

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2020, HARVEST, PRBC  
Psalm 136:1 – 26, "Give Thanks To The Lord For He Is Good"

One thing that gets my goat is bad manners on the roads. You pull in for someone to pass and they don't even bother to lift their hand in thanks. Is it just me? Or do we all get annoyed by bad manners? It is simple good manners to say "thank you". It is rude when someone neglects to say "thank you". So, traditionally, churches have celebrated Harvest Festival as a time when we pause, acknowledge the provision of God in our food, remember those in the work of bringing that food to us, and giving thanks.

Over my lifetime the food we eat and the way we obtain our food has changed out of all recognition. I remember people shopping each day because we didn't all have fridges. I remember getting fruit and veg from a greengrocer, meat from a butcher, bread from a baker. And so on!

Growing up in a city with no gardens I didn't get to see things grow as a child. When we were first married David decided that he'd have a vegetable patch in the garden and this was a great novelty for me. I was watching while he was planting carrots one evening and started to get a bit worried that there would be too many and we'd never manage to eat them all. I persuaded him not to put any more in.

Gerrad, would have been 4. My mum brought him to visit. Showed him our veg growing, took him out to get some spuds out of the ground ready for dinner, thinking that he'd enjoy that being a little lad, some digging after he'd sat on a train for hours and hours. While we were out in the garden we showed him where the carrots were, picked some green beans, looked at the not quite red yet tomatoes. As we came back into the kitchen, Gerrad was frowning, he looked a bit disturbed. So I asked him "What's the matter darling?" and he said (36 years ago now but I can see his face and hear his voice) he said "Auntie Sheila, why do you keep your food in that dirt when you've got a fridge?"!

That story passed into our family folklore but when it came time to dig the carrots up I was confused. David dug up these carrots one at a time, I confessed that when I'd seen carrots with soil on in the market they'd always been in bunches and I thought that they grew in bunches. David thought it was hysterical and has teased me about this for 36 years. Especially about how I'd never stopped to wonder at God providing the elastic to wrap around those bunches of carrots on the market!!

Nowadays, it is easy to lose the connection between the food we eat and the growing of that food. We are generally NOT people who live off the land any more. When we buy our food, pre-washed, pre-packed, from a supermarket we can so easily lose the connection between our food and the land. And how easy is it to lose the connection between God and God's provision for us.

One of our local ministers called round, years ago, in the summer and brought his little lad, 3+ with him. We had strawberries in the garden. David took the little'n out to pick strawberries for pudding. They washed them, then we ate them. He still talks about David growing strawberries! He didn't know anyone else who grew food!!

Harvest gives us opportunity to reflect that we rely on God and on God alone for the provision of our food and it is good manners to say "thank you" to God. Having

worked in rural churches I was taught very quickly by the farmers that if the Harvest isn't in before the schools went back we were all in big trouble. Late September, even October Harvest Festivals wound our Cambridgeshire and Essex farmers up somewhat!! Even farmers who never go to church acknowledge the role of forces outside of themselves in the production of food and still come out for Harvest. And don't forget the Harvest of the Sea, acknowledge the dangerous work of our trawlers and fishing industry. And how much danger shopworkers have been in while they kept everything open during lockdown.

**Give thanks to the Lord, for He is Good. READING: Psalm 136: 1 – 26**

Psalm 136 is a call for us to remember to give thanks to the Lord who is God. Give thanks to the Lord for He Is Good. His love endures forever. We celebrate God everyday – but on this day we celebrate God's provision for us in the provision of food. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is Good.

**Psalm 136: 1 – 4** the psalm opens in praise of God. God who is good, God of gods, Lord of Lords, who does good. God is God so we should give thanks

Even where we lose the connection between food and its origins, we can praise God for who God is. We can develop a habit of praise. Praise God for the morning, praise God for life, praise God for shelter, praise God for the health and strength to get about, praise God for people who love us. One lady I remember prayed in a prayer meeting once "Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, me arthritis is playing me up and it reminds that that I'm alive, praise the Lord".

Developing a habit of praise and thanksgiving will make it much easier to make a connection between God's provision for us and thanking God for that provision.

**Psalm 136: 5 – 9** The Creator God is praised and extolled. God who made all that is, out of nothing. God who makes variety. God of over the top generosity. God who does wonders. God who made the heavens. God who spread out the waters, God who made the sun and the moon and stars.

When I imagine God creating the heavens and the earth and all that's in them I usually end up grinning. I imagine God making stars and the angels crying "more, more, go on, do another one"!!! I imagine God saying "look, this is a flower" and then making a hundred varieties of flower and saying "and so is this.... And so is this.....and so is this..... and so is this.... And so on...."

What does this psalm tell us about God? That God is generous, brilliant, that God is extravagant, that God is imaginative, that God makes everything work together, whether we see it or not. That all we have and all we know is a gift to us from God.

The whole creation bears witness to the glory of God. Romans 1: 19-20, "What may be known about God is plain to us because God has made it plain. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that we are without excuse." Romans 1:21 then reminds us of the importance of giving thanks to God and giving glory to God. God is a creator God and so we should give thanks

**Psalm 136: 10-15** tells us that God redeems and so we should give thanks to God In the psalm it talks about God rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, dividing the waters of the Red Sea and saving the nation from the stronger aggressor who

came after them with their superior armed forces. God redeemed this nation so that they could be a blessing to all the nations. And they are to give thanks.

Christians give thanks to God for Jesus. Even if we don't feel that God is showering us with material blessings just now, even if we are having a hard time, especially if we are having a GOOD time, we still owe the Lord our thanks and praise for Jesus. When God came in flesh to dwell among us, when Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, died on the cross, we were redeemed, bought back for God, by God. And we give thanks

**Psalm 136: 16 – 24** tells us that God is involved in our history and so we give thanks. The psalmist gives thanks for the love of God, enduring forever, and remembers God's provision throughout the history of the nation. We are reminded of the way God led the people through the wilderness/desert. We are asked to celebrate the way in which God brought victory over pagan kings and gave land as an inheritance to Israel, God's servant, so that God's servant could bless others and serve the Living and Loving God.

**Psalm 136: 25** God gives food to every creature – give thanks to God.

Exodus 16 and 17, manna and quail - God's provision in the wilderness (Manna means "What's that?")

Leviticus 19 and Ruth 2 tell us that God who provides food for us wants us to make sure that we remember **our responsibility to provide for others**. There are those who are weaker, those who are in need. Poor people have NOT generally brought poverty on themselves and trade justice is as important to God as giving to the needy (just read the OT to confirm!)

This is how we give thanks – by acknowledging that all we have we have on trust from God and because of God and so in obedience to God we bless others out of our plenty so that none are in need. We give thanks by deliberately and wilfully taking care of God's creation as stewards of the earth.

Normally we'd give thanks with a lovely display of produce. This year is different in so many ways!! Most of our supermarkets have a basket for donations to Foodbank so perhaps we can go out of our way to put something into these, not just this week as a harvest gift, but habitually until we can come back to church and put our donations into the shopping trolley again??

**Psalm 136:26** Give thanks to the God of heaven. For all these things (and more) we give thanks. Harvest is to be celebrated and enjoyed. We are to rejoice as well as to share with others. In the West we can often feel a bit guilty, as if we are gloating over those less well off if we celebrate our plenty. It is God's command that we celebrate – so that we are reminded of the connection between God's provision and gratitude to God. We are to acknowledge God – this is the key. One expression of gratitude is to obey God's commands to ensure that those who are in need are cared for.

Keep the feast Give thanks to God For his love endures forever

Pause/pray, give thanks for food, for those who work in growing and harvesting food, food production, delivery, shop workers. Pray for those who do not have enough food ..... and then remember to do that little drop off for Foodbank