what we need and also turn on our taps for fresh water.
2. EAT. This is a reminder to thank God when we eat.
3. STARVE. We should spend time thinking about those who don't have enough to eat or drink. 1 in 6 people in the world are hungry (1.06 billion) 1 child dies of starvation every 6 seconds.
4. SHARE. Harvest is a time to remind us to help those in need. We can do this by giving regularly to our local Foodbank, by supporting charities both home and abroad. Being hospitable to our neighbours especially those who are lonely.

Why should we share? The Bible says this in Galatians: " whenever we have the opportunity, let us work for the good of all."

Harvest is a time when we can remember and praise God for all we have, food, drink, clothing, homes, family and friends and especially for Jesus, who God sent to be our Saviour.

Jesus in his ministry spoke of a spiritual harvest waiting to be reaped. As Jesus travelled, he saw the crowds that followed him and had compassion for them. He said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few. Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest".

If you are a Christian, a follower of Jesus, that is a message for you and for me. A spiritual harvest is the result of God's work in the heart of man. We can help sow the seed by being faithful in our prayers for those we know who haven't yet accepted Jesus as their Saviour, to be willing to tell others what Jesus means to us and what he has done in our lives. God's Holy Spirit is there to help us and to speak into the hearts and souls of those we have witnessed to.

Just like the physical growth of a field, the spiritual growth of people is a natural, organic process overseen by God himself. But sowing the seed is as important as reaping. We may have prayed for many years for someone we know to become a Christian and feel discouraged because it seems as if nothing is happening but we are encouraged not to grow weary and give up.

In the Gospel we hear of a rich young man coming to Jesus. He has been blessed in his life but comes to ask Jesus what he should do to gain eternal life. The young ruler did not come to Jesus to give of himself but to gain for himself. He already had many blessings but he wanted more. Jesus told him that he cannot pay the price. Obedience to commandments is good but God wants more, he wants our love.

There is always a danger in life of being possessed by things or even the lack of them. Here was a man who was given a glorious opportunity: "Sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come and follow me." But this rich young man wasn't willing to do this and went away sad.

As we celebrate all that we have this Harvest, imagine a table, where we put on it all the things you want to give to God: your time, talents, money, your home, your friends, your loved ones, your job, your plans, your future. We say to God, 'All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.' But wait, one thing that God wants is still missing. God wants YOU. He wants you to give yourself to him, to give him your love. God wants you more than anything. Amen.