

One of the most surprising and touching stories I have read this year of commemorating the 100th anniversary of the start of WW1 is that of trench gardens. Some of the soldiers grew flowers and vegetables behind the lines bringing a touch of home to the front line, a poignant reminder of the fields and gardens they had left behind. Many of the troops were countrymen who had worked on farms or gardened on the large estates of that era. So it was that they brought husbandry and creative skills to the alien landscape of the battlefield and in some of the black and white photographs, rows of cabbages and marigolds can be seen next to the sandbags in stark contrast to the squalor and horror of the western front.

Constant shelling, bombardment and the use of poison gas destroyed acres of farmland during that terrible war and indeed in all wars. Today we see on television that there are people who have not got a harvest to celebrate because of civil war or as a result of inner turmoil within their own country. Once again we can see God's good earth being destroyed and laid waste.

Harvest time gives us the opportunity for thankfulness: that we can farm in peace because of the sacrifices of others and the good weather this year means there has been a good harvest in this country.

Harvest time is a time to be thankful to remember God's goodness as we enjoy the sight of a full barn, pantry, freezer and well stocked supermarkets. Harvest is a time for celebration as we come to church to give thanks for God's bounty and generosity. There is something very comforting about harvest festivals in how we can feel secure with all the good things we have full cupboards we have before the darker days and the winter storms begin.

But harvest festivals should be a time for feeling uncomfortable too. In the Bible, harvest and judgement go together - the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13 verses 24-30 is a stark reminder of this that one day we will be called to account.

Not every family has a full store cupboard which is why we have foodbanks. Something is going wrong somewhere. So although it is right and good to be thankful, we need to ask ourselves how our thankfulness can be expressed in our deeds and actions.

We need to keep asking these questions of ourselves. Harvest is the point where far from sitting back and thinking how fortunate we are, we have to be prepared to address the needs of our community and the needs of the wider world so that we are ready for the time when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Best wishes Janet