

Harvest Festival 2020.

Reread the Genesis Creation stories and recall the ordering of God in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

Can you remember the first Harvest Festival you ever went to? Probably not but you will have a sense of what it was like.

Picture the church you went to as a child on Harvest Sunday? What was it like? How was it decorated? What produce did you take as a harvest offering?

I started going to the village Methodist Chapel where I lived when I was 12. I quickly found myself with two jobs. The first was weekly, collecting the hymnbooks at the end of the service and putting them back in the cupboard at the top of the stairs.

My second job was an annual one – polishing apples for the Harvest Service. Still when I go into a Church for a Harvest Festival I am likely to hunt out an apple or two to polish.

I grew up in Kent and there were plenty of orchards around and we were given sacks full of apples at harvest. Before they were placed around the Church I polished every one of them. I had not grown them but I wanted them to look their best.

I have lead many harvest festival services over the last 30 years or so I have lost count of how many. Sometimes it would have been four or five, or even more a year. There are some though that stand out in my mind.

In my second Circuit Appointment I looked after a little country chapel. For harvest the smell of fresh produce would be all around as you opened the door. The chapel would be traditionally decorated and all the produce around the church was from the local land and trees – even the jars of jam were from locally grown fruit; nothing purchased in the shops.

The people in that chapel still had a relationship with the land and their harvest offering was the fruit of their labours.

Whilst I was at college I was on a placement during one summer in a Circuit on the Welsh borders. There were 12 chapels in the Circuit. I lived with two different farming families during my month there. I was invited on my first Sunday morning there to walk around the fields with the farmer – before we went to chapel. I discovered what a privilege it had been when I later was told he always walked on his own – not even his son would be allowed to walk with him on his Sunday morning walk. Here was a man who knew his land and his animals for whom harvest was an important season.

In one community, on the edge of the Black Mountains, the Rector and the Methodist Minister had approached the farmers and asked them about donating a lamb to be sold at the local sheep auction to raise money for Christian Aid. All responded positively and gave a lamb, all were good quality lambs – well no farmer would want to be seen donating a poor one – much money was raised. The farmers could have been asked to put their hands in their pocket and make a financial donation and I am sure many of them would have, and generously, but there was something about the giving of a lamb – the product perhaps of a sleepless night – which was special.

This year Harvest Festival Services, where they are held, are going to be very different from how we remember them from our childhood, and even from how they were last year.

If you were to give something as a harvest offering this year, a product of your time and effort what would it be?

Perhaps something grown in your garden, for much time may have been spent there. Perhaps a piece of craft you worked with your hands. Perhaps a poem you have written, a painting you created. What would you give of yourself to God in Thanksgiving for all that he has given us even in this most difficult of years?