

In every last baked bean



I wonder if you remember the Global Hilarity back in 2017 when Worcester Cathedral's liturgy went viral around the world, and hit the global news?

What if I mention.... *Asparagus man*....?

Evesham, in Worcestershire, is a key asparagus grower. The crop is vital to the landscape and the livelihood of the local farmers, and also blesses the national and international palate to the extent of receiving Vale of Evesham Asparagus name protection from the European Union. So, they celebrated with a blessing service, bringing in the asparagus as if it were the first sheaf of a traditional Harvest Thanksgiving.....

and ... following it with a man dressed up as a stalk of asparagus.

And *that*... that is what went viral.

And produced all sorts of anger, scorn and hilarity.

To some extent one can sympathise – there was an unexpected lack of gravity I suppose in the inclusion of a semi-pagan figure in fancy dress.

On the other hand, I wonder if we have somewhat lost the Wild Joy of a harvest that literally determines our table – the joy of thanksgiving, as a hungry, cold winter is staved off for another year. There was one very Upset person who asked publicly if it would feel appropriate to dress up as a baked bean, and parade a tin of baked beans up the aisle as high as if it were the Blessed Sacrament itself well, my daughter is *very* fond of baked beans, and for myself as a child growing up in a family with not much money, baked beans filled many a would-be hungry night with warmth and goodness.

So.... I wonder... whether yes, we should take our tins of baked beans and dance them up the aisle with great jubilation, like King David danced before the Lord. And lift it high in joy and gratitude of the harvest, and the God who feeds us. Not to be afraid to be a little bit shocking, a little bit unexpected... and to rejoice in the Lord and his goodness... every tiny sparrow, says Jesus, every tiny weed of the field, is lifted up and rejoiced in by God.

In our modern, well-connected world, we sometimes have disappointments at the price of cherries or the lack of Christmas Sprouts, as harvests are affected around the world, but we are never in danger of an empty table following a failed crop. It's hard for us to imagine the sheer joy and relief when all is gathered in, to feed not just one house, but a village, a community, for the coming year. And to dance before the Lord.

In which context, it's a bit strange that in our harvest gospel today, the Lord tells us not to work for the food that perishes... and don't follow me for the loaves of bread I give you, either, he says.

But perhaps we need to look right back to the start of the story. To the Temptations where the Devil tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread. And Jesus says no. No... I will not set up a dominant power where people are dependent on me as their source of food, subject to my whims and caprices for their, and their families', bodily needs, in the same way Joseph's brothers were when they came seeking grain from Egypt.

I created the world from love, for love, and I do not want human slaves – I want human partners, stewards.

'What must we do?', ask the disciples, to perform the work of God? To bring in this kind of harvest?

'Believe in him whom God has sent', says Jesus.

Believe that through the incarnation we are drawn into sharing in the Love in which all are fed.

Don't follow me for the loaves I give you. Follow me because I am the Bread, and in me, you can be the bread too, the life of the world.

Believe it's true... and live like it's true....

Despite the rich culture of Jewish Harvest Celebrations, it is a recent development in the Church. There was no Harvest Order of Service in the BCP. In the early 1800s there were six individual Days of National Thanksgiving for Harvest declared, but it was only from 1847 that Harvest Festivals began to gain ground, and in 1854 that it was firmly established. So what happened?

What made us want a Harvest Festival each year?

The Irish potato famine.

From 1845 – 1852, Ireland suffered devastating poverty and hunger.

It was the impact of such need, and the awareness of our human fragility, brought together with our Christian call to care, to feed the hungry, that provoked the Harvest Festival gathering of food for the relief of the poor and hungry of Ireland.

The Greek word for Feast is ἀγάπη - agape – which means love.

Harvest is about Feast, and about how we share love– how we share in the Bread of Life, broken for us. How we join in Jesus' work in the world... stewards of his creation.

Eating reminds us that we need each other. If you are breathing, it's because at some point as a helpless babe, someone fed you. Just as Mary fed Jesus. We are born – created - completely dependent on others.

Harvest reminds us that those who have produced what we eat, and those who will eat the same foods as us, are all spiritually connected to us. We recognise our siblinghood and shared needs, and we accept mutual responsibility.

A responsibility to care for our world, and to be aware not just of the hunger of our neighbours, but also of the systems of profit and of oppression, and of damage to creation, that often come alongside the foods we share. What decisions do we make about where our food comes from? About the companies we support? The packaging we buy? What small things can we afford to do that support those who work for local or sustainable farming? How can we care better for our environment?

Our reading from Philippians today calls us not to worry, but to trust and bring our needs to God.

It's hard not to worry when faced with global climate change, floods, wildfires, poverty and hunger. When we stack up the effects of plastic use, and the impact of fossil fuels.

But amongst the brokenness, Paul calls us to focus on what is true, what is honourable, what is just... what is worthy of praise, and simply to keep on doing those things.

Today we have brought food for sharing with those in need. And the care for our creation is just as urgent. Take a look at the eco tips on the noticesheet each week. Reflect and pray on small steps we can make to protect our world, and to reduce the pain of climate change falling so heavily on the shoulders of the poorest and most hungry in our global climate and economy.

Jesus, the Bread of Life, invites us to make every meal into a part of the story of God's love – Every table is a little altar, and every meal a little Eucharist. At every one we give thanks, and break and share. At every one God pours grace upon the fruits of creation, and the fruits of fellowship, and makes it the source of life.

I am the bread of life, says the Lord.

So in feast, in agape – in love and thanksgiving, ... let us not be afraid to be a little bit unexpected, even with a certain lack of gravity, after all Jesus was when he drew all to the table, and when he sent a party of poor people wild on top quality wine...

let us rejoice

Yes, in every last baked bean ...

... and dance before the Lord, together.

