

One of the delights and privileges of ministry is watching families beginning the process of rearing their own children. Little bundles are brought home from hospital. In the early stages there is the hectic round of feeding, changing putting down, picking up, feeding changing, putting down in the midst of which young parents discover the value of sleep. Then of course the babies begin to relate to the world around them, they begin to explore, to reach out, to crawl, to walk; they begin to experiment with sound as random gurgles evolve into recognisable words.

Part of our duty of care of a child is training the child to interact with family, their first friends and then of course school.

one of the most valuable early lessons we can teach our children is in the whole area of thankfulness. Learning to be thankful, learning to say 'Thank you' when something is done for the child, given to the child. Sometimes it can seem as if this is a bit of an uphill battle. But then, I suppose if we are brutally honest, thankfulness does not always come naturally to any of us. We can take so much for granted, we can people for granted, we can take our environment for granted. All too often we don't give the give the people we love the attention, the time, the care they deserve. Occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries are valuable as reminders, as opportunities to show our love and affection.

The Church year with its Festivals of Christmas, of Good Friday and Easter, of Pentecost, the seasons of Advent and Lent are times when people who have slipped out of the habit of regular worship can re-engage as we reflect on God's goodness to us. In the words of the old General Prayer of Thanksgiving:

We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

Harvest is one of those well loved occasions when we stop to say ‘Thank you’. What are we doing when we say ‘Thank you’. I suppose first of all there is ACKNOWLEDGEMENT; an acknowledgement that we have benefitted from something. There is a lovely story of a clergyman going past a house in his Parish – the garden was magnificent, the sort of thing you would see in a magazine. ‘Sam’, he said, ‘you and God have done a superb job in that garden.’ Sam was proud of his garden and he did not like having to share the praise with anyone, not even God. He retorted, ‘You should have seen it when just God had it.’

And so in our Old Testament Lesson, the Israelites, as they prepare to enter the land, as they look forward to harvesting their own food are called upon to never forget the ultimate source of all that they enjoy.

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. *Deut 8:17-18*

There must be a humility in our thankfulness. Sam indeed had done a great job in his garden but he lost sight of the fundamental truth of God as the giver of all things including the skills he had to bring the very best out of the plants, the soil on which he lavished such care.

With that humility comes a realisation that we are not the ultimate owners of this created world, to use and abuse it as we wish. We are stewards, answerable to God, answerable to future generations. We have seen the damage that has already been done to this fragile and beautiful planet in terms of pollution and climate change. We see the glaciers receding before our eyes, we see the advance of the desert in sub Saharan Africa, the raising of sea levels threatening the very existence of coastal communities in the 3rd world. The failure of the international community to take even the minimum steps to at least stabilise the situation is nothing short of scandalous. Sadly it is the poor and the powerless who bear the brunt of the folly of the rich and the powerful.

ALMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men; We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. **Amen.**

