

## *Harvest Home*

### *“Give us this day our daily bread”*

Well what does *harvest* mean for you? Pumpkins and marrows on church windowsills and along communion rails? Stacked sheaves of corn, and corn dollies? Harvest suppers of bread and cheese and mugs of ale?

Ah, but once again it's Keats' "*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness*". It conjures up Millet's "*The Gleaners*" - many other painters tackled the same theme, but Millet's is clearly the most famous: (not to be confused with the pre-Raphaelite Millais) It reminds us of evocative phrases we have known since childhood, "*We plough the fields and scatter*", "*All is safely gathered in*", "*Come ye thankful people come*," "*Fair waved the golden corn in Canaan's pleasant land.*" – well it would wouldn't it, if you were an Israelite having wandered around the dessert for 40 years, living off a diet of manna. (See Wikipedia)

"*Wheat and tares together sown.*" Now this is an allegory Jesus used to explain the last judgement; when he described the sower of the good seed as the "Son of Man", the reapers as angels, the weeds as the "children of the evil one" to be gathered up and burned, and the wheat, or "... the righteous shall shine as brightly as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt.13 39-43)

"*Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.*" ... when they do.

And when they don't? Consider some of the statistics from a UN Report in January 2012: but beware, as Benjamin Disraeli once famously remarked, "*There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.*"

1 in 7 of the World's 7,000,000,000 (seven billion) people are undernourished, that's a billion; that's 20 million more than in 2000, despite some remarkable success stories; carbon dioxide emissions have risen by 38% in the last 10 years, heightening the risk of sea level rises, more extreme weather, and increased human suffering.

Six million children die every year through avoidable malnutrition; that's between 15,000 and 18,000 every day.

By 2030, the population is estimated to be eight billion; and because of the increased affluence of some parts of the World, we will need 50% more food, 45% more energy, and 30% more water.

Mind you, Aid Agencies and Charities will tell you, that they can quote all the statistics they like, often to little effect; but show a photograph of a starving child, and people give much more generously.

*(photograph of crying, starving, naked child(ren))*

***“God which made heaven and earth .. .which giveth food to the hungry.”***  
(Psalm 146)

The answers are not easily achieved. For example, giving food and water directly to the starving is an absolute necessity, but giving food directly to the undernourished in some countries, can be counter-productive, forcing local farmers out of work and forcing up prices. In some areas, the UN World Food Programme is giving out cash instead of food, in order to support local production; or equipment for the needy to drill for their own water, or seed, fertiliser and insecticides to improve and increase local crops.

The fact is, there *is* sufficient food produced to feed everyone, the problem is one of global imagination, logistics and political will.

Despite all this, in 2011, 1.3 billion tons of food, about **one third** of the global food production, was lost or wasted, at an estimated cost of £28 billion. Loss and wastage occurs at all steps in the food supply chain. In low-income countries most loss occurs during production, while in developed countries much food, about 100 kilograms (220 lb) per person per year, is wasted at the consumption stage. In this Country alone 3.6 million tonnes of (household) food is thrown away every year; that’s 18% of all food purchases, or 27% for families with children; all of which is completely avoidable with better shopping and storage. Much of our waste food still ends up in land-fill sites, despite local council waste food collections. This in turn creates additional harmful green-house gasses.

A similar amount is wasted at the production and distribution stage, and a further third is thrown away by supermarkets, shops and restaurants, because of so called “display”, “sell-by”, “use-by” and “best-before” dates, which instead of informing consumers, have done nothing but confuse them. Time was when we would scrape off the mould and make soup, (not of the mould of course), only discarding food when it smelled! But times have changed, and we in the developed countries, are now a shamelessly throw-away, consumerist, built-in-obsolent society; which needs to change.

“But what can *I* do about it?” I hear you ask. Well, quite a lot I think actually.

- get and keep yourself informed. Google: *UN World Food Programme, Foreign Aid, Food Waste, Malnutrition, Fairtrade ...*
- Google your *Carbon Footprint*
- support those charities which encourage sustainable self-help
- give *generously* to emergency appeals
- seek out *Fairtrade* products in stores - change the habits-of-a-lifetime
- check products for their Country of origin, and distance travelled: transport adds to green-house gasses
- support local producers and Farmer’s Markets
- support local food banks, and food parcels for local needy people - *why wait for harvest collections once a year, the needy can’t wait?*
- buy and eat less
- throw away less, and when you do, use the food-waste collection
- organise or join an Austerity Lunch
- save water: take shorter showers, don’t leave taps running, use washing water on the garden, don’t boil a full kettle for only a cup of tea
- say grace, and thank God for your daily food

### **A Grace before Meals**

*Lord, “Thank you” for our daily bread,  
And for clean water too.  
We can’t forget the underfed,  
What is there we can do?*

*Howard Brayton* 16<sup>th</sup> April 2012

Published in Witney Way Harvest 2101 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012

