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Dear Friends,

Creator God, you made the goodness of the land, the riches of the sea and the rhythm of the seasons; as we thank you for the harvest, may we cherish and respect this planet and its peoples, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Some of you know that I eat only vegan food (no meat, fish or dairy), buy organic fruit and vegetables sourced locally from The Welsh Food Box Company, avoid buying plastic or products that cannot be recycled and purchase my loo rolls from whogivesacrap.org. Some people would say these are life-style choices or perhaps little acts of defiance but I see this as part of my Christian witness. Strangely, I have not tried to convert the family. I cook meat, fish and dairy for them and try my best to ensure I know where the food has come from and that the highest levels of animal welfare have been part of the supply chain.



So why do I do this? Why do I claim this part of my Christian witness? I was brought up to love and care for animals (racehorses, a donkey, goats, dogs and a rabbit!). Growing up, various images influenced my decision to firstly become vegetarian. I remember, as if it were yesterday, delivering foals and calves but also seeing meat spray-washed off bones to make cheap sausages. Images of battery chickens in cramped barns and their final upside-down watery electrocution still haunt me. Little by little I changed my diet. As a vegetarian Rural Dean in Salisbury Diocese, I visited dairy farms and learnt about the short lives and life-style of the dairy herd; the animal husbandry was as good as it could be yet, as a mother, the sight of cows robbed of their babies and working to provide my milk finally pushed me to a plant based diet.

You may be horrified that I'm sharing this with you on the weekend when we celebrate Harvest, but what these decisions have led me to is a far greater connection with the earth, the farming community for whom I have deep respect, and gratitude for those who work within the food chain. I look forward to the arrival of our food boxes each Thursday. The boxes are filled with only seasonal fruit and vegetables. So I know what is grown locally and, when I miss something I might love to eat, I know it needs to be shipped or flown thousands of miles if I were to eat or buy it out of season. You might think the food I eat is dirty - well yes, it is when it arrives. The potatoes and carrots, the beets and leeks sitting loose in the box or wrapped in brown paper are muddy, they smell of the earth from where they came - but as we wash them we are connected to those wonderful people who tended the land and broke their backs in wind and rain that I might live. And, because each bag unwrapped is a little treasure, I try hard not to waste it. In the Taff and on the beach, in the countryside and all around us are little bits of plastic. The fish of the sea, the birds of the air and the foxes who have holes have our detritus in their tummies. Their lives are shortened because in the processes that bring food to our supermarkets, and our desire that meat, fish, fruit and veg have lengthy shelf lives, our fodder is packaged in products that cannot be recycled however hard we try. Please do not imagine I'm trying to present myself as a saint - I'm a bit of a self-righteous Pharisee. I'm far from perfect - from time to time I buy vegetables or fruit that has flown from the other side of the world ...and, yes, salty crisps are my guilty pleasure bought in bags that IF I make an effort could be recycled. But the harvest is not all about food is it? Each time I pay a visit and delight in the brightly coloured wrapped loo rolls sitting in our bathrooms I don't think "gosh this is an expensive trip" but I take a moment to think of those people who lives might be improved because of the way I have exercised my "purchasing power". My loo paper will build more loos and bring clean water and sanitation to the poorest in the world.



I wonder if you've noticed that it is our children and grandchildren who have been the most passionate about climate change, recycling and saving the planet? It has taken a child who first persuaded her own parents to reduce their carbon footprint to shame the world leaders into action - Greta Thunberg is perhaps a prophet in our time. In contrast Christians, until recently, have tended to believe that God in his Christ, came only to save us humans. Yet, from the opening chapter of Genesis when God declares creation to be good and calls upon the first humans to care for it until the end of the biblical narrative, we read of God's longing for all creation to live in harmony, for the harvest to be shared and for injustices to be righted.

Perhaps the lockdowns of 2020 have made us more aware of the beauty of the world, the goodness of the land and the rhythm of the seasons as we have tended our gardens, planted potatoes, lifted lettuces and baked ourselves out of boredom or eked out a food delivery for another week? We have become more aware of the cost of bringing in the crops and our dependence on those from other parts of the world to dig and pick for a pittance. We have become aware of that great harvest of gifts and talents, or to coin a new phrase "key workers", on whom our lives depend and our tummies are filled. It is not just those who work the land but all who work within the food chain who have put their lives at risk for us this year. This year I will remember not just farmers or those who fill the shelves in our supermarkets but those who, receiving the minimum wage crammed together in food packing plants, are now suffering with Covid.

Harvest festival tomorrow will be a new experience for us all. Gareth and the children of Junior Church will be leading Harvest for St Mary's by Zoom. At St John's in Danescourt and Christ Church in Radyr our talented young people will be involved in leading our thanksgiving. Once again we will hear the challenging story from Luke's gospel that Jesus tells about a man who destroys his little barns and builds larger ones when his land produces an abundant harvest. The so called "rich man" imagines eating, drinking and living happily ever after but he suddenly hears the voice of God calling him "You fool!" and asking him who will enjoy the huge harvest in his barns when he dies. Stop worrying and look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field who have all they need, but like us may be gone tomorrow, says Jesus to his followers. As I read this I thought of the stockpiling of loo rolls, the run on flour, the shortage of baked beans and the empty shelves at the beginning of lockdown as people rushed to ensure they would survive. Oh, we of little faith!

The biblical narrative invites us to worry not about our own survival but the needs of those who have so much less than we do. Over and over again the bible asks us whether we have noticed the poor, the hungry, the widow and the orphan. We are the fools who having entered a land "where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing" (Deuteronomy 8.7-18) often imagine "my power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth". Have we forgotten it is God who has gifted us with the power to both "get wealth" and share it? Harvest has always been a day for thanksgiving but it is also a day for saying sorry. We are called to face our own greed and remember that the salvation of the world depends on God's deep love and longing to save all creation.

This year please give generously to Cardiff Food Bank's New Van Appeal to make it possible for them to collect and distribute food to the needy in our area more effectively.

...and finally some words from the "Post Communion Prayer" for Harvest, "Lord of the harvest.....by your grace plant within us a reverence for all that you give us and make us generous and wise stewards of the good things we enjoy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Yours in Christ,

**Vicki
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