

Harvest/Remembrance

fresh and prayerful harvest

AIM

The aim of this piece is to restore integrity to prayer in the context of harvest thanksgiving and to save it from being either a guilt flavoured extension to Christian Aid week or a warm-up for One World week later in the Autumn.

A STORY

I once sat down to meal with someone in a very nice yet inexpensive restaurant in London. No sooner had our starter arrived and a jug of ordinary tap water set down on the table than my companion declared, 'Do you know, in Africa women have to walk many miles each day simply to fetch their drinking water?'

The rest of the meal (which was beautifully cooked, well presented and very tasty) was punctuated by similar comments. By the end of the meal my companion's commentary had done nothing to alter the circumstances of people in developing countries, but it had turned a delicious meal tasteless, guaranteed indigestion, blocked the future possibility of a meaningful relationship, and driven me into the pub across the road in search of a couple of beers and some equilibrium!

A STARTING POINT

For many years now the idea of holding a 'traditional' Harvest Festival service has seemed to be out of step with the real life circumstances of many church congregations. If the popularity of allotments continues to grow this may not always be the case, but realistically, few if any folk have ploughed fields and scattered seeds so there is no produce for which to give thanks. Consequently, harvest has either diminished to a shadow of its former self with a modest display of tinned goods and anachronistic hymns, or it has become an opportunity for driving home a very proper message of Developed World excess in contrast to Developing World need and the challenge to respond appropriately.

In the Psalms worshippers are invited to 'Taste and see that the Lord is good.' (Psalm 34:8). Rarely is thanksgiving in the Psalms diluted by our modern feelings of uncertainty as to whether being purely thankful is not rather indulgent and bad. Jesus approved wholeheartedly of the woman who gave him a pure token of thankfulness, and he dismissed as misplaced the concern of his disciples that such extravagance should have been put to more socially useful ends (Matthew 26:6-13).

So, let the season of harvest focus upon the theme of 'Savouring' for when our thankfulness is genuine it inevitably leads to a spirit of wholehearted generosity.

SAVOURING

Within worship, the home or some other setting create a time of savouring as a way into thankful prayer. The aim of these activities, however and wherever they are used, is to appreciate fully the quality and extent of what is given and enjoyed, and then to allow wholehearted and unrestrained thankfulness to be offered to God for these things.

Possible areas of savouring:

Food: linger over a tasty meal (anything from a banquet to a pint and a bag of peanuts) and deliberately echo God's words in the Creation stories; 'Yes, that is good!'

Comfort and security: last thing at night as you check that the TV is switched off and doors and windows are secure take time as you 'do your rounds' to be thankful for the comfort, safety, interest and at-home-ness of where you live.

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Memories: through story-telling, photo albums, or memorabilia create a display of 'times that have been'. If this is incorporated into worship allow gratitude to be expressed in conversation and not just formal prayers. Otherwise simply take the time, when next you browse an album or sort through some old papers, to savour the memories that are stirred and say, 'Thank you' to God.

Companionship: Sometimes we sing the hymn, 'Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided ...' They are great words so why not extend the sentiment to the people who are around us? For example, within a service of harvest thanksgiving there could be a moving around moment when through handshakes, hugs and eye to eye recognition the congregation say thank you to each other for their presence and support over the years.

Talents and achievements: Find opportunities to exhibit peoples skills and creative efforts. Don't just seek out crafts and obvious manual talents, but include children's toys to represent parenting/caring, a solved crossword puzzle, or photos of an event which some has recently organised.

OTHER RESOURCES

An alternative harvest song: Oh the life of the world (Kathy Galloway/Iona)

Bread making (see elsewhere on the V4L website) as a corporate, physical approach to engaging with harvest and providing opportunity for offering – in communion or simply as bread – the fruits of the earth.

Prayer

Harvest of memories
As farmers view their crops,
weigh up the growth and likely yield,
so in this quiet place
my mind seeks patterns
in the landscape of my life.

Growth at times has come
both strong and fruitful;
elsewhen the harvestime has
brought a sparse return of
small and bitter grains.

Plentiful and lush,
dry and meagre - the
years have passed
until once more I pause
to sing of
'All good gifts around ...'

... and with experience fed
by all life's varied harvest times
my thanks is honest, deep and true.

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EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more seasonal material please revisit the website.

Acknowledgements

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HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group about general or website V4L issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via prayer@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk