

I want to take you on a journey of imagination. Imagine that I had... an allotment. Not perhaps that easy, but just imagine... And last spring I prepared the ground, and using all my vast gardening knowledge, and planted my seeds. And now from my allotment has come a rich harvest - beans and potatoes, carrots and onions, apples and rhubarb, courgettes and the odd marrow. A great array of fruit and vegetables, all produced by my little patch of ground...

Well, you never know - it might happen one day. Possibly at the same time as you see a little group of pigs flying through the clouds... but just imagine.

I know that they wouldn't be all ready at the same time, before you tell me afterwards - but just imagine that I had all this wonderful harvest. What am I going to do?

Well obviously Sarah and I are experts at preserving and bottling and freezing the produce we grow each year. But what else might I do?

I hope that one of my first thoughts would be to give thanks. I might have used my own muscles to dig the ground and my own deep knowhow to plant the seeds. But like the farmer in the parable, I can't actually make them grow. I do my bit and then God does his bit, through the soil, and the air, and the sun, and the rain. So I hope I would begin by giving grateful thanks to God.

And then I hope that my second response would be to share what I have been given. Like those who have brought gifts for today's service. Like the kind folk who leave beans and apples in the church porch, and more optimistically the odd marrow. I hope I would know the pleasure of simply giving away some of what has been given to me.

And lastly, I guess that I might be encouraged to look ahead, and when next Spring comes, to plant again. I have seen how this miracle happens - tiny seeds produce wonderful things to eat - and I would want more of that.

I think I've almost convinced myself to get an allotment! Today, as well as giving thanks for the wonderful edible harvests that we enjoy, we also have the chance to look back and reflect on another sort of harvest. The harvest that God has been growing in these years that we have shared together in his allotment here, in the church.

If we look back to all we have shared together, and if we think about our own life with God, I'm sure that we will each have different things that come to mind. There are so many for me, and I don't want to turn this into a ten year report, so here are just a few...

It has been wonderful to see friendship and welcome growing in our church - growing further, I should say, because we found the church here very welcoming and friendly when we came.

So yesterday I was at 'Church in the Village' and saw the lovely welcome offered there to all the people who came for that time of fellowship. And here in church at Coffee, cake and chat many people are welcomed - whether or not they come to services - and for newcomers to the village that friendly welcome is really important. And we've added to our existing thriving social groups new ones like Women@theWell and Just a few Nuts.

It's been great too to see the caring side of the church extending - through our services in the care homes, and through the care we try to show to people in our community and for each other. And I've been delighted to see the help and friendship offered more widely to some of the very vulnerable people who are seeking asylum in the city, through our support group - like the young woman living far from her family who was shown kindness as she gave birth to a little baby boy yesterday.

It has been really good too to be able to open the church as a place of quiet and prayer. And we have seen God begin to grow different opportunities for sharing prayer together here or in each other's homes. And I think that we have known a closeness to God here, together, as we have met week by week, and travelled each year through the profound story of the love that Jesus has brought us.

And that shared journey mirrors the different journeys of faith that many people have been on over these past years - coming along to church for the first time, maybe

preparing for confirmation or joining a church group, maybe developing their own ministry or growing deeper in their spiritual lives. All the various ways that God has been leading us on.

So today we can look back at this wonderful harvest - the harvest which we have had the privilege of being part of. Sarah and I may happen to be the ones whose move gives it all a focus today, but this is something we have shared in together and contributed to together.

So what is our response to this harvest that God has been growing amongst us? Well, like the mythical harvest in my allotment, our first response must be thankfulness. Thankfulness that God has used our efforts and through his grace has grown these gifts. As it says in the hymn 'all our efforts are nothing worth unless God bless the deed: vain our hopes for the harvest tide till he brings life to the seed.' So we thank God for his life giving grace, in individual lives, in changed relationships, in our activities and ministry, in all that we have shared.

And our next response must be to share from the bounty that we have received. Have you found it a blessing to be part of the church? Then pray about how you can help others you know share this blessing - and ask God to guide you about when is the right time to say a gentle word. Have you found a deep spiritual resource in going along to Waiting in Silence, or being part of a Chad group, or coming to the Thursday communion, or using the Bible

Reading Fellowship notes? Tell others about it - offer them the chance to share the blessing. Follow Hazel's example with the BRF notes - she's a great salesperson!

Or maybe you have found great fulfilment in being involved in outreach - through care or through cake - or in getting involved with children and young people - or in having a role in our worship. Who else might be open to the joy of being used by God in these ways too? Who might just be waiting for your invitation to join in?

Or maybe you are just grateful for the way that God has been close to you, and helped you over the past years. Who might he be calling you to share that experience with, so that they might know it too?

Lastly, as we take time to appreciate this harvest, we are reminded that we can put our trust in God for the future. He is the God who will keep on growing good things in our lives and in our church, if we will let him. So I am excited about all that God will do in and through St. Nic's Church in the future. There are so many possible new ways to grow - to grow closer in fellowship, to move deeper in faith and prayer, to reach out further with care and friendship - not least towards the folk in the new houses just around the corner. A bit like Tess and Claudia on *Strictly* I want to say 'Keeeeeep planting!'

Last week I had the lovely job of blessing the new garden down by the lone singer statue. I was particularly

delighted because I knew that the idea for the garden had come from a Lent Group we had a few years back when we were thinking about mustard seed stories. Jan's mustard seed dream was to see Codsall have a community garden - and she and others has been involved in designing part of the garden, and making it happen. It's a great reminder of the ways that God can grow things in and through us, if we let him.

So on this Harvest Sunday, as we look back on this other harvest that we have shared, we give our grateful thanks to our loving God for all that he has given us. And we offer him our help in sharing these good gifts more widely, in the ways that he will show us. And we can look to the future in trust, ready to plant for the future.

I want to finish by reading a prayer that I came across when I was clearing out things in my study. It was written by someone at one of our groups - I think it might have been the Lent Group I mentioned. I'm not sure who wrote it - although I have an idea - but it is a wonderfully appropriate prayer for today....