

THE UPPER ALDE BENEFICE

The Twenty-eighth Sunday of the Year (Thanksgiving after the Harvest)



One day Bill went out hunting in the woods. It had been a very slow day and he hadn't found any game to shoot. Suddenly he heard a noise behind him and when he whirled around he saw two ferocious looking bears coming towards him. He quickly raised his rifle to his shoulder, took aim and pulled the trigger. There was a 'click' and nothing more. The rifle had misfired so he reloaded and fired again. Click, click, click. Again, there was nothing. In desperation he threw down his rifle and ran. The faster he ran, the closer the bears approached. Finally he came to the edge of a cliff and there was nowhere to go. He dropped to his knees and began to pray, 'Lord, I pray that you make these bears Christian bears.' As he looked up he was surprised to notice that the bears were kneeling just a few feet away from him. As he listened, he heard one bear pray, 'For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen.'

Harvest is a time when we thank God and celebrate for all his goodness to us in providing the harvest. It comes as a timely reminder every year because we live in a society where we seem to have so much and yet take it all for granted. It will come as no surprise that the Harvest Festival Service stands in a long tradition for God's people. It goes back about 4000 years. However, you may be surprised to learn that within the tradition of the Hebrew people which we read about in the Bible there were three festivals of thanksgiving.

The first was the Feast of Passover. It was usually held in March or April of each year – at the beginning of what was known as the 'spring grain harvest'. It was a time of thanksgiving. It was a time to remember how God had miraculously brought the people out of slavery in Egypt. The people remembered that God had been their Saviour. When we look at the New Testament, this festival takes on a greater significance for Christians – because it was at Passover that our Lord was crucified. It reminds us that our Saviour came to earth and took us out of the slavery of sin and brought us back to a new relationship with God. That is why we give thanks.

The second major festival was the Feast of Weeks and generally occurred at the end of the barley harvest. It took place fifty days after Passover and it represented the first fruits gathered in as a result of the labour of those who reaped the spring grain harvest. It is better known to us as Pentecost. In the New Testament, we see Pentecost having a new significance as it was the time when the power of the Holy Spirit was released upon the apostles. It enabled them to go out on to the streets of Jerusalem and proclaim the Good News of Jesus and to experience the first fruits of a spiritual harvest when three thousand people became Christians that day.

The final festival was the Feast of Tabernacles which occurred when the grape and grain harvest was over. It was at that festival that the Hebrew people would camp out for a week in tents, recalling the temporary dwellings in which they lived during their wilderness wanderings after the Exodus. For us, as Christians it is a reminder that our dwelling upon earth is not permanent but temporary, for our final destination is in the nearer presence of our Heavenly Father.

Therefore, as we celebrate our Harvest Festivals, we are reminded of God's blessings on his people, both in the physical and also the spiritual. It's a time to look back with thanks. Not only has God given us a physical harvest to nourish our bodies, but we have a spiritual harvest to nourish our souls.