

25.ix.16 Geddington Harvest

Harvest always seems to be such a richly coloured time of the year. It is wonderful to see the autumnal colours in all their profusion and rejoice again in the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. We can marvel once again at God's great goodness and rejoice at his bounty and open-handed generosity. And what should our response be? Yes, we come to give thanks to God for the harvest home – 'all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin.' If you are fortunate you might even have been stuck behind a tractor as it is bumping along in front of you. I say 'fortunate' rather than unfortunate because usually we are in such a tearing hurry that we have no time to stop and think about important things like farming and food. Being forced to slow down behind a slow-moving tractor is a good chance to think about the people who grow the food and even to say thank you to God. Judging by the reactions of other drivers in tractor-led queues I suspect that they are not humming to themselves "all

good gifts around us are sent from heaven above, so thank the Lord, O thank the Lord for all his love." Harvest is a good time to slow down and think about the land and its usage for those of us who are not directly involved in farming – even though harvest is anything but a slow time for those who work on the land. And when we have stilled the racing turbulence of our modern lives we can consider how we want to respond when we reflect on the ancient links between the land and its yield and between God, the provider and us, the harvesters and consumers of his beneficence.

I hope that most people could agree that an appropriate response to harvest time is one of grateful thanks: thanks to those directly responsible for producing the food and just as important thanks to God for his love and care. In other words our thanks go in two directions; one, to the people who grow the crops and the other, to God who made the world and from whom we hold it in stewardship. Before I moved to Peterborough the parish where I

served was host to National Ploughing championships not once but twice during my time there, which was a great delight and honour. had the privilege of blessing the plough at the service which marks the beginning of the competition and I really enjoyed it. It gave a first-rate chance to think about the people who are directly responsible for bringing us our food. We can consider the farmer and his tractor; the ploughing, sowing, spraying, tending, watching, waiting , harvesting, gathering and everything else. This train of thought might lead us on to think about the other links in the chain between the grain in the ground and the bread on our table. The fact that our ploughing championship started in church was really significant because it makes the explicit connection between the sowing and harvesting of the crops on the one hand and the creative processes of God which make the crops grow on the other. It is a partnership between God and humanity and we can rejoice in that cooperation as

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we give thanks to God for the bounty of the harvest home. But what happens next? Do we just leave it with a quick ‘thanks God’ and then go on our way without sparing him another thought until harvest time next year? Surely not! If our thanks are sincere and genuine, then we might perhaps want to find more concrete ways of demonstrating them. Let me tell you a story which might illustrate the point.

Once upon a time there was a man. And God gave the man ten apples. Four of them were for him to eat, and five of them were for him to trade with, so that he could get clothes, shelter and warmth. And the tenth apple was for the man to be able to demonstrate his gratitude to God, so that he could return it to God as an offering of thanks and praise. It all went well. The man ate his four apples – and they were very good. And he traded with the other five – and he was able to procure warmth and shelter and clothes. And that just left the last apple. The man looked at it. It seemed to look better and juicier

than all the other nine. It looked really good. And the man reasoned with himself like this: God doesn't need this one apple, since he has all the other apples in the world. He won't mind if I have this one, he won't miss it. And so he ate it. And he gave God ...the core.

What do we give God, so show our grateful thanks? Do we want just to give him the left-overs, the remains? Or do we want to show a little more gratitude? I would hope that if we are here this evening to celebrate the harvest home in God's house, then we are probably not averse to the idea of our thanks being more than a mere token. Our thanks and gratitude should go to the very centre of our being, rather than being just what ever is left after we've done everything else.

We have come a long way since our ancestors first sowed their first crops. Farming techniques have undoubtedly moved on – some of the back-breaking

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physical work has been mechanised and surely that can't be all bad. On a hot summer's day an air conditioned tractor is a welcome improvement on the blistering heat of the sun. The modern seed drill is rather less hit and miss than the sowing techniques described in the parable of the sower who seems rather haphazard by today's standards. But those who till the soil are still closer to the created world of our Creator God than those of us who charge around in our motor cars and have scarcely a moment to stop and think in our busy lives. Being stopped and made to think about the land is no bad thing – even if it involves being stuck behind a tractor and being late for a meeting.

Let's give thanks for all those who bring us our food and let's give thanks for thanks to God for his bounty and lastly, let's remember those who are much less fortunate than ourselves.