

Harvest Genesis 45:5-7

Harvest is our annual opportunity to pause and reflect on all God's goodness and provision for our needs, and to remember those who struggle to find their daily needs. This year we are supporting Southend HARP and Send-a-Cow.

"If my children succeed in their education, one day they'll eat what they want."

These are Grace's words, a mother concerned for the future of her family, a widow living in rural Kenya, she speaks as a mum who has sometimes been unable to see a good return on her harvest due to rain or drought. It is not easy to imagine what that is like.

Not knowing how you will feed your children, or where the next meal will come from?

During this past year we have sometimes found supplies of food and goods in our shops here have been a little inconsistent, through the pandemic and Brexit, and this continues.

More people than ever have turned to foodbanks for help, and to organisations such as HARP. Some of us are able to grow vegetables in our gardens, but this is more of a hobby than a necessity. What if we needed to rely on providing food for our families through our own efforts? And how would we feel, if having tried so hard to grow our own, the challenges of our climate and weather were to dash our hopes of a good harvest?

The story of **Joseph** in the Old Testament is an interesting one. In Joseph's day, there were huge challenges in predicting the harvest. One year there might be overabundance, enough to share, but another, insufficient to feed those in one's own family.

The story of Joseph is one of God's provision and of human partnership. His story begins when as a boy, Joseph the dreamer thought big! As a younger child in a larger family of brothers he found himself being despised by his brothers, partly due to his own arrogance and also because he was his father's favourite. As a result, they wanted to get rid of him. Saved by his eldest brother from death, he was sold into slavery and ended up in the foreign country of Egypt. But his predicament doesn't end there, as he finds himself again the object of favouritism, this time at the hands of his master's wife. His refusal to be complicit in an affair means that he is thrown into prison. It is in prison that his reputation as one who not only has dreams but can interpret them, comes to the notice of the Pharaoh. Pharaoh's dreams are disturbing, and Joseph recognises in them that the land will experience a prolonged period of abundance of harvests followed by many years of famine. Joseph suggests a plan as to how the country might respond to such a challenge – to store the excess food during the time of plenty in order that there would be sufficient for the time of need. And so, he gets the job! And it is because of that foresight and wise decision-making that not only the people of Egypt but those in neighbouring countries too, were able to provide food for their families. And it is at that point that we see Joseph reunited with his family. Their harvests have failed and so they have come for food from their Egyptian neighbours. In so doing, they inadvertently fulfil those old dreams of Joseph where he was in a position of power over his brothers. It takes some time for them to discover the truth and then reconciliation becomes possible.

It's a convoluted tale with many twists and turns which not only relates a family saga with TV soap-like quality, but also tells of the provision of God at a time of need.

We often recognise God's goodness when we celebrate harvest, as the one who provides from the goodness of the earth, but this is also a partnership with human beings. In the story of Joseph, we see that God is able to bring something good from all that happened to Joseph. And that can be our experience too. Life as followers of Christ is not an easy road. We can know hardships, difficulties and tragedy along the way and yet God is present in them with us. And we hold on to the promise that *"all things will work together for good"*.

This Harvest-time, how might we work with God to bring something good from what is a crisis? The world is beginning to recognise the effects of climate change, the way in which we are changing the wonderful world God has created through our own thoughtless actions.

In our abundance how might we be givers and sharers with others? Joseph's story reminds us that our vision can extend not just to our immediate neighbours but to others across the world too. We share a responsibility collectively for the way in which we have neglected to care for God's world, and so it seems only fair that those of us with more should share the abundance we have with others. Joseph could so easily have held back, allowing personal resentment to prevent generosity, but rather he acknowledged God's provision for him and wanted to share that. May we recognise Grace's desire that her children should be able to "*eat what they want*", as a desire we can share in with her, as her extended family.

We can share today as we bring foodstuffs for **Southend HARP** helping the homeless locally, and give money to **Send-a-Cow**, supporting poor families across Africa.