

# HARVEST TALK: 13<sup>th</sup> October '24

**First Reading:** Joel 2.21- 27 ... “Be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord” V.26

**Gospel:** Matthew 6.25-33 ... “Why do you worry?” V.28

**Poverty and Hope Appeal:** Peace Building and Conflict Prevention Initiative 2022-2025

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*The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it... 'He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.'* **Psalm 104, 14-15**

**Harvest has surely been celebrated ever since human beings first planted seeds and stored them to use through the times of scarcity.**

When the children of Israel entered the Promised Land and left off their nomadic existence in the wilderness, they adapted the agricultural festivals being kept in the Promised Land and these have come down to us today.

In the Old Testament, Land and faith are inseparable, even as the cities of the exile and post-exile periods thrived and grew. **People understood their dependence on a good harvest, blessed by God.**

It is interesting that many British harvest celebrations nostalgically call to mind a blissful era of harvest-home that owes much to Thomas Hardy, John Keats and Lawrie Lee. Sheaves of wheat, loaves of plaited bread, pumpkins, apples and cider-all very rural, wholesome, pastoral, fruitful, plentiful and peaceful. Certainly the warmly recalled Harvest Festivals of my teens and twenties, once living in Kent.

More recent harvest celebrations owe much to the excellent work of global aid agencies and fair-trade bodies ,who remind us that food production and matters of justice in agriculture, are global issues, and not quite so peacefully fruitful without a great deal of hard work.

But it seems that neither of these Harvest themes or focal points really make much connection with our ways of living today in this country, whether in rural or urban communities, town or countryside. Most of us (with the exception of our Critcher family farm right next to our church, and a flavour of it at our local Seal School Farm), no longer have any family links with farming, and our memory is fading of the communal importance of local harvests.

Our awareness of massive national and international inequalities, fair trade issues, economic and political unrest, and warfare and climate change impacts on the poorest parts of our developing world, means that Rochester Diocese's Poverty and Hope appeal at harvest time, rightly pulls on our heart strings, makes rational sense and speaks to our Christian sense of justice.

Yet these changed focal points do not connect with our experience in an immediate way, as the celebration of harvest is perhaps intended to do. They don't help us link our **faith to our dependence upon the earth and the way in which the food arrives on our plates.**

Eating food is one of the few things common to all human experience. What type of food we consume and how readily available it is to us, across our continents, may vary widely. **But we all eat!**

In our society, the meals on our table will have been brought there through the contribution of many different people working in a variety of environments. This food chain **typically involves farmers or fishermen, processors, packers, transporters, retailers and those who purchase and prepare the food to eat.** It is important that we reconnect with these realities. This can help us in our appreciation of what harvest can mean, when so few of us are directly involved in the production of food.

It may seem strange that we bring tinned goods to decorate our church on a day such as this, but these can be a modern way of acknowledging our dependence on God for which to raise up our thanks and praise, as well as more relevant and helpful a way to share our supplies with Food Banks, which can't take our fresh fruit and veg offerings.

Though sheaves of wheat and bags of apples may evoke memories of harvests of the past, when these celebrations were so poignant, and we were not in touch with the impact of our consumerism on others in far flung countries, they do still help us to remember a basic fact. For all generations a reminder is appropriate of the basic humble elements of soil, water and grain on **which we all depend**, and the fruits of which we should share with the vulnerable at this time.

**God's heart is set on restoration.** Leaves that fell last autumn have broken down into their elemental goodness and enriched the ground to produce the harvest for which we are thanking God today.

This can help us in appreciation of the fact that God does not just recycle nature; **he recycles our experiences as well.** If we allow him to, he can recycle our mistakes to produce wisdom to enrich our own lives, but also the lives of others.

He can recycle sadness at the failure of harvests, to produce compassion for others.

He can recycle good fortune to produce generosity towards those less fortunate.

**Nothing in our experiences need ever be wasted.** Everything is leading us towards full realisation of the Kingdom of God.

Sadly, we cannot take national food security as a given. Climate change and population growth mean that it is ever more difficult not only to produce enough grain, but also to maintain sufficient clean water, for the world's requirements. Global markets will sell to the highest bidder regardless of need. Political mismanagement and the power of global enterprise in the inherently local business of food production, are putting countless family farms out of business.

Today is an opportunity to pray for the lands where harvest has failed, asking that God's love will drive out fear and worry in those so tragically affected.

Harvest is an opportunity to offer to God the contribution we make in bringing food to the table; to give thanks and pray for others in the food chain upon whom we are dependent; and above all to praise God who starts off each food chain **by creating the sun's radiance and breathing life to all living things.**

Harvest is our wonderful opportunity not only to give thanks for all the wonderful gifts of creation and reconnect with our place as stewards of that creation, but also to pray for and with the farming community throughout the world, many of whom are struggling to make a living in today's global economic climate.

And to offer our support to those in other continents whose harvest lies in the ruins of warfare, injustice, flood, drought, fear and poverty.

Amen.