

It's said that the Harvest festival tradition pre dates Christianity. I don't go quite that far back but certainly Harvest has had different meanings in the 45 years of my life so far.

As a granddaughter of a farmer it was a time when we gave thanks for a successful harvest. I remember helping my grandma with the harvest tea. We would make hot sweet tea in a churn, cakes and sandwiches and we would take it up to the fields where we would meet the combine harvester and work would stop for a short while

Harvest was a job for the whole family.

Go back further in time and this was a vital time of year, when success was a genuine matter of life or death. A prosperous harvest ensured that a community would be fed throughout the potentially barren winter months.

Harvest was a job for the whole community.

Times have changed but Christians across the world continue give thanks for God's faithfulness and abundant provision.

As we remember that every good gift comes from God, there is no better time than Harvest to 'Share with Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.'

This year our harvest parcels will be shared.

Our non perishibles will go to the Food bank in Kettering who support families in Food Poverty.
Food Poverty

I've got some true and false statistics about food poverty to share with you now.

When I read a statistic if you think its true raise your hand and if you think its false don't ... ok .. here goes

1. 1 in 50 adults have used a food bank in 2016
TRUE
2. 1 in 20 adults have gone without meals because they were unable to afford food.
TRUE

When you put those two statistics together you realise that Food poverty reaches far beyond food banks and into the homes of millions of people who have had to miss meals without reaching out for help.

3. 4% of Britons have cut down on the amount of fresh food they buy in order to save money
FALSE – it's actually 14% - I'm one of them. I buy more, cheaper frozen foods now, partly for ease but definitely partly for cost.
4. 1 in 8 Britons (13%) had experienced anxiety or worry about being able to afford enough food for themselves and their family
TRUE

These figures demonstrate that the experience of food poverty is far more extensive than food bank use. That more people are affected by food poverty than use food banks.

There are many reasons why individuals experiencing food poverty might choose not to use a food bank

The Church Urban Fund, who did the research into these figures, believes that we need to go a step further than supporting foodbanks (and that's not to say foodbanks don't play a vital role). One of the steps they suggest is

Being Relational

Projects that bring people together to eat at a community centre or church hall can provide a much-appreciated opportunity for people to socialise with others whilst also meeting a need for food.

This is particularly the case where provision is not targeted to those experiencing poverty, but is open to all. This can create a sense of community, and improve people's resilience by giving them opportunities to develop relationships of mutual support with others.

Tonight we celebrate our Harvest by coming together for a meal and this report really made me think about that meal. I now imagine that at least one person is sitting in this congregation thinking - I would love to go to the Harvest meal tonight but I just can't afford £7.50. So tonight instead of coming round to you individually and collecting your payment I am going to leave a basket on the side and ask those coming to put in their £7.50 if they can afford it, or a couple of quid or nothing if that's more appropriate to your circumstances today. Nobody need know what each other is doing. And if that's changed your decision on whether to come tonight just add your name to the list at the back.

Our morning café is all about being relational – that's why we don't make a charge – its about a community coming together and sharing food and drink without the burden of worrying how to pay for it.

Today our fresh produce from our harvest gifts will be shared amongst the village in the church's porch. This provision has been a great success with many lovely comments from our community – here's just two from facebook –

Love this – just went and got myself a lovely marrow for tea (and left a contribution of course). Fab idea and meant I haven't had to go to the supermarket in Kettering for tea!

This is such a lovely way of sharing.

So our Harvest Festival in 2017 is probably not so different from those long ago in many ways –

We are here to thank God for his provision and to share it.

Harvest is still a job for the whole community