

October 10, 2021 - Harvest Festival - Reflection

***“We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God’s almighty hand....All good things around us are sent from heaven above. So thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love!”*** These familiar lines from a popular Harvest hymn contain some very important reminders as we stand in this time and give thanks to God for the bountiful harvest. It may not seem that there has been a tremendously bountiful harvest given the news from the summer about droughts on the prairies and forest fires in B.C. in the middle of the farming region but there has been a bountiful harvest. A number of years ago, while attending an event hosted by the Primates World Relief and Development Fund, I learned that each year enough food is produced in the world to feed everyone well and this year has been no exception. From the words of the hymn quoted above we learn that there is a shared responsibility involved in the harvest in that you and I are responsible for ploughing and planting while God brings the increase. We are also given the responsibility for distribution of the goods that are produced. It has also been observed that through innovation the growing of healthy food has been made even more productive. The reason, therefore, that people are going hungry is that the food God provides isn’t being distributed properly. We may not have direct involvement in the distribution process but we are asked to do what we can to ensure that the harvest God provides gets to where it is needed. We give thanks to God for this partnership in producing and harvesting what the planet provides to sustain life in all forms. We are indeed well cared for by the Creator but there are some obvious signs of our failure to be good stewards of creation - particularly in the area of food distribution. Our shared responsibility goes beyond simply donating to a food bank or a soup kitchen, although that is a very good thing to do. It also involves looking around our neighbourhood with fresh eyes to see if there is some kind of need to which we are being asked to respond.

For instance, I once had a conversation with a person who had been asked to speak to a congregation which was located close to a university and which was in an affluent neighbourhood. The Church building was beautiful and very well maintained and the visitor asked members of the congregation, ‘how are you feeding the poor?’. The answer was, ‘there are no poor among us’ to which the visitor replied, ‘have you asked at the university?’ It turns out that prior to his visit to the congregation this person had gone to the university campus to look around and noticed the signs for food banks and financial aid. The members of the congregation did rejoice over all the good things God provided and in general were quite generous but they had not opened their eyes to this need in their neighbourhood. Once their eyes were opened a suitable response was organized and now there is a vibrant partnership between the Student Union and this congregation on behalf of the university students

who have a need. There was no doubt that the people of that congregation were generous and careful but the person telling me the story wondered why it took his intervention to get the sharing going. I wasn't terribly surprised that a prompt was needed from outside because I have often realized that I too need a prompt to notice something that is right before my eyes and I give thanks to God for those nudges which sometimes come from a new perspective. This willingness to become more aware of the needs in our surroundings is part of what it means to be a Good Steward of the riches that have been placed in our care. There are enough biblical stories which illustrate the fact that any riches we have been given are simply on loan to us and are meant to be used for personal reasons as well as to share with others so I wonder what needs exist in our parish that could use a nudge - perhaps from outside our circle.

This concept does come with some controversy. "Why are we sending money overseas when we need it right here?" is a question which I have often heard and which has some validity. I don't have a pat answer but I believe that part of the motivation for such a question comes from an uncertainty about the future. As we experience some hard times it is natural to have some nervousness about being able to pay the bills that come our way. We can tend to forget how faithful God has been over the years and we can tend to forget the partnership into which we have been drawn. Jesus had some things to say about worry in today's Gospel passage that many of us find difficult to adopt. "Do not worry about tomorrow" Jesus said and many of us say, "Jesus didn't understand our particular predicament". Worry dominates many lives and it can rob us of the ability to experience joy. At the end of his teaching about worry Jesus summed up the way in which we can avoid worry and I believe the advice also helps us with other areas of our life. He said, "Strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33) It has been my experience that as I turn my attention to seeking after God's kingdom the nudges from the Holy Spirit help me to: remember the poor, care for the environment in appropriate ways, extend kindness to strangers, and share the Good News of God. In these days of coping with changes brought about by a dangerous virus worry has become a very real problem in our lives. Jesus urges us not to allow worry to take over and he does so by urging his disciples to focus their attention instead on the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. God's kingdom is where pure justice is found, where perfect beauty is seen, and where true love is expressed. If we strive after this and the righteousness that comes from God then we are promised that all we will need will be added to our lives. I find that to be a much more productive use of my time than worrying about things over which I have no control. If instead, I spend my time doing what I can to promote justice, beauty, and love I find God to be a much more present reality in my life and I receive appropriate prompts from God.

Celebrating the harvest is an act of thanksgiving which draws our attention to the ways in which God has helped us in the past and reminds us of the fact that God wishes us to use the bounty he has provided. The evidence of care from God strengthens our trust and helps to raise our eyes to the situations around us which could use some help. Whether that is sharing the produce from our vegetable garden with our neighbours or sharing some time with the food bank to help in the distribution isn't the most important question. The important question is: 'what does the Lord ask of you in this circumstance?' God indeed has been very good to us, even in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, there are those who are experiencing hard times and some of those people are in our midst. The partnership we share with the Creator of all things asks us to do our part in planting and ploughing and rejoice when God does his part and then share those gifts with the world around us. May the needs within our community capture our attention and imagination so that God's will to have the abundance of food and the strength of community be shared with those in need. So let us give humble and hearty thanks for all the good things our God provides and re-dedicate ourselves to the work of being good stewards of Creation by becoming more open to the nudges from the Holy Spirit or the requests forwarded to us through the agents of God.

In closing I offer this prayer of Thanksgiving.

*Our Lord God, we thank you for all your blessings,  
for life and health,  
for laughter and fun,  
for all the powers of mind and body,  
for our homes and the love of dear ones,  
for everything that is beautiful good and true.  
But above all we thank you for giving your Son  
to be our Saviour and Friend.  
May we always find true happiness  
in pleasing you and helping others  
to know and love you,  
for Jesus Christ's sake.*