

The image of land is a very power image – whether it is an abundance of crops, or fruit and vegetables growing in the fields – or even the barren landscape of the dessert has a strong resonance with the human spirit for many. Tonight I am flying to Australia, and one of the things I am always is awe of as you fly south is just how big and diverse the world is. You fly over vast oceans, and then vast deserts. And then when you feel like you are almost there, you fly over the coast at the top of Australia and the landscape becomes red-er and blue-er; and you think yes I am nearly there – and still you have to fly for another 5 hours before you reach the east coast of Australia.

The creation of Gods fill the whole of the world, its vastness and beauty is a wonder to behold, whether from the sky or while we are within it. God's creation provides more than we need for every living creature to survive, more than we are even able to imagine. At yet, many are hungry and many go without the basic necessities of life. How is this possible when God's generosity is so great?

The reading we hear from Deuteronomy this morning provides us with a snapshot of worship that centres on the gift of food and harvest. But also how easy it is to take this for granted and forget! After the Israelites left the harsh life of the desert, they settled down in the more stable environment of Canaan. There they faced new and more subtle dangers. As the ragged band of slaves had fled the tyranny of Pharaoh, God had fought for them because they could not fight for themselves. But as they settled in the land they had less and less need for God to fight battles for them<sup>1</sup>. They had wandered homeless in the desert for 40 years and God had taken care of all their needs. But after settling in the land they could build their own houses and raise their own food. The people who had earlier depended for daily survival now, could now easily forget why they could now live in such abundance.

Deuteronomy begins with a quick survey of how God had worked in the past. That was a primary way the Old Testament community dealt with problems: by looking at the traditions of the past to learn the lessons of history. One feature that stood out in those traditions was that God's presence could be seen in the most powerful and dynamic ways working through the most unlikely people in the most adverse circumstances. In other places in Deuteronomy, people are also reminded not to forget and one way of not forgiving is to remember to offer their gifts to God.

We are the people of God in this place, who are connected with the people of God throughout all time and space. We have a responsibility to give thanks to God in worship, but also to share this invitation within the wider community. For us Harvest, is now a festival not only when we give thanks, but has become a time when we take responsibility for those in our community who do not have enough to eat, or who find life more difficult than we might. That is why we collect goods for

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.crivoice.org/S-underdog.html>

Laurence's Larder, as a sign that we are thankful to God, but also that we respond to God's invitation to be good stewards within creation.

While Harvest festival is important, the faith component of this festival is not just for one day. God invites us to be always mindful of all that we have, to always worship and to always be good stewards. One way we do this in our congregation is that we are a permanent collection point for Laurence's Larder. The Harvest Basket at the top of the stairs remains all year round, and we are asked to continue to contribute, each week as a constant reminder of our thanks to God and our sharing of God's goodness. As many of us know this is not an onerous task. I know one person who each time they shop, always takes advantage of the 2 for 1 deal at the supermarket. He doesn't need two, but he always gives the spare to the food bank. If each time we shop we have one or 2 extra items and then donate them, I suspect it will only make a small difference to us, but it makes a huge difference to someone else.

Many of us are regular volunteers at Laurence's Larder and we know first-hand the difference just little things make – things which many of us take for granted. Harvest is a festival which helps take a moment to notice the gifts God has given us, and the things which we can be thankful for.

Thankfulness and recognition of God's abundance are at the heart of all our readings today. In our gospel reading we are reminded we should not worry, God has provided all that we need through creation<sup>2</sup>. Luke is trying to show us the heart of Jesus message is recognition of God's grace. He shares with us a message about God's faithfulness, Jesus recognizes that what underlies excessive accumulation is most often anxiety and fear. So Jesus offers the antidote to accumulation of too much empty treasure in the promise that it is the God's good pleasure to give the kingdom itself to his little flock. And the way to collect treasure of the heart suitable for that kingdom isn't the earthbound, inward-looking way of the barn guy but the soaring, beautiful way of the one who lives and loves generously, lavishly, and with joy.

So much of what we hear in biblical accounts is the constant reminder that as humanity we seek to build up for ourselves, but that God has a plan where all are provided when we act out of love and grace.

Today we have another action which reminds us of God's abundance, as part of this festival day in a few moments, Aurelie will be presented– she will be anointed with Oil and claimed as a child of God. It is a powerful moment in any life and for us also a celebration of our own faith in God. It is a moment when we too recognise God's gift to us of life, and we give thanks for it. Our baptism calls us to continually give thanks every day of our lives.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2923](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2923)

Baptism as we know contains much symbolism, much of which brings us back to see that God will provide. Symbolism is important, because like festivals like Harvest it helps us to remember, it helps us to give thanks, it helps us to call God to mind.

In Baptism, water is used because it is a powerful symbol. Yes Jesus was baptised in water. But without water we cannot survive – it is around 80% of our body – and without Jesus we cannot survive! I am reliably informed that I should be drinking 1.5 litres of water a day (and apparently coffee doesn't count) – water sustains us, just as Jesus sustains in life.

In addition, most of us will have a shower or bath everyday – we do this to keep clean. The water of baptism also cleanses us – God says not matter what you have done, if you come to me I will make you clean. This is often the hardest thing for us to believe! But in Baptism God says – 'you are good enough to be loved!'

Finally, as hard as it might be to imagine this week, when we get hot from being in the sun, or working hard or playing we splash water on our face – water refreshes us. So too the waters of baptism – they refresh us. Jesus says to us, no matter what has happened, how jaded you might feel, come back to your baptism – come back to me and feel refreshed.

So the waters of baptism sustain us, cleanse us and fresh us – just like water in our lives. We keep the font near the door of the church so that each time we enter we might touch it and be reminded of our baptism and who we are, and how we can be thankful to God. To re-call the memory and the promises.

Our faith is a living and breathing thing, because it is part of who we are. Baptism brings us into the community of faith – and as congregation we make a commitment to help in raising Aurelie, and all new Christians, in the faith. We commit to ensuring that there is a worshipping community for them to be part of. Our theology means that none of us are called to faith in isolation – Christianity is a faith which calls us into community - to be the body of Christ.

Each time we participate in Eucharist – when we come to worship together – we remember this. Harvest Festival is a great opportunity for us to call to mind our faith – to give thanks for all that God gives, and to take responsibility for those in need in the wider community.

But foremost, like those who have gone before us, we are called to come of this day and remember where we have come from, remember all that we have, to remember that without the grace of God nothing is possible. And to remember the promises we have made in baptism – to share God's love and grace throughout the whole of creation. Amen.