

# Minster All Age Harvest Festival – 1 October 2017

**Readings:** Deuteronomy 8.7-18  
2 Corinthians 9.6-15  
Luke 12.16-30

## Introduction

I'm so glad I am able to celebrate this harvest festival today with all of you here in the Minster.

Harvest is one of my favourite times of the year.

As someone who grew up on a farm in a farming community in rural Wiltshire, this time of year always brings back memories of tractors, trailers, produce being brought in from the fields, and a last dash before the rains of autumn arrived in earnest.

I'll do my best to not slip into my natural West Country accent, but I can't make any promises when we sing we plough the fields later on...

I spent some time thinking about what the theme for today's celebration should be.

OK, obviously harvest, but more than that?

This is an important time of thanksgiving; thanksgiving for the rhythm of the seasons, for the success of the harvest, but those ideas can sometimes be a little removed from where we are as a society living in a post-modern, post-industrial town.

Instead, I thought we could think about the "gifts that we have".

I kept that intentionally vague and abstract, because I like to leave you guys with some work to do!

From the first reading we have heard this morning, the "gifts that we have" is referring to the gifts that we have received from God.

God is making a promise of what the gift of land that he will deliver the Israelites to will be like.

The land is amazing: fertile, productive, rich in natural resources.

But, this brilliant gift comes with a warning: do not forget the Lord, remember who it was who brought you out of Egypt and gave you this land.

God reminds the Israelites just how rubbish it was in the wilderness, and how even then God provided for them the gifts of everything they needed to survive.

Like the Israelites, we need to be mindful as we celebrate this time of year to give proper thanks to God for all the gifts he has provided us with, even in those times when we wander in the wilderness.

## Sermon

So, back to thinking about “the gifts that we have”.

I touched a little earlier on the gifts that we have received from God, and how we must give proper thanks to God for them.

Now I'd like us to think about the gifts that we have to give.

What do we think about when we think of gifts?

Is it things? Stuff? Possessions? It certainly can be.

How about natural resources?

Often, we here in our safe corner of the Western world, can forget how lucky we are with the resources that we have access to, when others don't have enough even to cover the basic necessities of life.

And in fact, it isn't just in other far-flung countries that don't have the same agricultural technologies and temperate climate as us that people go without food.

Foodbanks are often in the pages of the news, and it's important to remember that last financial year the Trussell Trust's Foodbank Network provided 1,182,954 three day emergency food supplies to people in crisis compared to 1,109,309 in 2015-16.

Of this number, 436,938 went to children.

69,280 went to people in our region of Yorkshire and Humberside.

It's important to think of this as we give thanks for the blessings we have, and remember that we are called to be a blessing to those around us, or further away who aren't as fortunate as us.

These gifts here, and those that you share with our food bank in Beverley throughout the year, are a reminder of how we can share what we have with those around us to be a blessing.

As Paul said in the letter, God loves a cheerful giver! And, your generosity will produce thanksgiving to God.

As I said at the start of the service, today is the hundredth birthday of the Beverley Minster Guides.

100 years! And it's been able to go on for so long in part to the gifts of the leaders and volunteers that they've given over the years.

Their time, energy, talents, expertise, love.

And I'm sure most of the time these gifts have been given cheerfully, even while the leaders were on duty all night for the sleepover in the Parish Hall...!

These other types of gifts show that it doesn't always have to be about "stuff".

This is good, because Jesus makes it pretty clear in the reading from Luke that we need to care less about acquiring stuff.

It's strange as the secular understanding of being happy is getting loads of things is actually the wrong way to go about living, or as Jesus says, the way to ruin.

In fact, the opposite is the case, the more we give to others the more happiness we receive ourselves.

It is something that we have learnt from God Himself:

- He gave us the world and all creation to live in.
- When humanity messed up so much all seemed lost, he gave his only Son to show us a better way to love.
- Jesus had no possessions, but he still gave up all he had, eventually his life for all.

I see the example of this model of giving alive and kicking today in this place with the gifts that you have brought for the food bank, and the other less tangible gifts that you give every day.

My prayer today is we all are able to take heed of Jesus' advice as we go out into the world together, to give freely and cheerfully, and be glad in the act of it.

Amen.