

Evotion 27.09.06 (am)

## Harvest

Exodus 23: 14-16

Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. No one is to appear before me empty-handed. Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field.

Deuteronomy 16:9-12

Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the Lord your God has given you. And rejoice before the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name - you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and follow carefully these decrees.

Leviticus 9: 9, 10

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.

Why celebrate harvest? We are so removed from the process of growing food that our children believe everything comes from Tesco. There is no real sense of dependence upon the elements, dependence upon God.

If you were an Israelite, to celebrate harvest was a command. It was a time of recognising that you were dependent upon God, who had rescued you from Egypt and provided for you in the desert. God still provided year in year out. It was a time to rejoice and celebrate; a community affair that included men, women and children, widows, orphans and priests, servants and foreigners. God had called them and as a community they were to come before God and give thanks for all that had been provided.

God also commanded that the poor and the foreigner be provided for in the harvest. They were not to be ignored. Don't strip the fields bare; deliberately leave food for them to gather. This isn't just the leftovers, but proper provision so that they will not go hungry, and they will have the dignity of gathering for themselves. In Deuteronomy 15 the Israelites were told to be open handed with the poor, even in the year of Jubilee, when there would be no prospect of being repaid.

Just in case we are tempted to think that this generosity and open handedness is restricted to our family or Christian brothers and sisters, Jesus blew that out of the water with the story of the Good Samaritan.

As a church we are supporting the work of BMS in the refugee camps on the Thai border with Burma. 150,000+ - the population of Sevenoaks add another 40,000 - confined to a small space. They are ingenious in their farming methods, many are strong in their faith, but they need our support in prayer and in giving. £10 will clothe a dozen orphans; £20 will enable a family to start fish farming; £100 will provide a wooden house for one family. There are gift aid envelopes available in church and we will be collecting over the next couple of weeks. How committed in prayer will you be? How open handed will you be?

## Prayer

God of creation, we praise you. Once there was nothing, but now the world teems with life and the cup of your provision overflows. Once there was dark emptiness, but now there is sound and colour, majestic mountains and intricate petals. Beasts and birds gain their food from you and all people depend on the fruitfulness of the earth you have made. We praise you, faithful provider, generous and gracious God. You have made more than enough and your love and care are prodigal. As we worship you and give you thanks, may we be open handed and generous towards those who are poor and destitute. Amen.