

North Kildonan United Church

9th October 2022 ~Rev. Don Johnson

Deuteronomy 8: 7-18

II Corinthians 9: 6-15

Luke 17: 11-19

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19:14)

John Birch is a contemporary English Methodist Local Preacher who has a wonderful way of using deep thought and profound emotion to shape his prayers. As he says on his website, a prayer must not remain on the page, but leave it and touch both reader's and listener's heart.

On this Harvest Thanksgiving Sunday, I thought it appropriate to begin with this prayer by John.

*We see signs of summer's passing in golden leaves,
shortening days, misty mornings, autumn glow.*

*We sense its passing in rain that dampens,
winds that chill, Harvest's bounty placed on show.*

*Creator God, who brings forth
both green shoot and hoar frost,
sunrise and sunset,*

we bring our thanks

for seeds that have grown,

harvests gathered,

storehouses filled,

mouths fed.

And, as your good earth rests

through winter's cold embrace,

we look forward to its re-awakening

when kissed by Spring's first touch.

Wonderful words, wonderful imagery, wonderful poetry.

And we need powerful imagery to celebrate the harvest and our gratitude for all the food that we receive from land and sea.

During my years in Toronto, the church I served there would echo the book of Deuteronomy by having a jug of milk and a jar of honey on the Communion Table, symbolic of the promised good land. Hear again the promise from today's reading: *"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and*

bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you."

Sounds so much like the promise of Canada. So this day, while we give thanks for the promise of this land, we remember with gratitude all who care for this inheritance. We remember the farmer and the fisher, those who till the soil and seed the land then after much worry and work gather in the harvest, those who care for livestock, brave the sea waves, transport and prepare the harvest. It is good to have a day, a weekend, set aside to give thanks for the wonderful variety and quality of food our land and sea produces. A day to remember the long food chain that stretches back before we buy our packaged and prepared food at the store. To be grateful for all those who labour to produce food both for us and for those beyond our borders, and to remember those labourers who come from other countries to help bring in the harvest, workers who in these still pandemic times risk their health and their very lives for our sake.

Deuteronomy goes on to remind, well to warn, the people of Israel, and us as well, not to forget the One behind the gift of the harvest. It's easy for us to see the harvest as purely a human venture, to congratulate ourselves on our skill and ability and cleverness. We think of the systems of transportation and organization and marketing which bring us our food, and commend ourselves on how well it operates. Yet all we have has come about because of the wonderful cycle of nature devised and created by our loving God, a cycle we are interfering with at our peril through climate change.

The biblical story reminds the people of God that the harvest, the gifts of field and orchard, of birds and fish, that food, is meant to be shared and given generously to others in need.

Think of Paul's words to the Corinthians: *"the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

Next Sunday we are embarking on two aspects of St Paul's admonition to cheerfully give.

The first aspect focusses on Stewardship. We begin our annual Stewardship campaign next Sunday and I would encourage you, well let's use a stronger term, I would urge you to carefully consider the financial need of our congregation for next year and balance that out with how cheerfully you might give of your resources. Enough said for now, because I don't want to steal the thunder of the Stewardship Committee.

The second aspect for next Sunday focusses on the donation of non-perishable food items. October 16th is World Food Day, and the Canadian Food Grains bank has suggested the theme of "Until All are Fed". All food items will go to Winnipeg Harvest, and we know that the need in our community, our city and our province is great, and every item that we can place in the boxes in the Narthex will be appreciated by those in need.

But before you pull some dusty tins out of the pantry, have a look at the date.

Recently I made borscht. I make it once a year, when the beets and other vegetables have come down in price and are fresh, and it takes much of the day to make. I call it Don's borscht, because it has everything I can think of, without following any particular recipe. Onions, carrots, celery, potatoes, pork and beans, beets, cabbage, tinned tomatoes, steak cut into tiny pieces, beef stock. I'm sure I've forgotten something. These five pounds of beets, a head of cabbage, five pounds of onions, and so on took three large soup pots.

Downstairs I found some tins of tomatoes. The date? 2015 I think. And then I noticed the slight bulge on the bottom of the tin. Since food poisoning was not on the list of ingredients for this borscht, I looked around for more recent purchases and found some safe 2023 tomatoes.

The moral of the story. Please make sure any tinned or canned goods have expiry dates substantially beyond October 2022. The same goes for dry goods like pasta and Kraft dinner and crackers and cookies, or jars of cheese whiz or spaghetti sauce and so on. We should never donate anything that we are not prepared to eat ourselves.

We are told in Deuteronomy, and in the gospel reading, to be grateful for what we have received. In Deuteronomy it is the hoped for Promised Land, the land entered into after forty years of wilderness wanderings. In the Gospel of Luke we hear of only one leper out of ten, a Samaritan, who gives thanks for being healed by Jesus. So gratitude is an important theme in both readings.

But so is generosity. These days perhaps more so.

We might actually say that generosity is gratitude put into action. We can be grateful for the blessings we have in our life and express that gratitude by sharing with others. And each of us might have our own mental list of what we are grateful for, a count your blessings tally that perhaps includes family and friends, a home and food on the table, a safe community, belonging to a faith community, health and happiness. These are indeed blessings, gifts that enrich and strengthen our daily living. Blessings for which we rightly give thanks to God.

On this Harvest Thanksgiving day, in the midst of these trying times, let us give thanks for all the blessings we have, let us continue to be generous in our sharing of our resources and of ourselves, and let us stay hopeful and strong in God's great love and grace.

And we end with these words by John Birch.

*May this eternal truth be always in our hearts,
That the God who breathed this world into being,
Placed stars into the heavens
And designed a butterfly's wing,
Is the God who entrusted his life*

*To the care of ordinary people,
Became vulnerable that we might know
How strong is the power of Love,
A mystery so deep it is impossible to grasp,
A mystery so beautiful it is impossible to ignore. Amen.*