

## Harvest Festival 2020: Let the land produce vegetation

Readings: Genesis 1 v 9-13 and John 15 v 1-17

### Reflection by Revd Becky

*'We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land...'*

Trees have a vital role in countering climate change and its effects. They remove CO<sub>2</sub>, hold back storms and flooding and help protect and restore moisture and fertility to soils. In the land of Peru, Quechua farmers will tell you that rains are no longer reliable, unusual droughts are occurring and changes in temperature mean that crops have to be grown at an increasing altitude. Many of Peru's native trees have been cleared. Churches in the Cusco, Peru, have planted 32,000 trees 13,800 feet above sea level on what is called a *prayer mountain*. Prayer and the restoration of the land is combined in mission. The church members have lived out the mission of God to care for the community *and* creation based on the land they know to witness to God's love.

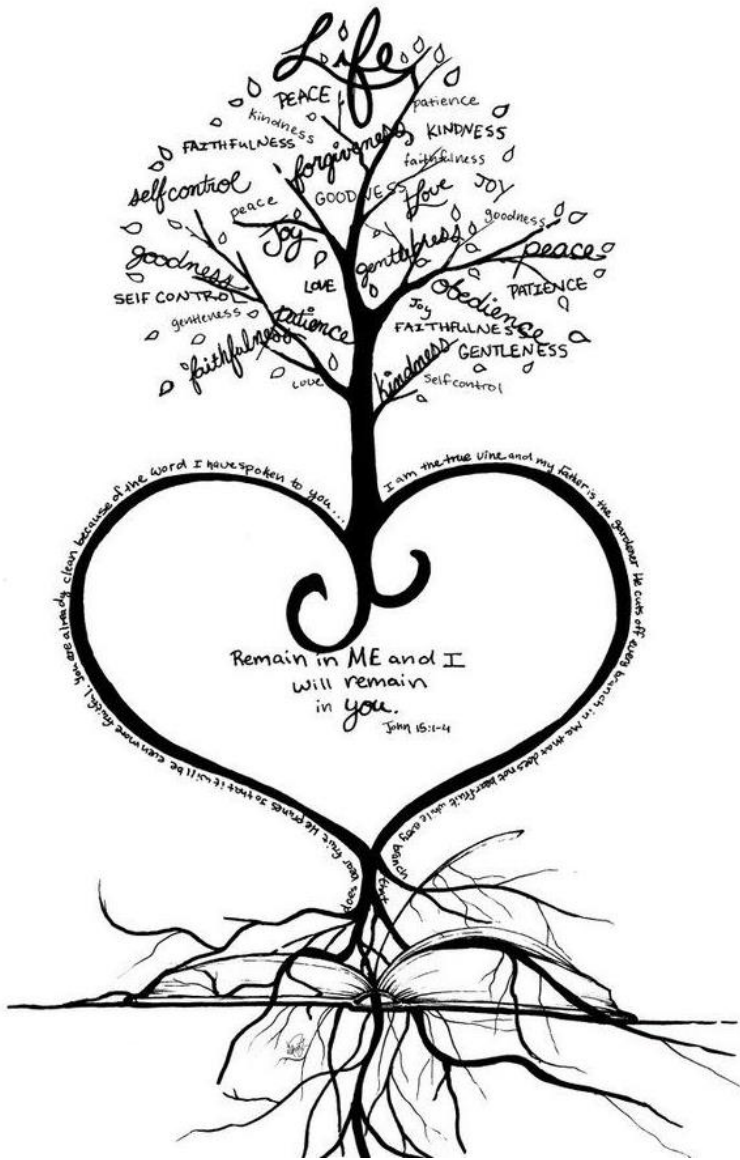
We live in England's "green and pleasant land." Yet as a nation we have become separated from the land. Unless we have allotments or organic vegetable boxes, our food often comes already cleaned and in plastic bags. We still, however, depend on agriculture for our existence. We can forget

that the soil and the seed are so important. Harvest reminds us of this fact.

The people of God, in our scriptures, lived their lives deeply dependent on agriculture. The story of the Old Testament is not just about God saving a people but the story of a people returning to a promised land. The laws for the Old Testament community relate to relationships with each other, care of animals and REST for the land. Other religions and traditions affirm humanities connectedness to the land. For example, the Aboriginal peoples of Australia rub the soil over a new born baby and North American Indian peoples bury the placentas of new born children under a tree to bless the life of the child and the land.

For a long time the church has emphasised the promised- land as heaven rather than encouraging Christian faith to be rooted on earth. This emphasis affected our nation and other nations to which we 'took' Christianity. God affirms the goodness and value of the world. We are having to rediscover that 'matter, matters' (David Wilkinson) and actively aim for all human life to not cost the earth.

And so back to trees- A person of spiritual maturity is described as a Tree that bears the fruits of inclusion and justice, someone who is consistent in doing what is right. Jesus, at his resurrection is mistaken for a gardener and describes God as his Father, the gardener. Jesus describes himself as the True Vine and his followers as the branches. Spiritual maturity is about positive deep rooted relationships of love with Jesus, each other and the earth.



This harvest time, may the imagery from the Bible remind us of our responsibility as Jesus' disciples to appreciate the land and trees around us and act in ways that protect and care for them. Let us ensure our spiritual lives are rooted in both earth and heaven.

- When did you actually touch the earth?
- What helps you to remain connected to the land?
- What practices in your life root you deeply in Jesus and the world around you?

### **HYMN REFLECTION** by MS

The genesis (good word) of this hymn is very complicated. I cannot guarantee the accuracy of every detail of the notes below; if you are using them as source material for your PhD, please check. The question is, which came first, the words or the tune?

In the beginning was a Welsh folk song to the tune *Ar Hyd y Nos*, which we know as *God that madest earth and heaven*. A translation of that has been used to make money by Olivia Newton John et al, who sold it as a Christmas carol. It includes the words "All the stars' twinkles say, all through the night, 'This is the way to realms of glory' .... the heavenly family in peace .... Guardian angels God will send thee ..... I my loving vigil keeping all through the night." There was also a hymn, *Go my children with my blessing* using *Ar Hyd y nos*. The verses we know as *God that madest earth and heaven*, originally four in number, were written by two different bishops in 1827 and 1855. In 1957, Francis Jackson of York Minster (who is now nearly 103) wrote the tune *East Acklam* as a setting of *All through the night*. Then in 1970 Fred Pratt Green wrote *For the fruits of his creation* specifically to go with the tune *East Acklam*, and David Mowbray wrote a Whitsun hymn, *Gift of Christ from God our Father*, also for *East Acklam* - but BBCSP says it can be sung to *Ar Hyd y Nos*! Time for a new tune for Mowbray's words?

So which tune to use now, I ask for the second week running? *East Acklam*, please. Fred got it right - a distinctive tune for distinctive words. In which case the tune came first, but not by much (13 years). To use *Ar Hyd y Nos* is the easy way out. It is a quiet, prayerful tune, not really at-all suitable for singing in praise of Creation.

For the fruits of his creation, thanks be to God;  
For his gifts to every nation, thanks be to God;  
For the ploughing, sowing, reaping,  
Silent growth while we are sleeping,  
Future needs in earth's safe keeping,  
Thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour, God's will is done;  
In the help we give our neighbour, God's will is done;  
In our worldwide task of caring  
For the hungry and despairing,  
In the harvests we are sharing,  
God's will is done.

For the harvests of his Spirit, thanks be to God;  
For the good we all inherit, thanks be to God;  
For the wonders that astound us,  
For the truths that still confound us,  
Most of all, that love has found us,  
Thanks be to God.

We will be listening to this hymn in our Harvest worship – I found a Methodist version of the hymn that alters the words of the second verse from *God's will is done* to *God's will BE done*. Both protestors and theologians (whose concerns are justice) talk about active participation and co-creation in caring for our world as a challenge to the presumption that God provides. Just think of campaigns such as Fair Trade which have highlighted the need for the communities that grow and pick our food to be given fair wages. God's will BE done reminds us that we have to take an active part in doing God's will within the world. Revd Becky