

HARVESTING TIME by Rev Sue Woolley

I count myself so very blessed to live in the country. Life in our little Northamptonshire village is still very much linked to the cycle of the seasons, and at this time of year I have to remember to allow a little extra time for journeys, as the chances of getting stuck behind a tractor are fairly high.

Because this is the beginning of the Harvest season. The Celts celebrated it at the festival of Lughnasadh, or Lammas, on 1st August. The wheat and barley in the surrounding fields has begun to ripen and turn gold, and the farmers are praying for a few weeks of good weather, to complete the process, and to get the crops in safely.

I think it is a shame that Western society has grown so far away from the rhythm of the seasons, and the agricultural cycle. Even when I was a child, which I know my children think was sometime in the Dark Ages, but really isn't so long ago, harvest still meant something, at least to a child brought up in the countryside.

But now, ask anyone where their food comes from, and they are likely to reply "from the supermarket". You can buy pretty much anything all the year round – strawberries in December, parsnips in June. We've got a recipe book at home called 'The Cookery Year', which is full of wonderful recipes to cook for each month of the year, using "seasonal ingredients". And in the beginning of it, there is a four-page table entitled 'The Fruit and Vegetable Year', which explains what you can get from which country at particular times of year. It makes fascinating reading.

But this universal bounty (in the West) has its down side. We have lost contact with the changing order of the seasons – and I think it is a loss. The Western demand for all kinds of everything all the year round has had far-reaching effects all over the world. Farmers in developing countries now grow "cash crops" such as coffee and bananas, instead of food to feed themselves and their families.

Most people in the West already have absolutely everything they need. And yet, we seem to have this hunger for more and more, the newest, the brightest, the glitziest gadgets we can lay our hands on. Last year's gadgets are discarded as "so yesterday" so we have to work yet harder and longer to "keep up with the Jones's".

But need it be this way? As Brighton Unitarian John Naish so wisely writes: "We have to learn to live 'post-more' ... Enoughness is a path to contentment." We don't seem to appreciate all the marvels that we have, including abundant food. So maybe this year, we can remember to give thanks for all the farmers and agricultural labourers the world over, whose hard work enables us to eat what we want, when we want.

I'm a beginner at this, but am finding that when I do remember to be mindful, and to think about the spiritual aspects of everyday life, I'm enjoying it more, appreciating things more. Hopefully in time, if I practice it faithfully, it will transform my life, and how I connect with other people and with the world. May we all remember to count our blessings, and realise how very rich we are, not only during this season of Harvest, but all the year round.