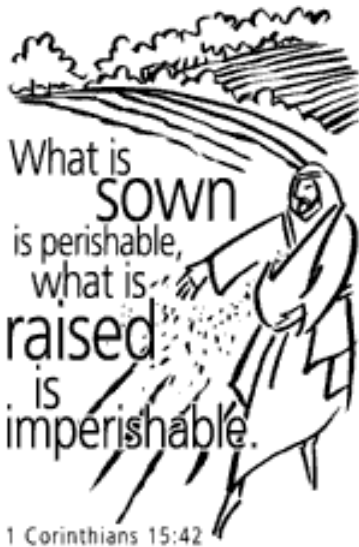


Harvest Home



Canon David Winter, former Head of Religious Broadcasting for the BBC, considers Harvest.

As a child I can vividly remember harvest time in our tiny and remote Welsh village. It was war-time, and many of the young, able-bodied men and women were away with the Forces. So when the harvest was ready, it was all hands on deck - yes, even very young and occasionally very naughty hands.

Everyone had a job to do. For the children, it might be carrying drinks or sandwiches to the tired workers in the fields, or piling up bales of straw, or even - great rivalry for this one - picking fruit off the trees. If the weather was good, it was all fun in the sun; if rain came, we scuttled into a barn and sang songs until it stopped.

Even better than the work part of it all was the party that followed, with everyone who had taken part invited, plus a few who through age or other calls on their time had missed out. There would be Welsh cakes and lemonade (and beer for the men), and a harpist and lots and lots of singing, culminating in several emotional renditions - in Welsh, of course - of 'Land of my Fathers'. I must admit, subsequent harvests back in a north London suburb never managed to equal that!

However, the experience taught me something I have never forgotten - the sheer joy of a shared task and a shared celebration after it's finished. Jesus talked about the calling of his disciples in terms of harvesting: "The harvest is plenteous, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37,38). The next words are significant: "Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples..." In case they were in any doubt, they were to be the first answer to their own prayer - they would 'ask' and the Lord would 'send'.

Being a worker in God's 'harvest' may well be demanding, but like my childhood harvesting experience it can also be deeply rewarding, and at the end there is always the 'party'. Harvesting, certainly until modern technology, was always hard work, usually under pressure to get the crops in before the weather broke. But it was also always a communal activity, a shared task, and all the better for that. Harvest brought people together, partly because they knew that without it they would probably not survive the winter, and partly because they saw that the very food they gathered was also the food they would themselves eventually eat. They were sharing together in their own future welfare.

There was (and is) one other feature of harvest that I haven't yet mentioned, and that's Harvest Thanksgiving, when both the church (where my family went) and the chapel (where we didn't) were packed to the doors. Harvest services are still popular in rural areas, but I suppose it's hard to get enthusiastic about fields and cows and crops when food comes pre-wrapped from the by-pass supermarket. Food is still a gift of God, though, and gratitude is still a virtue.

Anyone for Harvest?