

A 'good' harvest

Everything in the vicarage garden started late this year. When we should have been sowing seeds or planting out young plants, we were still removing brambles and docks and planting out the plants we had brought from our old garden. So our garden harvest has been somewhat sparse this year, though we have enjoyed strawberries and rhubarb and a small handful of raspberries. Nevertheless, I am aware that if we had to feed ourselves, we'd be going hungry this winter.

Autumn, as churches prepare to celebrate Harvest, is often a time when we are encouraged to think about the food we eat, and those who supply it for us. As well as remembering those around the world who are hungry and reflecting why they do not have enough, we are also encouraged to think about the food on our own tables. In the UK, agriculture is one of the most environmentally damaging industries we have, contributing massively to climate change and loss of biodiversity. Yet many farmers come from families who have traditionally cared for the land for generations. So what is going on?

I grew up surrounded by farming families, in a hamlet that makes Bradwell look like a vast city. In my lifetime, I have seen a relentless drive for ever-cheaper food. I have seen the proportion of household income that the average family spends on food drop dramatically. I have also seen the gap between rich and poor widen massively, so that many families now struggle to put good, healthy food on the table. And I have seen farmers, caught between market forces and government policies, carrying out practices that they know are bad for us, bad for the environment, and bad for them, because they often have limited choice.

So this autumn, this harvest, my prayer is that we will all be encouraged to look more closely than ever before at where our food does come from, and how it is produced. The nineteenth century Prime Minister William Gladstone apparently said that 'It is the duty of government to make it difficult to do wrong and easy to do right.' I believe it is also the responsibility of every one of us to urge and encourage and support our politicians in carrying out their duty to create the kind of world we would like our children and grandchildren to live in. And I believe it is the responsibility of all of us who claim to love others, to use whatever shopping power we do have, to consider the needs of the planet, the poor of the world, and future generations.

Yours in Christ,
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