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The World Came to My Place Today

By Revd. Corrie Alexander-Willette

Today we are celebrating our harvest festival. Harvest festivals are celebrated around the world in many different religions and traditions. I have to admit this is my first harvest festival. We have something similar in America called Thanksgiving, but it doesn't happen until November. When I found out we would be having harvest, I asked my friends what exactly is Harvest, and someone sent me a recommendation of a book. It's called The World Came to My Place Today.

As I have started to understand a little bit more about how harvest is celebrated here, that has felt like what I understand it to be. The world has come to our place today.

Noticing What We Take for Granted

In the book, George's grandfather comes to look after him and his sister during a rainy day when they can't go out. He begins helping them discover where the ordinary things around them have come from. Their food and their clothes and their toys, the things they use every day. George begins to realise the world is already here. It's been here all along. He just hadn't noticed.

I think that is a good place to begin a harvest celebration, especially as my first one here, because harvest invites us to notice. It asks us to stop for a moment and look at something we normally take completely for granted.

Maybe we think about what we ate for breakfast this morning. Perhaps a full English breakfast with eggs and beans and toast and coffee and tea, tomatoes, mushrooms, sausages, bacon. But as we think about the things on our tables, we also need to think of how many places and how many people were involved in getting it to that point. The farmers who grew it, the people who harvested it, the people who processed and packed it and transported it and stocked it on the shelves. And underneath all of that were soil and rain and sunshine, the plants and God's creation.

Most of the time we don't necessarily think about that. We just eat our breakfast. But harvest says: "Stop. Look again. The world has come to our place." That is why the call to worship this morning was so powerful, imagining harvest coming from all over the world—

from avocados and limes to cucumbers and turmeric, figs and almonds, bananas and plantains. Suddenly we realise how much of the world is sitting in our kitchens, sitting in our cupboards, sitting around our dinner tables. The world has come to our place.

We Are Connected

It is important because we don't live isolated lives. None of us grows everything we need. None of us makes everything we use. Our lives are connected with the lives of people we have never met and will never meet. And that's not a problem. That is part of the gift. The gift that harvest is about remembering.

That is also what we see in the harvest festivals of the Bible: Passover, the feast of weeks, the feast of tabernacles. They were celebrations of the harvest, but they were also celebrations of relationship. Relationship with God, relationship with one another, relationship with the land, and relationship with the story of God's people. They gathered, they ate, they remembered, they gave thanks.

Harvest wasn't simply "Look at how much we have." It was also "Look at how much we have received." And once we realise how much we have received, another question follows: What are we going to do with it?

From Gratitude to Generosity

Thanksgiving becomes something more than simply saying, "Thank you for what we have, God." Thanksgiving leads us toward generosity, toward sharing, toward justice, toward recognising that God's abundance isn't meant to stop with us.

Our opening prayer this morning reminded us of this. It gives thanks for the rich harvest of the world and also remembers those who don't have enough, those who are hungry, those who live with scarcity. And it asks God to show us how to share the world's harvest more fairly. And then it said something particularly challenging: "Teach us to value people more than things."

I think that is a good harvest prayer because we can be grateful for a full table without asking whether everyone has a full table. We can celebrate abundance without noticing who has been left out. But harvest asks us to look again, to notice the connections. And once we see those connections, we begin to recognise our responsibility to one another.

That is where Jesus enters the story. Jesus understood something about tables. He understood that tables can show us what the kingdom of God looks like. Jesus broke bread with all sorts of people. He takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it and shares it. And that has become one of the central things we do as Christians. We gather around the table. We take

bread. We give thanks. We break it and we share it.

We are reminded that Jesus's Passover meal—the meal he shared—points us toward God's love for the whole of creation and toward God's kingdom where all—all—are invited to the banquet. Not just the people who have enough. Not just the people we know and like. Not just the people nearest to us in proximity, but all people.

Faith Teaches Us to See Differently

Perhaps that is what Grandpa is teaching George. Perhaps he is teaching him to see things differently. The cereal isn't just cereal anymore. The bicycle isn't just a bicycle. The food isn't just food. There are people behind these things. There are places behind these things. There is creation behind these things. And behind all of that is God.

Perhaps that is one of the gifts of faith. Faith teaches us to look at things and see them differently. We look at bread and see wheat. We look at wheat and see soil and rain and sunshine. We look at food and see farmers. We look at our neighbour and see a person who is made in the image of God. We look at someone on the other side of the world and realise that their life is connected to ours.

And once we notice, the question changes. It becomes: What are we going to do with what we have been given?

If God has given us abundance, how will we share it? If God has given us resources, how will we use them? If God has given us a voice, whose voices will we amplify? If God has given us welcome, who will we welcome? If God has given us enough, how might we help someone else have enough?

Harvest: Notice, Remember, Share

Imagine holding the globe in your hands. Imagine all of the countries that are represented here in this space today. And then imagine all the other places represented by the things you will eat today, the clothes you will wear, the objects you will use, the food you will put on your table.

The world is already here. The world has come to our place today.

And so our invitation of harvest today is to simply notice. Notice the gift and the connection, the people and the abundance. And then ask ourselves: What are we going to do with what we have received?

Because Christian gratitude doesn't end with thank you. It becomes a way of living. It

becomes generosity and welcome and justice. It becomes care for God's creation and love. And perhaps that is the harvest God is most interested in. Not just the harvest that comes from our fields, but the harvest that comes from our lives. A harvest of love and joy and peace and generosity.

So this harvest, may we give thanks, may we notice, may we remember, and may we share. Because the world has come to our place today. And now having received the gifts of God's world, may we become part of the gift that God is giving to the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.