

Thought for the Day for Thursday of Harvest Week
Pat & Ian Basson

Welcome to our Thought for the Day on Thursday of our Harvest themed week, today we will be centring on Teamwork. But first we share a prayer.

Thanks be to you, our God, for the giving of the harvest.
Thanks for the variety of food, which gives enjoyment to our eating.
Thanks for the colours of fruit, which give beauty to our table.
Thanks for the diversity of vegetables, which gives so much choice.
Thanks for the produce of this country, which gives fresh food each day.
Thanks for the produce from overseas,
which gives ample supplies throughout the year.

Thanks be to you, our God, for the giving of the harvest.
Thanks for all who sow and nurture and reap and give us food for growth.
Thanks for all who transport and sell and give us the freedom to choose.
Thanks for all who cultivate and improve and give us better yields, finer crops.
Thanks for all who prepare and cook and give us tasty meals
which entice us to eat.
Thanks for all who advise and instruct and give us good food for health.

Thanks be to you, our God, for the giving of the harvest.

Thoughts around Teamwork

Back in 2017 Ian and I went to Peru and Ecuador. We saw amazing scenery, wonderful buildings, fascinating ruins and interesting people. But one of the most outstanding memories for both of us happened in the Amazon jungle where we came face to face (not quite literally) with the most incredible farmers who take Teamwork to the highest level. No - they are not humans, they are Leaf Cutter Ants.



As we walked along a path our guide, Lily, stopped to point out to us a "route" teeming with ants and as we followed with our eyes we could see the route went on and on virtually as far as the eye could see. Going one way were "empty handed" ants moving very quickly along, while coming back the other way were ants carrying pieces of leaf just like the pictures above. Lily then explained in more detail what was happening in front of our eyes.

Leaf cutter ants can strip the leaves off a tree in a relatively short time, their "pincers" act a bit like secateurs and make very clear cuts through the leaf which they then transport in their mouth back to the nest which can be hundreds of yards away. You would imagine the leaves are being taken as a food source, but this is not so, they are taken down into the chambers of the nest where they are turned into "mulch" on which a fungus grows and this is the food for the colony. So these ants are farmers, cultivators.

But where's the teamwork I mentioned? We could see that there were different sized ants, some quite large others much smaller. Along the route some of the larger ants were ensuring that the route was clear of any debris. The ants carrying leaves were easy to spot, but Lily then told us about the small ants that "hitchhike" back to the nest riding on the leaves, they have two jobs, they protect the carrying ants from parasites that try to lay their eggs on them and they "quality control" the leaves ensuring that there is nothing on them which will cause problems in the nest. Back at the nest site there are "soldier" ants which protect the nest from intruders while inside there are two more groups of workers, minor and media ants which work in the fungus garden processing material and looking after the fungus. And in case there are experts among you I must mention that there is one "queen" who is responsible for laying all the eggs to keep the colony alive.

Definitely teamwork of the highest order to bring in the harvest.

I'm sure we're all familiar with Paul's pictures of the church, the Body of Christ, Living Stones built together, teamwork in and for God's kingdom. But sadly the church in Corinth was in danger of splitting into factions as there were divided loyalties to the two men, Paul and Apollos who had brought the good news about Jesus and founded the church. So Paul wrote to sort them out:

1 Corinthians 3 'You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? For when one says "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.'

Harvest is a celebration that goes back years and years and is worldwide. If you watch programmes like Countryfile you will know that there is a lot of science involved in farming these days, much research into growing crops that can withstand various weather conditions or are resistant to diseases. But as Christians we believe that ultimately the harvest still depends on God's provision and this is why we bring our thanks and praise to him. However there is a lot of human team work involved along the way.

Just as He was in Corinth in Paul's time God is working in our world today but He needs the Church and individual churches to work as a team. Like the ants we have many different gifts and talents, no-one is without a part to play and no part is unimportant, however lowly it may appear. Speaking at the front is no more and no less important than the person who makes sure that the chairs are put out, or that the toilets are clean. Particularly in our present situation praying for and keeping in touch with others is such an important ministry which most of us can do. As Andrew has said in a strange way being unable to meet Sunday by Sunday in our usual place of worship has meant that we have been drawn together in a wider way by the Thought for the Day and the Sunday worship that has been circulated and now attending services that are running even if it's not our regular meeting place. Also learning to use technology has meant people working together to share their knowledge and skills in new ways.

Just as the life of the ant colony relies on every single ant being "on the team" so God wants us to work together on His team and rely on Him to bring the harvest from our labours.

Prayer of Intercessions

All power and glory are yours: **For ever and ever. Amen.**

We pray, O Father, for those who work to provide our food:
for the farmer and gardener, the lorry-driver and shopkeeper,
for the skills you have given to them,
and the expertise we can use to grow our food.
All power and glory are yours: **For ever and ever. Amen.**

We pray, O Father, for those who have no food:
for the hungry of the world,
and for those who, for lack of water or good soil,
cannot grow enough to live on.
We pray for those who use their power to help others in need,
for the aid agencies,
and each individual who gives to help another person.
All power and glory are yours: **For ever and ever. Amen.**

We pray, O Father, for the leaders of the world:
that they will use their power for the good of all;
that they will be just and even-handed in making decisions.
We pray for ourselves that, as people rich in comparison with many, we may
learn to reject selfishness, and live in love, as your Son showed us.
All power and glory are yours: **For ever and ever. Amen.**

We close our thoughts today with the familiar Harvest hymn "Come, you thankful people, come" (STF 123) although the words have been modernised in the hymnbook.

Come, you thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home!
Fruit and crops are gathered in safe before the storms begin:
God our maker will provide for our needs to be supplied;
come, with all his people, come, raise the song of harvest home!

All the world is God's own field, harvests for his praise to yield;
wheat and weeds together sown here for joy or sorrow grown:
first the blade and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear -
Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be.

For the Lord our God shall come and shall bring his harvest home;
he himself on that great day, worthless things shall take away,
give his angels charge at last in the fire the weeds to cast,
but the fruitful ears to store in his care for evermore.

Even so, Lord, quickly come - bring your final harvest home!
Gather all your people in free from sorrow, free from sin,
there together purified, ever thankful at your side -
come, with all your angels, come, bring that glorious harvest home!

Henry Alford