

'Global Village'

Sermon by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, All Saints Belmont Harvest Festival 2022

Theme passage: Corinthians 9.6 – 15

Harvest is an occasion for celebration! We all enjoy partaking of fresh fruit and vegetables. Especially the new seasons apples. The celebration of harvest dates back to antiquity. So, this morning I invite you to focus thoughts on harvest, from the past, in the present, and towards the future.

- 1) The Sermon is entitled 'Global Village' and that will become evident from an overview of history. First then, *the past*. Anthropologists tell us the first humans were hunter-gatherers, then transitioning from a nomadic existence to permanent settlement and farming. This varied from 5 – 7000 years ago, not long in geological history. As people settled and began to cultivate crops they discovered some soils were more fertile, such as the Nile Valley and the Euphrates and others. Other areas were less so and time was taken to work the soil, then sow and care in the growth. Such a scenario fits well into the biblical development of the Hebrew people as they moved into the 'Promised Land.' They had 'theologised' this process. Thus we read in the opening chapters of Genesis 'Because of what you have done, you will have to work hard all your life to make the ground produce enough food. It will produce weeds and thorns. You will have to work hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything' (Genesis 2).

So when the soil did produce crops this became a cause for celebration. Early crops included corn and other grains, grapes, olives and figs. Others engaged in fishing, and shepherding domesticated animals. Thus, there was cause for celebration – of the 'first-fruits', the ingathering from the threshing floor and the winepress. The Book of Exodus describes three related festivals of unleavened bread, the harvest of the crops and the festival of shelters in autumns 'when you gather in the fruit from your vineyards and orchards (Exodus 33.16)'. (Thus we need not be too concerned for an exact date of harvest with different ripening dates.) Surprisingly perhaps the Christian church has only observed agricultural festival in more recent times. Probably the earliest was 'Lammas' (Loaf Mass) having Anglo-Saxon pagan origins. And celebrated August 1st in the Northern Hemisphere. Then in the church from the 18th century parish church's observed Lammas and hymns of celebration such as 'We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the ground...'

- 2) *In the present*, harvest celebration is a variable feast and receives but passing mention in the Prayer Book – it 'may be observed on a Sunday as determined by local custom.' Perhaps it is as our population is so urbanised. Yet it surely retains significance, as the Psalm notes: 'The earth has yielded its harvest.' Furthermore it is cause for wider significance as we dwell on planet earth is a global village. I was reminded of this when recently supermarket shopping. Perusing the labels, the origins of the products were truly 'global:' Prunes from California, figs from Italy,

sultanas from Turkey, tea from Sri Lanka, peanuts butter from Australia, nuts from Brazil (not their real name, they are seeds), tomatoes (tinned) from Italy, and (apricot) jam from Egypt. A global village harvest for sure. It would seem there's plenty to go round.

Sadly though there are peoples and nations desperately short of food. Mostly not because it can't be produced but more because of inequality and the ravages of war such as Afghanistan.

The bible passage of today is a welcome reminder of the need for *generosity of sharing* what we have. We shouldn't need foodbanks in Aotearoa, but we have. A biblical prerogative is to share with those who haven't. I can just hear such words coming from Jesus, as on the Sermon on the Mount. My visits to Tonga were a learning experience of the place of generosity. Their feasts are well-known by anyone who has visited. My experience of a church where I was invited to minister was of their setting aside an abundance of food – not for the morning tea but as a *koha* for the visit. After the service it was loaded into a van and taken to my accommodation, from where we shared it with those who visited over the next week. 'Encouragement to be generous' is the title of this section of Paul's letter. Thanks to all who have brought items to be given the foodbank.

- 3) Now to the third aspect, *of the future*. Shortages on the supermarket shelves are likely to be temporary. There's plenty of food, yet all is not well. What is happening in global warming, climate change will eventually affect agricultural production. For example an article in New Scientist expressed concern that with the 1.5 billion cattle in the world, they produce 18% of toxic methane gas into the atmosphere. Efforts are being made to minimise this, but it too has implications, from what is known as 'gene-editing' a chemical process altering the (Cells) of living organisms. Thus agricultural scientists are using CRISPR to modify and produce animals and plants to cope better and produce more, bearing in mind climate change. That may sound positive yet it has ethical implications as some scientists have work on human embryos. I also have a concern for the use of plastic for packing fruits and vegetables and meat products, adding to the already mounting amounts of pollution in landfills.

Finally in summary we can indeed praise our creator God, for seeds and growth and harvest, and thanks; for placing your creativity within us' Yet we need to take note of the intent of the collect prayer – 'Help us to use your gifts wisely, to your glory, for our well being and for the relief of those in need. Amen.'