

The Harvest

Psalm 126

Today is our Harvest Thanksgiving Service. Different churches across our country, and indeed across the world, will have a Harvest Thanksgiving Service one of the Sundays at this time of year.

It is a reminder that we remember with thanks all of the work that goes into the planting and tending and harvesting and sharing growing things that we enjoy eating, and that help us to live healthy lives. We also remember with thanks those who work at sea and in our rivers, providing us with fish and shellfish. And more widely we give thanks for those who plant and tend the trees, woods and forests of our country and world, and who are concerned with preserving the wider ecology of the globe, ensuring where possible the wide diversity of plant, water and animal life.

All of these are good things for which we give thanks today.

How good are you at saying thank you?

Maybe someone has given you a special gift for your birthday or Christmas, or some special event in your life? Do you remember to write a thank you note, or send a thank you email, or make a point of saying thank you to the person for the lovely things that you have been given?

Maybe somebody has remembered at some ordinary time to cook your favourite food (what is that?) or to bake you a cake (what is your favourite cake? All of them is not a proper answer!) Did you remember to say thank you?

Maybe somebody has taken you on a special trip, to visit something. Or bought you tickets to go to a concert, or the theatre, or the cinema, or some special holiday location. Did you remember to say thank you?

Maybe somebody takes you to sports events connected to school. Or music events. Maybe somebody helpfully remembers to make sure that you are awake in the morning and not fallen back to sleep. Maybe somebody helps you with your homework. Or gives you a party or takes you to parties. Did you remember to say thank you?

People say thank you for all sorts of reasons, and in all sorts of ways. It is good to say thank you.

Here is a story about a farmer and a Church and the importance of saying thank you. In Highland Perthshire, if you go along the A9 from Perth to Pitlochry you would pass the little village of Dowally. It's very small and not many people lived there, even fewer today. The old church, now sadly closed, had been there for hundreds of years.

One day the Church at Dowally had a problem. The front porch – at the main door – had come away from the rest of the building and water poured in when it rained. Something had to be done about it. The trouble was there was no money to pay for the work. It would cost a thousand pounds to put it right. It was a long time ago and a thousand pounds was a lot of money.

Mr Brewster was the farmer at the nearby Rotmel Farm. He remembered how the Church had been helpful to him and his family at different times. Family members had been married. Babies had been baptized. Funerals had taken place. Comfort was given in hard times, and laughter was shared in happy times. And God was praised. Farmer Brewster was thankful for the church and wanted to help.

He gave the Church at Dowally two sheep. Each sheep had two lambs so that made six in all. He asked people to buy shares in the sheep. Each person who bought a share was given a fine-looking share certificate. Eventually Farmer Brewster sold the sheep for £164. He added to that sum the money from the church people who had bought the shares in the sheep. It came to a thousand pounds! Do you remember how much the repairs to the Church porch came to – a

thousand pounds. So the little Church in Dowally, long ago, had its porch put right. No rain could get in again.

Well done Farmer Brewster, who was thankful for his church. And well done to the people of Dowally, who were also thankful for their church. In times of need it is important to give whatever help we can. But at all times, like Harvest Thanksgiving, and other times in the year, it is important to say 'thank you' – to farmers and fishers, gardeners and shopkeepers. And thank you to God, for giving us everything!

Matthew 6:25-33

At our Harvest Thanksgiving service today we are supporting the work of the South East Edinburgh Foodbank. The foodbank opened in 2012 – 14 years ago. Last year, 2023, it gave 4,183 3-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis need of food and other household goods. Did you know that in the United Kingdom 1 in 5 people live below the poverty line? With not enough to eat and drink, with not enough clothes to wear, especially in the colder winter months, with not enough money to pay for electricity and gas to keep themselves warm.

We don't think anyone in our community should have to face going hungry. That's why the Foodbank provides three days' nutritionally balanced emergency food and support to local people who are referred to them in crisis.

The South East Edinburgh foodbank is a project founded by local churches and community groups, working together towards stopping hunger in our local area. Every day people in our country go hungry for reasons ranging from redundancy to receiving an unexpected bill on a low income. A simple box of food makes a big difference, with foodbanks helping prevent crime, housing loss, family breakdown and mental health problems. Schools, churches, businesses and individuals donate non-perishable, in-date food to the foodbank. Large collections often take

place as part of Harvest Festival celebrations like ours today and food is also collected at supermarkets.

Over 40,000 people give up their time to volunteer at foodbanks across the country. Foodbanks partner with a wide range of care professionals such as doctors, health visitors, social workers and police to identify people in crisis and issue them with a foodbank voucher. Foodbank clients bring their voucher to a foodbank centre where it can be redeemed for three days' emergency food.

Harvest thanksgiving is our opportunity to give thanks to God for the many gifts of God's harvest, and it is our opportunity also to give support to the South East Edinburgh foodbank as part of our Christian responsibility to love God, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus tells us to trust in God and that God will continue to provide. As Christians we are part of God's trust in the world, being God's hands and heart and providing, where we can, support for other people, especially those who are struggling. In tough times it is so hard not to worry. In our country today people are being faced with horrendous choices about whether to eat, or to heat their homes. It is a scandal that in a wealthy country like ours, this is still a problem.

God waves no magician wand over the troubles and ills of the world, making bad things go away, and hurts healed, as if by magic. God waves us over the world, with our kindness, and generosity and understanding and determination, so that we are the ones, with God, who offer real, practical, loving help.

I reflect also on a world that now has built into the fabric of its tattered society the need for Foodbanks. There are so many around our country, providing the basic need for food and drink for far too many in our population. People who've fallen on hard times. Some who do have work but what they earn is not enough to provide what they need. What civilized society, and what

national government, whatever its party colour, can rest easy when such needs have to be met by churches and charities and volunteers? In a sometimes selfish world it feels like a constant challenge to provide help, because it is a constant challenge to provide help.

Ultimately it is not the necessary and well-intentioned work of churches and charities that is needed. It is the systematic and generous state-funded response to all forms of poverty that is required, and it is the genuine generosity, maybe even sacrificial generosity of the whole community that is required, alongside the determination to eradicate need and poverty from the homes of our countries.

On Harvest Thanksgiving Sunday, God in Jesus reminds us that all needs are known. How then with God do we help meet those needs, and in meeting them, make our country a kinder, more generous and loving place?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen