



**A sermon for the Cathedral Eucharist at Wells
Cathedral, preached on Sunday 12 October 2025 by
the Reverend Sally Wright, Priest Vicar.**

Harvest

*May I speak in the name of the living God, who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.
Amen.*

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”

Today we celebrate Harvest, a festival that would once have seemed as natural as the concept of harvest would have in bible times, but which now seems to be entwined with our complex relationship with our environment, the shame of having enough in a world in which many are hungry and the challenge of how we begin to celebrate harvest in a society in which most of us have little, if anything, to do with food production, simply picking our food from the shelves of shops or, possibly, market stalls.

Yet, here we are at Harvest once again, still perhaps wondering how to make sense of it.

To return to the root of our relationship with harvest, to clarify our intentions around harvest, let us hear again the words from the beginning of our reading from Philippians: *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”*

Likewise, the Psalm set for today: Psalm 100, which begins:

“O be joyful in the Lord, all the earth; serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song...Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and bless his name.”

In other words, returning to and focussing upon the intention of gratitude on which Harvest Thanksgiving is predicated, remains the surest and best way to relate to harvest amidst the complexities of the world we live in.

Yes, we live in a society in which many of us are far removed from our food, but we can still have gratitude for those who grow and produce it, for those who deliver it to our shops.

And yes, it is true, we live in a world in which many people are hungry and don't have enough to eat: that is surely all the more reason to be grateful for the earth's bounty which we enjoy, for the food on our plates.

The power of gratitude is *immense* because it can transmute *anything*.

You may already know that many years ago, we lived in Peckham in South East London for five years. For us it was a place of deep love and profound lessons. Virgo was one of our parishioners. He was homeless, struggling with alcoholism, soon to be jobless and had been cut off from his much beloved daughter *but*, he said, 'I thank God for all the blessings of my life.' Gratitude enabled him to know joy even in the midst of deep sorrow and loss and that lesson has stayed with me.

Gratitude can alchemize even the darkest of shadows, not as a magic wand, but because it shifts our focus to what is good.

Manifestation is a word much heard and used in our society today, but what is interesting is that science is now able to prove that, far from being some new spiritual fad, manifestation is real: what we put our attention on grows, within ourselves and within the wider world.

When we focus on lack, that is what we create more of, so when we focus all our thoughts on what is wrong with the world, we do nothing but send more lack energy out into the world.

Of course, this is not to encourage ignorance - it is important to be aware of and acknowledge the part we play in the misuse of and inequity apparent in this wonderful world - but self-flagellation will not of itself change that misuse and inequity: it will just add to the wound.

Conversely, when we focus on giving thanks for all that we enjoy, that is what we create more of; when we give thanks for this earth's bounty, which we *know is enough to feed everyone*, and for the food we eat daily, we begin to grow the energy of abundance and we begin to contribute to solutions instead of problems. As the late author, Melody Beattie, once said:

"Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

Being truly grateful for our food not only allows us to know and connect with the heart felt appreciation of the simple gift of having enough to eat, which is vastly preferable to mindless consumption, but it is also far more likely to spur us into action because gratitude increases our joy, and when we are joyful, we want to share that joy with others.

If we feel discomfort around focussing on gratitude, then perhaps we might take heart from our reading from Deuteronomy, through which we can begin to understand that gratitude and celebration are actually required of us. God declares that when the Israelites come into the new land that they have been promised, they are to take some of the first of all the 'fruit of the ground' and give it to the priest in office as they recall their history, acknowledge God's

grace in bringing them to a new land and, finally, celebrate the bounty they have been given. God calls them to gratitude and celebration.

For us, this call to gratitude can extend even further. The feeding of the 5,000 appears earlier in the chapter today's gospel comes from, with its resonance with the manna given to the Israelites in the wilderness following their liberation from slavery in Egypt.

This resonance is important: the belief, explicit or not, was that the Messiah would outdo Moses, so something more than mere loaves would be expected of one who called themselves Messiah. The people who are following Jesus want more, both in terms of physical food and also a greater sign.

Jesus uses this testing to reroute their thinking: the manna was from God, not Moses, but even more importantly, he invites them to turn their attention from *physical* bread to the bread which comes down from heaven and *gives life to the world*.

Misunderstanding the reference, the people ask to eat this heavenly bread always, to which Jesus responds:

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Here, at this altar, we come in gratitude and celebration for the gift, far beyond manna, of God in Christ, the bread of life, the one who sustains our hearts and souls. We know that we can have all the wealth and riches of life and still be starving: this is the hunger which only the love of God can satisfy. So, as we celebrate this Eucharist, which literally means 'thanksgiving,' we extend our gratitude to the Word made flesh, whose very Self is given for the nourishment of *our whole selves*.

Today, as we come to celebrate harvest, and with the joy of the Food Festival taking place just outside these doors, may we come in gratitude for the food we enjoy and for those who produce it, and may we focus on and grow our gratitude, so that we may use it as a springboard for action. What one thing could we do differently to contribute to a healthier world in which everyone is satisfied?

May we also come in full gratitude for Christ, the bread of life, the one in whom our *spiritual* hunger is satisfied, the one whom we meet in bread and wine at this altar today.

Sisters and brothers, may gratitude, with its extraordinary, transforming power, be in our hearts and on our lips this harvest and all the days of our life. In the words of Meister Eckhart:

“If the only prayer you ever said in your whole life was ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.”

Amen.

Sally Wright, Priest Vicar

12 October 2025