

Sunday 7 October: Harvest

Harvest Festival

Readings: Deuteronomy 26.1-11; John 6.1-14

We're extremely keen not to repeat the length of last week's service – which I am told was 2 hrs 20 mins, not that anyone complained! – and we have already had 3 poems and the C Club presentation, so this is more a 'Thought for the Day' than a sermon.

Thanksgiving

Harvest Festival is a curiously English thing. Invented in the 19th century by Parson Hawker of Morwenstow there is something universal about its root instinct to give thanks to God for all the gifts of creation. Thanksgiving represents an attitude to life, acted on each week in our main service, a Eucharist or Thanksgiving. In giving thanks for the gifts of the harvest we give thanks to God for all that sustains and enlivens us.

Urban and rural together

Even at the centre of this city we also recognise that our livelihoods are bound together on the fragile earth. The eruption of 'blue tongue' and 'foot and mouth' diseases make us realise even in this country that we cannot take things for granted and that we're in this life together, mutually interdependent.

Justice

Since the 1960's we haven't been able to celebrate the Harvest without also thinking about its just distribution. Ours is the first generation that cannot say we did not know about poverty and hunger on a global scale and our celebrations of Harvest make us thinking about justice.

Care of the earth

Increasingly Harvest Festival includes concern about the stewardship of creation. We cannot live by economics alone and, even if he wasn't 100% accurate, Al Gore was right to say that this can be an inconvenient truth which desperately needs addressing.

It really isn't going to be enough for us to change to low energy long life light bulbs and to switch off all the unnecessary 'stand-by' controls. But today's Gospel is an example of something small producing radical change.

John 6.1-14

I have no idea how the feeding of the 5,000 worked. Perhaps it was Divine intervention and a supernatural miracle. It seems to me much more likely that the small boy being willing to share his 5 loaves and 2 fish gave others the confidence to sit down, relax about being in the wilderness with little food, and share what they had. Having eaten their fill there were 12 baskets left over.

Every parish social is an example of that. It happened last Sunday when I said there wasn't enough food to go round the vast congregation. People went out and got more.

This community is one in which we demonstrate, learn and witness to the sort of change that is needed in our world – a sort of joyful repentance, giving thanks for the gifts of creation and seeking to use them well for the long-term good of all.