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As I write this, preparations are in being put in place once again for this year's round of Harvest services. I have many ask, 'What is the point of Harvest anymore?' The answer is quite simple - thanksgiving; for our farmers, our beautiful rural community, our food and produce, creation and all its splendours, for our church and for each other. 'All the benefits of this life' as the Book of Common Prayer puts it.

We give thanks too for our very lives and God's blessing upon them, through good and ill, from first to last breath. For those you who like me are getting older, and less active physically, we may be becoming more thoughtful and reflective. We be may even, for reasons of sickness or the incapability of older age, becoming powerless and vulnerable. One of the spiritual classics of our time is W.H Vanstone's 'The Stature of Waiting', in which the author describes Jesus' life in the Gospel accounts falling into two parts: dynamic action, and then (from the start of his passion in Gethsemane) a brief but intense passivity in which he is in the hands of others, totally dependent on what they do to him and what they do for him: he is treated as worthless, bound, imprisoned, mocked, and helped carry his cross, then to be nailed to a cross. Vanstone takes this deepest of all mysteries, that of God revealing himself as one who knows what it is to be vulnerable and powerless, and links it to the pattern of our own lives as we grow old, increasingly becoming those who are no longer proactive but reactive, people who must learn to be waited on, to let go with grace and not feel they are of any less value as human beings.

Harvest reminds us that we each have a unique story to tell. We each need to discern it and marvel at how, as we look back, it begins to make sense, and how having come through perhaps a bit battered, we have learned lessons that make us more rounded people; how all in the end is part of the harvest of our lives. For those who are granted the grace of a reasonably healthy old age, one of its gifts is

the chance to explore the shape of one's life and its inner journey - all the relationships, all the experiences of beauty and sorrow, love and loss, all that we know, which have formed and changed us, and made us who we are. The temptation in old age is to say, 'I am what I was'. But that's only half the truth. Until the day I die I am what I am and when I come to die, I shall no longer have a past, but I shall be remembered as a complete being formed by my relationships and by all that happened to me and what I made of it. This uniqueness made in God's image that is 'me' is what I have to offer to my Creator, who knows me infinitely better than I know myself, and graciously welcomes me home, not in spite of what I have been but because of who I am loved by Him. The need to be affirmed, to feel ourselves of value, beloved, is part of what it means to be human and as we celebrate Harvest again, we rejoice again at our connectedness to each other, to the Creation, and to all things.

Every blessing to you all.

Rev James