

**Sermon Sunday 4th October 2020, Harvest,**  
**by the Revd Andrew Hurst, Curate**  
***Jeremiah 31: 10-14, 23-25 and Luke 3: 7- 18***

My Father in Law was a farmer in Devon. He was a proper, hands, arms and boots on Farmer. He had a number of sayings that I remember fondly - most of which are not suitable for the pulpit.

In fact, a lot of them really aren't suitable at all.

But one I remember fondly is his declaration to me, in broad Devonian, that, "Andrew, there's two things you never see: a dead donkey and a satisfied Farmer."

So here we are at Harvest - that time of year when we give thanks for God's great abundance. Much of our Biblical narrative is set in terms of harvest: of grain, oil, wine presses - of descriptions of abundance, of milk and honey. Harvest has been celebrated down the centuries when communities were acutely attuned to the success or otherwise of the harvest. No wonder that in the Bible God's abundance is described in terms of the literal and metaphorical terms of harvest.

Over the years and in the late twenty century and now in the twenty-first we have lost touch with that sensitivity, although of course the stakes are just the same.

I can only imagine how over the centuries this Church would be full of produce and people, all come with thanksgiving to sing the songs of Harvest home. In the fields around Grantchester and Newnham now the harvest is done by machines of inconceivable size, often generated by computers, machines so vast that they could not even fit in the little lanes. We have lost touch with how all consuming and important the Harvest was; what a communal event it was; and how the Harvest thanksgiving would be a heartfelt affair after long days and evenings of back breaking toil. We can look around the Church and imagine the scrubbed faces in awkward Sunday best with the earth perhaps still stubbornly under some fingernails, heads damp from being rinsed cold at

the pump, and the hands clutching Prayer Books all calloused from scythes and pitchforks and baling twine.

But it is still today in twenty-first century Britain the precious harvest home, perhaps without the romantic cider glow of “years ago”; but harvest home it is and we are thankful. And we can look around this Church and nod at the ruddy, weather browned faces and give thanks as our predecessor parishioners have done.

But as thankful as we are, no doubt the Farmers are still never quite satisfied, however full the Barns, silos and hoppers; perhaps they never were - perhaps that is the Farming Way.

Jeremiah, in our OT reading, was addressing an exiled community. In the verses we heard today he turns away from the condemnation of the earlier parts of the book and sings of the joyful return of the exiled Israel to Jerusalem. Jeremiah does so in the language of harvest and husbandry. The promise is that the scattered will be gathered as a shepherd gathers the flock, the people shall sing over the grain, the wine and the oil - life shall be restored as to a watered garden - there will be dancing, comfort and gladness. - and along the way the Priests will get fat - (Might have to watch that one.)

The promise is that God will satisfy the weary.

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We can feel weary. We continue to live in strange times. The events of the week with the ever gloomy Covid forecasts and the strangely, universally diminishing Presidential Debate in America, all serve to bring us at times low; all cast into a longer shadow by the reports of illness. The world seems to be losing hand over fist, in terms of society, decency and expectation.

We can feel that we are far from home - exiled from so much that was an unremarkable given a year ago when last we sang - as indeed sing we could way back then BC - “Before Covid” — of Harvest home.

But like the exiled Jewish communities of Israel, we have in these Covid times learned to sing the Lord’s song in a strange land. We have sung the

Lord's song through Zoom, socially distanced and wearing masks. We have sung the Lord's song without the physicality of sacrament of the wine poured out on our tongues, without touching as we exchange the peace, without our gatherings and our weddings and our Harvest Suppers. Yet we have sung the Lord's song nonetheless. We have been faithful. And in so doing we have found much that has taken us happily by surprise. We have been blessed. And the message from that other BC from the Prophet Jeremiah, is that we shall be restored, one day, to our song in its fullness, and it will be as a harvest, a harvest of our return, a harvest born richly from our Exile, a harvest when we look with new eyes upon the old we sometimes fear has gone forever.

And we shall be satisfied.

But the question is with what are we satisfied?

Turning to Luke we have the answer in the prophetic and uncompromising words of John the Baptist. Luke tells of John speaking too in terms of harvest, of fruit, of the grain on the threshing floor. Our true Harvest is the Harvest of the Holy Spirit. John declares that he baptises with water, but the One who is more powerful to come will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire - he will clear the threshing floor and gather the wheat into his granary. This wonderful image then is of God harvesting through the Messiah, such that we become the Harvest.

This is the Harvest of the Holy Spirit.

Harvest is not for its own sake. The Farmers don't work the eighteen hour days to get the harvest home just so that we can look at it, as if it is some rather nice feature of the countryside. A harvest is celebrated and we give thanks for a harvest for what it means: that we are assured of food and health as the days shorten and the cold air comes in; that in the lean time of the year when the rain comes and earth is silent with the mysterious business of growth but nothing yet ripens, we shall have food, and enough of it; that we shall get through to Spring and the longer days and the first fruits and growth of the early summer. Our cattle and sheep will be fed, our chickens will lay, our oil will settle and wine mature; we shall still have butter and cheese and milk. This is what the agricultural

harvest is - it is our future safe, stored up, parceled up and shared out - it sustains our lives.

And in the same way this harvest of the Holy Spirit, this harvest of restoration is not just a feel-good factor in our lives. We are called to live and to work with the harvest we are given. And so it is in Luke that the anxious crowds start asking John the Baptist - what should we do? So he tells them - give your spare coat to the one with none, share your food with those who are hungry; be honest if you are taking taxes and stop bribing people all you soldiers: live decently, honestly - without exploitation - be satisfied.

And we might say for our world all of the above, and consider the challenge of climate change, and homelessness, and poverty, war and oppression, of migrants embarking on desperate suicidal journeys and wars and corruption.

The Harvest of the Holy Spirit is a two way street - we receive to give. How we do that giving remains between us individually and God. And that is a satisfying harvest. It is good to know that we are loved; it is good to see our way. We all have our ways, our limits, our means and our constraints. And whatever else we may give, we give in our prayers, our fellowship, our greeting, our compassion and our love for one another. So we have received - and so we give.

Strange times, these Covid times - there is Jeremiah's harvest of our promised return; and there is John's our constant harvest of the Holy Spirit, and there is our 2020 Harvest home of God's abundance borne from the fields and the labour and the skill of all those who day after day, night after night. And we give thanks.

But above all - let us give thanks that we are the Harvest.

We are satisfied.

And as for the Donkey - well we need that before too long, for the greatest Harvest of all: Easter.

But for now, we can indeed raise our song of Harvest Home. *Amen*