

# HARVEST TALK

Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Deuteronomy 16:9-11 & Leviticus 23:22

## Introduction to the theme - Harvest Quiz

Today, we're celebrating Harvest and all that God has given us to eat, and the abundance and variety of food that we enjoy.

This morning, we have two short Harvest bible readings, both from the Old Testament. The readings tell us about some of the instructions that God gave to his people when he'd freed them from slavery in Egypt and with Moses as their leader, taken them into a new land flowing with milk and honey.

### Deuteronomy 16:9-11

*Moses said to Israel:*

*“Seven weeks after you start your grain harvest, go to the place where the Lord chooses to be worshipped and celebrate the Harvest Festival in honour of the Lord your God. Bring him an offering as large as you can afford, depending on how big a harvest he has given you. Be sure to take along your sons and daughters and all your servants. Also invite the poor, including Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows.”*

### Leviticus 23:22

*The Lord said to Moses:*

*“When you harvest your crops on your land, do not harvest all the way to the corners of your field. If grain falls onto the ground, don't gather it up. Leave it for poor people and foreigners in your country. I am the Lord your God.”*

## SERMON

I doubt if there are any farmers among us this morning, but I wonder if any of you have been harvesting some vegetables or fruit in the last few weeks? I know there are one or two of us, at least, who grow vegetables in our gardens or on an allotment. A few weeks ago, Jan kindly gave me and Pete some tomatoes from her allotment.

If you're a gardener you'll know that every year is different; depending on the weather, the amount of sun and rain we get, the number of snails and slugs and other things that like to have a good munch on your crop, you may or may not have a good crops of tomatoes or carrots, or beans. Some things will have done better than others, I bet.

But whether we're vegetable growers or not, all of us depend on all sorts of important factors to ensure that we have food on our plates to eat: people sowing the seeds, the weather, the bees doing their work of pollination; protection from crop disease, and people doing the job of bringing the harvest in, packing it, transporting it to our local supermarkets.

For as long as the earth has been turning, people have depended on that earth which God created to produce food for us. And we are all dependent upon the God of this world who is the source of everything we have; He is our Provider.

In our Bible reading from Deuteronomy we heard how the people of Israel were instructed to join

together to worship and celebrate the Harvest in honour of the Lord their God. He wanted them to remember his goodness to them, and one expression of that thankfulness was to bring a portion from the crops they'd harvested as an offering to God.

This morning as we celebrate Harvest at All Saints in 2020, we follow in the footsteps of others who through thousands of years have given thanks to God for all the blessings we have from Him, and especially our food.

Of course, it's not been as easy to bring our harvest gifts to church this year, but thank you to everyone who has, and especially to the children and parents and staff of All Saints Primary School, who have given so generously.

But here's another simple way we can take time to thank God *today* as we celebrate Harvest, and celebrate all the amazing variety of food he's provided us with to eat.

Before you sit down and eat today (this works best if you sit at a table!) - make yourself a simple place mat by taking an A4 piece of paper (if you have one), and drawing round a plate, fork and knife. And then write in the circle (the plate): **Thank you Lord for:**

Now, write the foods you're really thankful to God for (or draw your foods), or you can write a prayer saying thank you to God. And then put your place mat on the table and put your plate of food on it.

**So, today is a day to say thank you to God, just as the Israelites did all those years ago.**

But when Moses was passing on God's instructions to the people about how to celebrate Harvest, did you notice that there was something else important that he said?

*"Bring him an offering as large as you can afford, depending on how big a harvest he has given you. Be sure to take along your sons and daughters and all your servants. **Also invite the poor, including Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows.**"*

Make sure that you share your Harvest celebration with those whose harvest hasn't been as good as yours, with those who, because of their status or situation, don't have any land to harvest.

And again, in our second passage from Leviticus:

*The Lord said to Moses:*

*"When you harvest your crops on your land, do not harvest all the way to the corners of your field. If grain falls onto the ground, don't gather it up. Leave it for poor people and foreigners in your country. I am the Lord your God."*

I wonder if you've had the chance to watch a Combine Harvester at work in the fields, down in the Kent countryside perhaps?

Combine Harvesters are amazing machines that make a farmer's job of harvesting a field of wheat or barley so easy compared to years ago! But has anyone seen a Combine harvester leaving a strip of wheat or barley all round the edge of the field? Probably not!

As we heard in our reading from Leviticus, thousands of years ago God gave his people instructions not to harvest right to the corners / edges of the field, but to leave a strip all around so that poor people and those who couldn't earn an income (like widows in those days) could have a chance of gathering their own grain and ensuring they had food to eat.

God had a concern that everyone got their share of food and should be looked after. And the Bible tells us the story of one woman, in particular, whose life was helped and transformed as a result of this instruction God gave.

Ruth was a widow, looking after her mother-in-law, Naomi, who was also a widow. Widows were very vulnerable in those days. But even worse, Ruth was a foreigner, and so was even less able to provide for herself. But because she was allowed to harvest the edges of the wheat fields it meant that she could provide enough food for herself and Naomi. And working to provide that food must have given her a sense of dignity too - she was being given the opportunity to do something about her situation.

Ruth's life was transformed. While she was harvesting the grain in the fields, she met the owner of the field, Boaz . They went on to marry each other, and Ruth became the great grandmother to David - and David became Israel's greatest King. What a wonderful story! And all because the people of Israel did what God instructed them to do - to care for those who were in need by sharing of their plenty, leaving some wheat at the edges of their fields.

Today, in our Harvest Service, we're remembering and including people who are in need in our community in our Harvest Celebrations. We've brought our gifts of food to thank God, and we're going to share those gifts of food with local people who are in difficult situations at the moment.

This year, we're giving gifts of food to All Saints Community Project and Caring Hands in Chatham.

All Saints Community Project is continuing to provide food for people whose lives have been affected particularly badly by the current pandemic. Caring Hands provides people in crises, people who find themselves homeless and on the margins of the community by providing essentials like a hot meal, spare clothing, and other services. The food from our Harvest offering will help both of these charities as they provide for people in need.

But one of the great things about these two organisations is that they're not just providing food for people but they're both committed to helping people to find their own solutions, rebuild their lives, and restoring self-confidence and dignity. In the brilliant words of Caring Hands - "a hand up, not just a hand out". Rather like the story of Ruth, who was given the opportunity to harvest the edges of the fields and thus provide for herself and her mother-in-law.

As we celebrate Harvest, we thank God for all he has given us. And as we share some of what we have with others, here's a challenge for us that goes beyond our celebrations today:

I wonder how what it might mean in our *daily lives, all the year round*, to not harvest all the way to the edges and corners of our fields, but to leave room for people in need to also share in the harvest? How might God use us to bring hope and change in the lives of those who are in need?

## **PRAYER**