

Sunday 24th September 2023 Harvest

All material © Heather Whyte unless stated otherwise.

God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Today we celebrate our harvest festival, an opportunity to thank God for the food we eat and to take a moment to recognise all the people who play a part in creating the food that we eat.

Food trace – take a moment to think of your favourite food and how has it got on your plate, where did it originate, how many stops has it had on the way, how many people have been responsible for its journey to your plate?

Reading Exodus 16:2-15

Reflection – Waste not want not

God provided enough food for everyone and the people were warned only to take what they needed for each day, no more, and they were not to keep any overnight. Some people did not obey and took more and stored it overnight and in the morning we are told it was full of maggots and had a terrible smell.

There are many people in the world who do not have enough to eat and I wonder what they think when they read this story – why is God not providing for them perhaps. However there is enough food if we all learn to only take what we need, and if what we don't need is shared out.

Food waste is something we need to prevent. There are schemes for supermarkets to give the food that is left and that will go out of date to food kitchens where it can be used to provide meals for those in need and that is good but in our homes we throw away food that we bought and did not eat in time. That food goes into landfill and is left to rot and it can be smelly. The vegetable matter could be composted and used to enrich the soil and enable more crops to be grown. This can be in our gardens, but around the country many councils collect food waste and turn it into compost which is sold to gardeners – we should be lobbying for all councils to do this. However as we give thanks to God for our food we should also pledge not to waste food, to be more careful in buying only what we need and then treasure and enjoy it. Throwing away food is a sign of greed!

Growing our own vegetables reminds us of what it takes to produce our food and it can also give us food to share with others.

Reading Matthew 20:1-16

Reflection – It's not fair!

I wonder if you have ever said 'It's not fair' I know I have, especially when I was a child and was not allowed to do something. Perhaps you really wanted a McDonalds and couldn't have one, did you have a tantrum and say 'it's not fair, I never get what I want!'

In our story that is what happens when the farmer goes to pay the workers. He has hired them at different times of the day and has promised them all the same wage. Now those who have worked all day are angry and feel it is unfair that they don't get paid more. What do you think?

This is a complicated story because it does seem unfair and yet the farmer had enough money to be generous and he chose to pay everyone the same. God treats everyone the same, every person is important and perhaps that was what Jesus wanted people to realise. However this story also raises issues for us in the world today.

Every person is important and God provides for everyone but it depends where you were born and where you live as to the sort of opportunities you have and that cannot be fair. A very small number of people have most of the food in our world. The wealthiest people get to control how the food is shared and that is not fair.

I was listening to a [TED talk](#) this week, given by an Indian woman, speaking on behalf of an organisation campaigning against practices in India which are denying people food and affecting the environment. India has been seen as a country rich in produce – rice, grains, pulses etc but it has changed and the diversity of

produce has decreased. Where diet used to evolve around up to 8500 different seeds now there are a basic 8 commodities used in the diet and ½ - ¾ of the population do not have enough to eat. Biodiversity is important for the balance of creation and when we allow business to control what farmers grow we lose the balance and nature suffers. India now has to import dhal, and sometimes it is fake dhal made from soy to look like dhal, we have to ask why we are allowing this to happen.

Farmers are struggling around the world. In the ten years between 1997 and 2007 over 200,000 Indian farmers committed suicide! 1 billion children die of malnutrition every year. The statistics are frightening. What I did not realise until I heard this talk was that commerce is insisting farmers use genetically modified seeds which are impregnated with chemicals which destroy the eco culture of the soil, they are not good seeds which are being scattered. In India most farmers produced their own seeds for the next year from their crops, one seed of millet has the potential to produce 1 million seeds. Now, that is illegal and they are forced to buy special seeds and farming becomes unsustainable. It is not fair.

Jesus told this story in a very different time, I wonder what he would want us to take from this story in our time. The owner of the vineyard used his wealth to act generously but it highlighted injustice. We live in the wealthy part of the world is our generosity sometimes misinterpreted? How can we challenge systems that are unjust unless we think through how our actions might be seen?

Our choices always affect others. God calls us to love one another and to love creation. Every time we eat we are making a choice, and we are engaging in a partnership with a farmer. We can choose what we eat and that will make a difference for good or bad but is it fair? When we fail to challenge the consumerism that encourages greed we are part of a system that is killing people and that is not fair. When we fail to challenge the capitalist approach that encourages uncontrolled genetic modification for the sake of profit, that is not fair.

As we celebrate harvest we have an opportunity to choose to do things differently, lets make our choice a fair one and a loving one.

Fair food for all

In a world where more are hungry than not,
how do we show we care?

Eating is
ecological, political, ethical and agricultural,
what we eat feeds injustice,
what we eat damages the planet,
what we eat is not fair.

Capitalism
drives hunger, insecurity, fear, and despair.

Love
empowers, shares, cares
and love means choosing life for all.

Loving God, while we enjoy the choice of menu,
others have no choice. May we take responsibility for our choice of food,
may we learn to eat carefully, shop ethically, campaign politically and recognise our partnership with farmers.

Through learning about life in other countries
may we understand how we can share more effectively and challenge the practices which threaten the lives of our neighbours.

Heather Whyte 2023