

Sunday 1 October 2006 at 6.30pm: Harvest

**Sermon preached by Revd Leon P Golding, Archdeacon of Kingston,
The Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands**

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3: 5-9

In Jamaica harvest thanksgiving services are occasions that most congregations look forward to, even in the major urban centres where very little farming takes place. Harvest thanksgiving services can take place at different times of the year in Jamaica, particularly in rural communities as their celebrations are linked to the harvesting of their main crops and the need to have it before the hurricane season. Being a tropical country there is no real winter season and different things grow all year round.

At harvest thanksgiving services churches are beautifully decorated with flowers, fruits, vegetables, plants and in some cases with products that are produced locally by our people. Harvest is a time of colour, life, joy, fellowship, rich music and packed congregations all giving praise to God. It is a joy for me to share in your celebrations today at St Martin's in the Fields.

"I [Paul] planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

1 Corinthians 3. 6-7

Our reading and my text chosen are not traditional harvest readings, even in Jamaica. In the text, however, are found the words of planting, watering and growth all of which we associate with gardening, farming. Paul uses the language to address concerns of division, jealousy and rivalry in the Corinthian church of his day. Though the text seeks to address these concerns in the Corinthian church, within it are implicit truths that we can reflect on as we celebrate harvest. Truths we must bear in mind as we give thanks for God's goodness, blessings, in this city of history, culture, art, architectural wonder and engineering genius.

In a world where many of us are tempted to live with the illusion that we have achieved our goals purely on our own strength we are to remember that our progress is made possible through the labour of others. No matter how brilliant and skilful we are, we depend on others. This is true not only in agriculture, but it is true in other areas of our life. James Gibbs the architect envisioned and designed this beautiful church, but without the skill of masons and carpenters and others it would not have become a reality. It takes more than one person for growth, development and the harvest to take place. Many persons unknown to us, and we unknown to them, play a part in our well-being, they contribute to our food security and to other areas of our life. A vast number of people from different nations, cultures, races, languages and right here in Britain give their labour that we may eat of the foods of the earth and be sustained. Our survival as individuals and as a nation, depends on the work and efforts of countless others. Their survival also depends on us. The farmer depends on us and us on the farmer. We are workers together. Persons in Africa, China and South America and other places depend on us and us on them.

In our world we give importance to some people over others, but in a real sense no person is more important than the other. We are all playing an important role in the process of living. The end result is what is ultimately important; we all have food and are feed and sustained. Our harvest celebrations, beautiful decorations, remind us of the labour of others - those who have given of their time. Harvest is a celebration of human work. In the Genesis story of the

Fall, work is seen as a curse. God in taking on human nature in Christ Jesus redeemed creation and all work. Today we remember and give thanks for the labours of those who plant, water, nurture, reap and package the foods we eat. We give thanks for shipping lines, factories, workers, delivery men and women, business persons and those who serve us in stores and supermarkets and many others. We are workers together. “Paul planted, Apollos water ...”

Paul states that neither he nor Apollos count for anything. “So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, only God who gives the growth.” (vs.7) Of course Paul was addressing those Christians who put themselves into camps saying they were of Paul or Apollos. Paul seeks here to emphasise that he and Apollos were mere vessels and that they with them all belonged to God, and so do we. We with Paul and Apollos are all important in the economy of God. In Christ Jesus we are all called to be co-creators and co-workers with God. Yes it is not about us, the glory belongs to God, but we are called to play our part. God cares about each one of us. The welfare of each worker is important to the success, final product, growth, development and security of all. The question of fair trade, equality, justice and fair pay for work performed are important issues if we are to create a world where all people can have the right, the privilege to develop their full potential under God. To be grateful, thankful, for these who labour and make our life easier we must work for their good and well-being too. If we are to experience a world free of war, where the shalom of God reigns then we have to recognise and begin to act in a way that says no person or nation is better than another person or nation. All of us have a right to be treated equally and fairly. We are workers together. Therefore, how we live our lives, spend our money, the policies we implement as nations must contribute not only to our own welfare but also the welfare of others, our fellow workers and, ultimately, the whole creation. To be thankful, for another is to work for their good also.

Harvest in a way reminds us of the mystery of life. We may plant and water and do a number of other things to help the plants to flourish, but only God gives life and causes it to grow. God is the source of all life. Without God we believe that none of what we have would be possible. The beauty of creation, flowers, fruits and the food of the earth that sustains us all come from God. In our world of supermarkets stacked with every conceivable food and increasing fast food outlets we can so easily forget the source of all life God, and many do. We plant and water, but God gives the life and growth. The glory ultimately belongs to God. If anything we who celebrate harvest in the urban centres of our world are called to remember that in all our efforts it is God who is the ultimate Giver who blesses us with the beauty of creation.

As we celebrate we thank God for the gift of work. Recognising that we are workers together and we must for the good of all in our world. We praise God for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life. Amen.