

## Reflection for Harvest by Rev'd Peter Shaw

**It is a temptation!!** I suppose that is a good, if not provocative way, in which to start a sermon, It can be a temptation for us all to think that all is well with the worlds food supply, based largely on our experience of living in this country - so rich in all things, particularly food production.

**But** as I think we all know, particularly in the light of recent world event, all is not what it seems.

Today, we have the privilege and opportunity to express our sense of joy and celebration in our beautiful churches – which have echoed joy and celebration down the ages.

How appropriate on this autumn day, that we are here together giving thanks to God. Here in our church, our diocese, in one of the most beautiful and agriculturally rich areas in Scotland, if not the UK, we come to celebrate His goodness and his bounty; a bounty which sadly is not shared by everyone in this country: Foodbanks report that they are becoming very busy, to the point of being overwhelmed. Right now, at this time of Harvest they are getting even busier. People are facing dramatically higher food bills and fuel costs as temperatures dip, placing extra strain on family budgets - causing many to face the dilemma of choosing between turning on the heating or putting food on the table – heating or eating. Sadly, in my work with the Fishermen's Mission, I had to refer a number of people to Foodbanks who faced this very dilemma.

I do not know for certain how many times man has given thanks to God for the harvest but it will certainly have happened from before the presence on earth of His son Jesus Christ.

The uncertainties of life and the unpredictability of harvest and availability of food to eat; the everyday anxieties of primitive societies, points to faith and the power of religion being strongly related to the relief and joy that comes from a harvest safely gathered in.

In the Old Testament, the cultivation of crops was a feminine duty within the family structure; We are told in the Book of Ruth about Ruth gleaning the fields; but we can tell from the early history of the Israelites that it was not long before the control of the harvest represented political power in these priest/king societies.

Some might argue that even in this country the power derived from the ownership of land before the industrial revolution was an echo of the importance of harvest and its power.

No wonder that this celebration of Harvest is deeply ingrained in our culture and our faith.

We live today in a very different world, one where those who have custody of the land are very much in the minority - in the sophisticated societies of the West - and where the security of food supply is largely taken for granted. Even in the emerging economies, such as India and Brazil, other wealth generating activities are the drivers of growth. For whilst food production is important, the economic drivers of growth lie elsewhere; a pattern which we can see repeating itself in parts of the developing world such as Africa.

But complacency about food security cannot be sustained in the face of the evidence of failed harvests, price volatility, famine, war in Ukraine, all against a background of global warming.

Global markets may exist but access to them is for the rich, near impossible for the poor. We may eat food from around the world with a year round supply of fresh fruit and vegetables; asparagus from Peru, beans from Kenya, cod from the Barents Sea.

Indeed, during my work with the Fishermen's Mission, it became apparent that one of the problems that the fishing industry faces in this country is that people are now used to buying fish out of season – meaning that when it is not available from the seas around our country it is imported from further afield. Because of the way the supply chain works in this country, this then causes problems for the industry, particularly for those whom we called “day fishermen” who go out in small boats for one day or night. They are unable to set up long term contracts with major supermarket chains who want a supply of for example plaice all year round. Fishermen can't provide that because for about 2-3months in the year around the UK, plaice are roeing which makes them very thin and essentially unsaleable. Yes, a trip to the supermarket is a world tour nowadays but this is not the experience of most of the world.

Partly because of this, there is a growing realisation that the world created by God can only be sustained by a fresh examination of what we are doing to the world and how we protect it for future generations.

Much of the thinking on this has been generated in this country.

It was the Government's Chief Scientist Sir John Beddington, who some years ago at a Chatham House Conference on Global Food Security, pointed to the perfect storm that we faced. The combination of expanding world population, the development of diet beyond the basic as economies developed, the pressure on land, soil degradation and pressure on water supplies; all this against a background of climate change and now a war in one of the major food producing areas of the world - Ukraine.

For, relatively little of the earth's surface is capable of supporting arable crops and much of it not even livestock grazing. It is difficult for us to consider this. We live in one of Scotland's premier agricultural counties with some of the most productive farms. We have in this country some of the best soils in the world. But even we are not immune from the need to keep our farming sustainable.

Across the world we have had to recognise that the Earth needs to maintain its green lungs such as the tropical rainforests and that to destroy these to meet agricultural production would be to compound the problem of climate change and threaten existing fertile areas with the parallel risks of drought and flooding. We too are now becoming increasingly aware of the role we play in preserving the biodiversity on our farms.

It was the Royal Society which produced a response from the academic world. 'Reaping the Benefits' was a collection of papers by many of Britain's leading scientists pointing the way to engage science in a positive way to ease the pressure on Food Security. Responding to the challenge of doubling global food production by the year 2050 as had been predicted. **I will repeat this** – the prediction is that we must double global food production by 2050.

Or put it another way, it has been estimated that we will need to feed more people globally in the next 50 years than we have in the last 10,000 years combined.

This challenge has further been responded to by the Government's Foresight Group which showed the way that truly global action was needed. It also showed that not only was high quality science needed but that also, of vital importance were structures to provide for the translation of science to practical technologies. And that we would need knowledge transfer of these technologies and skills to farmers and growers around the world.

Science can be used to increase the productivity of our farms and protect the environment. Science presents us with major ethical challenges, particularly when we think of bio crops etc., but I would suggest that perhaps we would be failing the poor and disadvantaged around the world, and even in our own country, if we do not pursue these challenges and grapple with them.

For one of the things we celebrate today is that God gave man an imaginative and creative mind. He gave us science, the pursuit of knowledge by observation, investigation and evidence. Above all he gave us the capacity to create and follow a sense of moral purpose. My faith, our faith demands that we use all these in the service of others.

Some challenge how it can be justified to use nature for the interests of man. I have no difficulty with this concept; man is part of nature and we are all God's creation. It is for us to use those gifts He has given us - including an enquiring mind expressed in scientific research for the benefit of others. However, we must never forget that these are gifts from God and that we are blessed to use them, **NOT** to abuse them.

When mankind picked up a stick and broke the soil and planted seeds that had been gathered, he or indeed she started the journey to use nature to sustain themselves, their family, their neighbours. So if we are here celebrating another harvest gathered in, we also look to the harvests yet to come. We should start by looking at the world God created. The World in which, on the sixth day, God created man and as we heard, 'God saw everything He had made and behold, it was very good.'

**And so it is, and so it is.**

**Amen**