

Being blessed with what you have and being willing to share with those who starve is a lovely way to define a good harvest. I suspect celebrations have been held ever since the very first crop was harvested. Certainly, there are abundant examples in both the Old and New Testament where people understood their dependence on God blessing a good harvest.

Understandable perhaps when it is estimated almost 90% of people's time would have been spent producing, selling or preparing food in Jesus's time. So, when Revd Jon spoke about being grateful for what we have, the villagers of Thurlestone came to mind.

Thurlestone is a village I've often visited around harvest time. It's situated right in the heart of the Devon farming community. For generations and with very few exceptions, household incomes have been directly or indirectly dependent on a good harvest.

I've often attended Harvest Thanksgiving services in their All Saints church when the diverse local produce from the farms, smallholdings, allotments, orchards and even hedgerows were brought to the alter to be blessed amidst thanks and praise to God. You name it, the produce was brought forward, including if I remember correctly, eggs from 5 different breeds of poultry reared by the infant's school.

The people felt blessed and thankful in equal measure and there was an overriding sense that whilst they might have put in the effort to produce the foodstuffs, it was only through God's grace and generosity that they were able to be self-sufficient.

But I'm also conscious of incidents of major famine and starvation around the world throughout recorded history. Earlier this year the World Economic Forum described the food supply crises as an ongoing global risk, compounded by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the consequent disruption to the world's grain supply.

The disheartening reality is that as conflicts, economic shocks and extreme weather events continue to wreak havoc, millions of people worldwide continue to suffer from hunger and starvation in countries such as Haiti, Mali, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen to name but a few.

We know about this because of the many appeals for financial aid so frequently seen in our newspapers and on TV. But when you get to be my age, stories from the past are equally important as those of today. As a youngster, I met people whose wider European family had starved to death in World War Two. As a 20 year old, I would raise money for the starving Biafran War victims by attending sponsored lunches when we would either be given nothing or just bread and water to eat.

And of course, who of my generation could forget this:

The Live Aid concert at Wembley in July 1985 was organised to raise money for the relief of famine-stricken Africans and as fabulous as the music was that day (well at least for people of my generation), it is not the music I remember, rather the haunting images of those skeletal children.

But as we heard earlier, a good harvest can be defined by our willingness to share what we have with those who are less fortunate.

Before his death in 2017, Antonio Carluccio, the celebrity chef and restaurant owner established a foundation to support the work of charities and non-government organisations in alleviating hunger world-wide. - but he spotted something few others had done – that food poverty existed here in this country. Which explains why the foundation has been particularly keen on supporting much smaller charities in the UK helping to fight food poverty.

We have been working closely with the foundation since 2020 and through their support our fledgling foodbank has grown in strength and scope so that we are now able to support a number of families on a regular ongoing basis.

One of the key reasons why the Trustees of the foundation have supported us is the fact that, unlike the vast majority of grant applicants, we had shown a willingness to share out of our own purse by matching pound for pound the initial grants we had received. We were also able to show a solid plan of how we could continue to support families. This gave them confidence a few months ago to give us a generous grant to cover the next three years believing that we would continue to provide equally.

Thank you, Antonio. And thank you to each and every one of you who has supported and continues to support this ministry.

In cockney rhyming slang, bread and honey is shortened to bread, meaning money. So, in effect, we are able to offer people bread as a foodstuff or bread as money. But that is a totally different thing to the bread offered by Jesus. When Jesus says he is the bread of life, he is offering spiritual bread that feeds our spiritual lives. He is saying that ultimately, he can satisfy our deepest needs and longings. He can make us feel full and overflowing with blessing.

He'd done just that the previous day by feeding 5,000 from just a few loaves and fish. I think there's no doubt, Jesus loved sharing bread; they were times of real blessing, intimacy and revelation. He broke bread with those he met on the road to Emmaus and their spiritual eyes were opened to know him. He broke bread with the disciples at the last supper and revealed the meaning of his death. And after his resurrection, he broke bread with the disciples in fellowship with them as they breakfasted together on the beach.

Shortly, we too will break bread together. Earthly bread which can sustain us until we die. But within the setting of our Eucharist, we also remember that although we are not worthy to gather up the crumbs from under God's table, through Christ's grace and brokenness we become worthy.

We become worthy because Jesus is the bread of life and I thank God that we continue to show our worthiness when we share what we have with those who do not. That, surely, is a good harvest.

Amen

Rev. Terry Ward-Hall, 1 October 2023