

Psalm 104:1,5-18

Matthew 13:1-9. 18-23

You may have guessed from my surname that I am half Irish but one of the surprising things, given my heritage, is that I'm not over keen on potatoes. Bring out the big potato – and show it. I won't give you a thank you for plain boiled potatoes, I can eat a baked potato with enjoyment providing it has a tasty filling. However, I do enjoy mashed potatoes and well-cooked chips. That is something you have learned about me today. Sometimes what goes on in people's lives is not always obvious.

In the story of the wheat we heard earlier you can see fairly soon what happens to the seed that is planted. Some of it doesn't even grow, other withers and dies and only the wheat in good soil lasts and is fruitful. With potatoes, the story is a bit different. You plant the seed potato (*show one*) and then wait. The shoots come up, and you know something is happening. The plants grow and you know they are alive, but you don't know what is going on under the ground. Then, they begin to die away, but still you don't know what is happening below the surface. Still you must wait. Finally the great day comes. Out comes the fork, (*produce one*) on go the wellies, (*produce these too*) and very carefully you start the lifting of the potatoes. This is the exciting moment. What are you going to find? Maybe the plants didn't look too good, but then there are loads of potatoes. Maybe the plants looked great and you had been very pleased, but then the yield is very small.

I asked Andrew Nottage about this year's potato harvest and he tells me: It's been another difficult year for Potato growers and Agriculture in general.

The effect on the market due to coronavirus led to poor demand and prices over the last 18 months.

There were lots of unknowns going into 2021 following Brexit.

Winter 2020/21 was very wet leading to waterlogged fields in January. We received almost twice the average rainfall in January. Farmers were starting to think that it was going to be a late spring. However, February and March were kinder and the soil was starting to dry nicely just after Easter.

Air temperatures were much lower than average in April and although soil conditions were good, farmers rarely feel comfortable planting crops into

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cold soils in the spring. However, interestingly the soil temperatures were around average for the time of year.

Potato planting commenced in earnest in April into good soil conditions. Although air temperatures were cold, soil conditions were good. Nevertheless, crops were a long time emerging, some 2 - 3 weeks longer than normal. Regardless of the growing season ahead this would have an effect on final yield.

Crops in this area narrowly missed damage from May frosts. Unfortunately, the dry soil conditions in May affected the number of potatoes formed on each root further affecting final yield potential.

Crops grew rapidly in June and July due to timely rains. I have never seen such lush green crops this summer – a real pleasure.

The damp , warm summer led to weeks of intense blight pressure. From history we know how devastating blight can be on potato crops. Crops in north Norfolk were particularly affected. 2021 has been the worst year for potato blight I have known.

Maincrop potato harvest is in full swing and many growers will be aiming to finish before the end of October to avoid frost and deteriorating soil conditions.

Yields are average at best but quality on the whole, is OK at the moment.

Sometimes our lives are easier to compare to potatoes than wheat. Only we ourselves and God know what goes on inside us. Maybe we look very holy on the outside, but our lives are not really fruitful. This year the potato plants were lush and green but the yield was not good. Maybe our lives look dim and ordinary, but in our hearts, and our own quiet ways, we are being very fruitful in God's kingdom. Only the time of the harvest will tell. As we celebrate the harvest this year, let's remember these words from the Bible

'...wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness, and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.'

(1 Corinthians 4.5)

Readings**The potato Harvest****Thriplow/Shepreth****Psalm 104:1,5-18****Matthew 13:1-9. 18-23**

As we thank God for the harvest and for all he gives us you might to use this as a chance yourselves again to God. You can ask to be like the strong wheat, or the hidden, fruitful potato plant, bringing forth a life of abundant harvest for God.