

*'We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand'*

As a child, growing up in an inner-city environment, I had little idea of how our food was produced. I always loved Harvest Festival, and sang with gusto about ploughing the fields etc, but the produce with which we decorated the church came from the greengrocer on the corner, and my idea of scattering seed was derived from a picture in the Children's Bible of the sower going out to sow, taking seed from a shoulder bag and flinging it in all directions.

I realise, too, how little I was aware of the gradual changing of the seasons. The year was divided into school terms, plus the highlights of Easter (eggs!), Christmas (stockings!) and birthdays (presents! cake!)

How different, now, living in this beautiful place, so aptly known as the Garden of England, intensely conscious of the sheer bounty of nature and the work of those who labour to produce our food, and the gradual changes from spring to summer, autumn to winter.

But I have also come to see another meaning in the well-loved lines of the harvest hymn. As those who care about the wellbeing of our world and our fellow beings, we are all called to work the ground and scatter good seed wherever we are, and though we may not see for ourselves the harvest we have prepared, we trust that our work and commitment have not been in vain. We might reflect that each one of us is somebody's 'harvest', the harvest of all the love, teaching and examples we have received throughout our lives.

As we mourn the death of our beloved Queen, we reflect on the rich harvest she has left us. St Paul describes 'the fruit of the Spirit': love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. It is no exaggeration to say that our late Queen brought to the life she had been called to every one of these gifts. King Charles speaks of all that he has seen in her: her life of duty and service, her love for her people, her deep faith; and he speaks of his determination to follow in her footsteps. Not only the members of her family, but so many others who have been moved and inspired by her life are very much the harvest of this remarkable woman.

At this season of harvest let us give thanks for all those whose love and wisdom have inspired, guided and encouraged us. And let us, in our turn, till the ground and sow the seed for harvests still to come, praying that our efforts maybe 'fed and watered', blessed, 'by God's almighty hand'.

Revd Dr Rosemary Kobus van Wengen, Assistant Priest