

So, I hear you wondering, how do you combine the 8th psalm, a reading from the prophet Joel, the little red hen, where our food comes from, and a greedy farmer, into a single message for Harvest?

Well, if you can work that one out then let me know – no seriously, there is a link between these various strands, so let's try and build that link.

Psalm 8 is an equally wonderful, and challenging psalm. It is all about praising God and thanking him for putting us in that high place in his world whereby we are above everything else in the pecking order. And if we are not careful we can take that to mean we can do what we like with the rest of creation. Indeed many people would say that is precisely what we have done.

But that is not what this psalm is saying – it is saying that we are part of creation as a whole – and I love the reference in the Message's translation to God's 'Genesis-charge'. However we interpret that opening chapter of Genesis in terms of time, and order, at the end of every reference to what God created, God saw that it was good. And so, therefore, we are charged with looking after each part of creation – whether we are at the top of the pile or the bottom.

So the first part of our link is a responsibility to care for all of creation.

When we then come to what the prophet Joel has to say you need to know that Joel is talking to the people of Judah after they have been exiled from their country – indeed their country has suffered a number of invasions from different armies, and so they must feel pretty vulnerable.

The reference to the swarming locusts, the hopping locusts, the stripping locusts and the cutting locusts are referring to these invasions: invasions that the Lord God allowed to happen, or according to Joel, armies that the Lord sent to Judah, because they were so disobedient. But despite this, God is also promising to make things right again. 'Once again you will have all the food you want – indeed earlier in the passage Joel tells the people, 'Don't be afraid, you animals of the field, for the wilderness pastures will soon be green.'

Yes God's people may go through difficult times – Jesus never suggested that following him would be easy – but through the harvest which is available to each and every one of us, our needs are provided for.

So the second part of our link is not to be afraid – because God will care for us.

But that is not achieved by sitting on our backsides and doing nothing. It is not good enough to only offer help when we think we will gain from our offers or when it suits us. The little red hen shows us precisely that. The poor hen wanted help to do all the work as she worked towards making the bread that she needed to feed herself, but the cat, dog and duck were having none of it. Perhaps they were busy.

Perhaps they had things they would rather do than help the hen. Or perhaps they simply couldn't be bothered. Whatever, by not helping when help was needed, they lost out in the long run. A bad choice you could say.

So our third link refers to making the right decisions at the right time, so as to avoid missing out at a later stage.

Then what about those thoughts about the amount of food that is imported to this country from the rest of the world. Now, I have to say this is not a simple issue. Clearly, as a country, we need to import a lot of food in order to feed ourselves. We simply cannot produce enough food. What is more, there are many countries in the world whose very survival relies on their ability to make and export huge amounts

of food to, particularly, western, economically rich, countries. But also, can we, by our actions as a country, effect how people are treated in the food industry, in their countries?

Now, let me say, I am no expert in this and I am simply trying to point out what might be possible. But it is clear that by using their buying power, organisations like Tesco have had a significant impact on banana growing companies. To me this is the next generation of Fairtrade – and when the Fairtrade movement started we, as individuals, had to make the choice between paying a bit more for our food or ignoring the conditions that food was produced under.

But where does leave you and me today. I was shocked the other day when I was looking at the apples we had brought from Waitrose to discover that the apples we had bought at about the height of the apple season in this country, came from South Africa. That somehow seemed wrong to me. Yes, the oranges also came from South Africa, but then the mass production of oranges is simply not possible in this country. When we look at the food that we buy, there are some decisions to be made that are harder than others. If we want strawberries in January we will probably have to choose between imported strawberries and no strawberries. But if we want Apples in October, the decision may be to choose our favourite sort of apple that has been imported, or a slightly less favoured, English apple. But surely, there is a real value in our making decisions to use seasonal produce, produced near to our homes, thus reducing the effect on our world by reducing transportation.

So our next link is again about making the right decision – even when there may be a cost to ourselves for the benefit of the planet.

And finally our greedy farmer. In many ways this story has very little to do with a harvest festival. If it had we should be celebrating the success of the crops he was growing. But there is a link to what we've been looking at. When we have much of anything, we must always have one eye on those who don't. You know we have made a gesture to that today by our harvest gifts, and thank you very much for all those gifts.

Yes, we want to take care of our resources; yes it is important that if we are in a position to make ourselves financially secure then we should do that – but not at the cost of others.

Do you know, it doesn't happen so much these days because cold callers on the telephone seem to be more after tricking us out of money, but a few years ago there seemed to be a spate of people who thought they could make money by advising people how to pay less tax. And I always found the best way to respond to their opening questions of, "Are you happy with the amount of tax you pay?" was to say, "Yes" – not only because it shut them up, but it's true. Sharing what we have – and that is how a fair tax system should work – is to me a very Christian approach to life.

So I think the last element to our links today is the need to be generous whenever we can.

And what you then get from the various parts of our service is a Christian approach to Harvest. God created this world for us and it is our duty to care for it. At times that can be a huge challenge, and what is going to happen to this world can be very worrying, but Jesus made it very clear that we should not worry. But he also made it very clear that doing nothing was not an option – Jesus expects us to act, and we do have some choices that we can make which can help the care for our world, and we should make those decisions – being as generous in our decision-making process that we can. So I think that our link

between a bits of our service are if there were to be a story in the New Testament about Jesus celebrating a Harvest Festival, then his message to us would be very much along those lines.