

A famous allotmenteer, when asked, by Channel4 News, if he were to become PM replied “If you grow plants and look after your garden, it gives you time to think, it gives you a connection with the natural world and makes you stronger in everything else you do.” (Jeremy Corbyn)

So, in preparation for this day of Harvest Thanksgiving what have we been thinking and what do we wish to strengthen?

My first thought, moving from the deep countryside into the city and particularly this part of the Town, is just how many allotments there are – and how many people are growing plants and looking after plots of earth, connecting with the natural world.

Many of you will know that several of the allotment associations across Newcastle are celebrating their

centenary year and that today an Allotment and Garden Fete is being held in Leazes Park.

Looking briefly at the history of allotments across the UK we find a fascinating story: in some parts people have tended the earth for a thousand years, but the growth of allotments really began with the Industrial Revolution. Of course, there was often in this an element of “the rich” the land-owning and political classes looking after “the poor” – giving them a hobby and ensuring that the devil could not find idle hands.

With the First World War and the U-boat war in the Atlantic (and again with the Second World War) the demand for allotments grew alongside a national call to self-sufficiency.

But self-sufficiency is not really the ethos of allotments at all! My experience, admittedly somewhat dated, is that

allotmenters are a community of companions who work co-operatively, sharing plants and seeds, tools and equipment as well as the fruits of their labours.

My first thought – not least because this is the year when so many allotments are celebrating their centenary – is to give thanks for all those who tend and care for the earth.

But as we celebrate the abundance of harvest so beautifully displayed on our windowsills my second thought is this:

Let us remember that, despite the words of Jesus in this morning's Gospel, many of our brothers and sisters in this land worry about where their next meal is coming from.

Some of you during this past year will have been shocked by the world presented by Ken Loach's film "I, Daniel Blake", which, set in this city, highlights the issues of food poverty and the work of Food Banks.

Newcastle West End Food Bank, which was featured in the film, gave 43,000 three day emergency food supplies in 2015. The Trussell Trust reports an increasing number of and need for Food Banks - in 2016/17, they gave 1,182,954 (one million, one hundred and eighty-three thousand) three day emergency food supplies to people in crisis. They show that the bulk of these people in need are on low income, are experience benefit changes and benefit delays.

Speaking to The Guardian Nigel Webster working with the Trussell Trust in Nottingham argues that we need to ensure that Food Banks don't come to be seen as normal; the Trust therefore works long term to offer advice on money management, eating well, fuel poverty, seeking to break the cycle of poverty.

My second thought – not least because of the generous response from St George’s to appeals from the Food Banks – is to ask how we might strengthen our commitment to work for an inclusive society which does not discriminate on the grounds of economic power.

“If you grow plants and look after your garden, it gives you time to think, it gives you a connection with the natural world and makes you stronger in everything else you do.”

We come today to celebrate Harvest Thanksgiving:

- We give thanks today for the God of the Harvest, who so generously gives gifts to the earth and looks for justice in God’s Kingdom
- We give thanks today for all those who tend and care for the earth working co-operatively with the God of the Harvest

- We are given the opportunity today to rededicate and strengthen our commitment to use our power and influence to challenge and change unjust structures in this land and throughout the world.