

Harvest Sermon 2014 by Mr Rod Prince

There are some people here who can remember, I am sure, where they were on 22 November 1963. There are perhaps more people who can remember where they were on 11 September 2001.

Where were you on the 7.8.2014? It was not a notable day in most people's diaries. On the whole it went unremarked. Does it rank with the two previous dates I have cited, certainly not in terms of their global impact but it is nevertheless an important date for this United Kingdom. Because if the UK relied solely on the food it grew alone then supplies would have run out on that day. The National Farmers Union have stated that despite our farmers being better placed to produce more food than at any time in the past our ability to feed ourselves has dropped 2% every year since 1991 to just 60%. Well that's no problem one might think, imports are not going to dry up any time soon. Indeed not, but that is to ignore our responsibilities as stewards of the earth and its finite resources for future generations.

National problems and their solutions begin with individuals. Not only can we consume more locally grown food but we can also cut back on the food we waste in staggering quantities. Here are some scary figures: About 50% of the total amount of food thrown away in the UK comes from our homes. We throw away about 7 million tonnes of food and drink and more than half of that we could have consumed. Wasting food costs the average household £470 per year rising to £700 for a family with children. If we stopped wasting food the benefit for the planet would be equal to taking one car in four off the road. The foods we waste the most are fresh veg (not if you grow it!) salad, drink, fresh fruit and bakery products. We throw away more food than packaging in the UK every year. Lastly, before you become too depressed, the good news is that between 2007 and 2012 avoidable food waste reduced by 21%. Is there a link with the economic downturn?

To keep us going from 7 August until the end of the year we bring our food, out of season, from across the globe. Two years ago I played a game with some children at a harvest festival service. I told them that I had planned a valentine's dinner for my wife. Being a child of the 70s it was prawn cocktail, roast lamb and an exotic tropical fruit salad washed down with a bottle of Australian wine. The prawns came from Bangladesh, the lamb from New Zealand and the exotic fruit salad from all over the globe. We went through the menu and they guessed where it came from and the distance from the country of origin to the UK. To reach my dinner table the food in the meal had travelled a total of 50,000 miles or twice round the circumference of the earth.

When one is in need of a good quotation you can always rely on Oscar Wilde to provide you with a pithy quip. In "A picture of Dorian Gray" can be found the following quote "Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing" Supermarkets bombard us with adverts and bogof's. Turn on your television and it won't take you long before you know the price of the bargains in store for the week. We know the price of everything from bread to strawberries but do we know the value of food?

This year our village Parish Council opened an allotment for the village. It is easy to see them as just another amenity, a place where people can indulge in a hobby, but the allotment movement throughout the country plays an important role in raising awareness of the value of locally grown food. As with so many activities in life it is not until you have undertaken it for yourself that you appreciate its value. If I offered the people on the new allotments twice the amount of produce in return for their home grown produce I am not sure that many would accept. When you invest something of yourself, your time, your care, your backache into growing some of your own food you begin to look at the food you buy in a different way. You begin to value not only the produce itself but the labour of those who produced it.

Harvest reminds us of the value of creation, its beauty, its fragility, its bounty and of our total dependence on it for our wellbeing. Harvest reminds us of the value of food; its importance in providing, not only essential nutrition but for promoting healthy relationships within families and communities. Harvest reminds us of the value of those who produce food for us no matter where they are in the world; of our dependence on them for our basic needs and their dependence on us for a just reward for their labour. Fair Trade is not about food it is about ensuring a right relationship with our brothers and sisters around the world. Harvest reminds us of our dependence on the grace of a loving, bounteous God who has provided sufficient resources for all; a God who creates, sustains and cares; who brings us into life and is there for us in the life beyond life.

Christians are called to live a life that rejects that assertion from Oscar Wilde. We are called, not to know the price of anything but rather to acknowledge the value of everything and everyone around us.