One of the best known stories in the Book of Genesis is the story of Noah and his Ark. Chapter 8 describes how, when the flood receded and the Ark came to rest, Noah and his family and all the animals came out of the Ark and we read that:

**20**Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. **21**The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: ‘Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

**22**‘As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease.’

This week, we have been thinking about and celebrating the harvest, from the preparation and the sowing to the period of growth for the crops. We thought about the hard work and the team work required and now we come to the celebration as we bring in the sheaves. But that doesn’t mean it’s all over, because the world doesn’t stop spinning and the seasons don’t stop following one another. We gather in the sheaves, but we also prepare the ground for the next crop, and so the cycle continues.

**22**‘As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.’

And God is there at the centre of it all. His is the promise and he is the creative power that keeps the cycle going.

So it is right to pause and to celebrate this year’s harvest and, in doing so, we celebrate God’s goodness and his generosity that underpins our food provision.

**Exodus 23:16**

You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labour, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labour.

Here God asks us to celebrate a Festival of Harvest. There were times in Old Testament history when there wasn’t much to celebrate as they went through periods of drought and famine. Pat Basson reminded us of this recently, through the story of Joseph and his brothers.

It is deeply concerning that thousands of years have passed and, despite all our technological progress, people living in this world still suffer the consequences of famine because of the injustices of our world and the greed of the few that has such devastating impact on the many.

It is right that we celebrate God’s goodness and his generosity beyond anything we might deserve. It is also right that we call on governments and world leaders to address the injustices of our global economy.

**An extract from Psalm 104**

**14**He makes grass grow for the cattle,
    and plants for people to cultivate –
    bringing forth food from the earth:
**15**wine that gladdens human hearts,
    oil to make their faces shine,
    and bread that sustains their hearts.
**16**The trees of the Lord are well watered,
    the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
**17**There the birds make their nests;
    the stork has its home in the junipers.
**18**The high mountains belong to the wild goats;
    the crags are a refuge for the hyrax.

**19**He made the moon to mark the seasons,
    and the sun knows when to go down.

We receive an abundance of good things from our heavenly Father and give thanks. In a traditional Harvest service we might bring examples of God’s goodness, transforming our churches into something resembling the front of a greengrocer’s shop. We could also bring an empty bowl – a symbol of harvests that fail and of those around the world who suffer from hunger and starvation.

**Let us pray:**

Loving heavenly Father, maker and giver of all good things, keep us mindful of the needs of all your people and may your goodness towards us bear fruits of compassion and generosity.

Lord, we offer you our hearty thanks for your generous gifts to us and for the bountiful harvest we share. We thank you for your fatherly goodness and care in giving us the fruits of the earth in their seasons. Give us grace to use them rightly, to your glory, for our own well-being and for the relief of those in need; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

For the fruits of all creation,

thanks be to God;

for the gifts of 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 world-wide task of caring

for the hungry and despairing,

in the harvests we are sharing,

God's will is done.

For the harvests of the 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.

*Words: Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)*

*© 1970 Hope Publishing Company, 380 S Main Pl, Carol Stream, IL 60188*

*Music: Welsh traditional melody*

*© From The English Hymnal, 1906, Oxford University Press*