

Harvest Home: 111311 Chapel PCA WOW Breakfast

There's a handful of things I have been mulling over for the last few months that I want to tell you about. Then there's something that, if you will, we will do together to enact them.

One is the season. I'm new to using the Anglican Book of Common Prayer for my personal Scripture and prayer. Not having grown up that way, it intrigues me that the old year ends, and the new begins, not January 1, but at the end of November and the beginning of Advent! November is the last month of the calendar. All Saints Day is the last saint day. Then our anticipation of Christ begins in that quiet dark of early winter. So November is a most fitting end-of-year quiet space for thanksgiving.

Second: all this October and November since I got my fake pumpkins out, brought my plants in and cleaned up my garden a bit, I have been singing "All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin." That's "Come, ye thankful people come, raise the song of harvest-home..." I hope to have us sing it here at the end of our time together.

Third: I remember "Harvest Home" in my West Philly Baptist Church at Thanksgiving time. As a child, I was astounded by the gigantic wicker cornucopia that appeared magically on the stage. And I was deeply moved by what would happen: at the beginning of that service, as the congregants came in, they would walk in front of everybody down to the cornucopia and add their cans of sweet potatoes to a growing pile of food that was being collected for distribution to the needy. That motion of people bringing the work of their hands to God moved my little soul. It moves my big soul still—more and more.

Fourth—and as I talk, you can take a look at Psalm 104 (the habitat psalm), and the latter part of Psalm 65 (the thanksgiving psalm). I'm continually struck by the way God relates to our work. By work, I have in mind the ordinary stuff we do every day all year long. If we were all farmers, you see, all this might be a bit more evident to us, but it's as true for us Beaver Countyans as it is for farmers. You can think about dirt—soil—here: first, God made it, and makes each clod in every second. You don't have to go to church or Bible Study to find God at work: his works are under your nose and feet, literally. What is more, he makes dirt because he loves it; in fact, his covenant love is just what makes it. And you just have to look at the text and the world to see God delighting in his work.

Fifth: we see another very curious thing in both of these passages about God's playful work that is our world. We see he invites us into the work. He makes it so that we make stuff, we produce. And THEN—he counts our good work, our produce, as his own, taking as much delight in it as if he had done it himself. He takes the credit but wants us to give it. All this doesn't diminish the value of our work, but it renders it deeply significant.

So—in Psalm 104: God makes and sustains our habitat. He makes it for his own delight, and also for the satisfaction of the earth itself (104:13); 65:13. He makes our habitat for us to do things with it: "He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man o

cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.” (104:14-15).

After talking about what the nondomesticated parts of creation *do* as part of what they are—the moon and the lions, etc.—he returns to what humans do as part of what we are: “Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening.” (v. 23)

Immediately following this we get the pinnacle verse of the psalm: “How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” (v. 24) I think what we see here makes it clear that God counts our work as 1) what we humans are supposed to do, and 2) his own. He gives the earth and the work to us. He likes us producing things; he likes us honoring him with it.

In Psalm 65 you get a bit of the same thing. Esp. note the thanksgiving verse, verse 11: after listing all God’s crop-producing works, land, water, and grain, the psalmist says to God, “You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.” Of course this is praise to God. But *whose* are the carts? They’re our carts! —which he counts as his. Our plain old carts that he gave us the trees and brains to make and fill.

So what I’d love for us to do today is enact “harvest home.” By that I mean naming, as concretely as possible our “crops.” Our crops include things we don’t exactly store in the barn: clean diapers, meals fixed, pies and scarves made and given, workers employed, patients cared for, books and songs written, children taught to read, customers’ insurance contracts completed, a pile of good works still in process, and, oh yeah, probably a whole slew of tomatoes. All these not particularly agrarian things, count in just the same way as the crops: resourced by God, out of sheer delight and invitation to join in, cultivated by us derivatively as image bearers, for which we may be blessed by honoring him with our cultivated abundance. By the way—in this church we have a pastor and family who are Makers. But in reality, all of us are God’s makers!

So—work with a partner. Take turns naming to each other very concrete “produce” of your year. Estimate the amounts. Each pair gets... a gourd and a sharpie. Take turns listing your produce on the gourd. Then—we will have a ceremonial, joyful singing of the one verse of “Come Ye Thankful People, Come,” and each pair gets to walk forward and put their produce in the cornucopia. Together we will be thanking the Lord and sharing with Him the delight of the produce He let us collaborate with him to make.

*Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home:
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin;
God, our Maker, doth provide
For our wants to be supplied:
Come to God’s own temple, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home.*

(Henry Alford, 1867)

Almighty and gracious Father, we give thee thanks for the fruits of the earth in their season and for the labors of those who harvest them. Make us, we beseech thee, faithful servants of thy great bounty, for the provision of our necessities, and the relief of all who are in need, to the glory of the Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever, Amen. (BCP Thanksgiving Collect, p. 194)