

Harvest in a time of climate crisis



Bible verse: Genesis 45: 5-7



A reflection by the
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“If my children succeed in their education, one day they’ll eat what they want.” These are Grace’s words, the words of a mother concerned for the future of her family. A widow living in rural Kenya, she speaks as a mum who has sometimes been unable to see a good return on her harvest of maize due to rain or drought. Can you imagine what that is like? Not knowing how you will feed your children, or where the next meal will come from?



During this past year we have sometimes found supplies of food in our stores here in the UK have been a little inconsistent. The pandemic; Brexit; and then the saga of the container ship, Ever Given, stuck in the Suez Canal; have meant that we have known some small glitches in the availability of food on the shelves of our supermarkets. For some, facing financial crisis, it has meant the need for support from a foodbank. Some of us however may have put our hand to growing vegetables in our gardens or baking our own bread, but often this has been more as a hobby than a necessity. What if we needed to rely on providing food for our families through our own efforts? And how would we feel, if having tried so hard to grow our own, the challenges of our climate and weather were to dash our hopes of a good harvest?



The story of Joseph in the Old Testament shows us that famine has touched the lives of many families through the ages. The country of Egypt shares



Grace, Kenya

something of the challenges that face Grace’s family, with the regular flooding of the banks of its river Nile. Over time, and with the building of the Aswan dam in the 1960s, farmers have learnt to adjust agricultural practice and been able to benefit from improved irrigation methods. But back in Joseph’s day, there were huge challenges in predicting the fruitfulness of the harvest. One year there might be an overabundance, enough to share, but another, insufficient to feed those in one’s own family.

The story of Joseph is one of God’s provision and of human partnership. His story begins when we see him as a lad, Joseph the dreamer who thought big! As a younger child in a larger family of brothers he found himself in the uncomfortable position of being despised by his siblings, partly due to his own arrogance and also because he was his father’s favourite. As a result, they wanted rid of him. Saved by his eldest brother from death, he was sold into slavery and that is how he ended up in the foreign country of Egypt. But his predicament doesn’t end there, as he finds himself again the object of favouritism, this time at the hands of his master’s wife. His refusal to be complicit in an affair means that he is thrown into prison.

It is in prison that his reputation as one who not only has dreams but can interpret them, comes

to the notice of the Pharaoh. Pharaoh's dreams are disturbing, and even more so, as Joseph recognises in them that the land will experience a prolonged period of initial abundance of harvests followed by many years of famine. Joseph suggests a plan as to how the country might respond to such a challenge – to store the excess food during the time of plenty in order that there would be sufficient for the time of need. And so, he gets the job!

And it is because of that foresight and wise decision-making that not only the people of Egypt but those in neighbouring countries too, were able to provide food for their families. And it is at that point that we see Joseph reunited with his family. Their harvests have failed, and they have insufficient to provide for their large family tribe and so have come for food from their Egyptian neighbours. In so doing, they inadvertently fulfil those old dreams of Joseph where he was in a position of power over his brothers. It takes some time for them to discover the truth and then reconciliation becomes possible.



It's a convoluted tale with many twists and turns which not only relates a family saga with TV soap-like quality, but also tells of the provision of God at a time of need.

We often recognise God's goodness when we celebrate harvest, as the One who provides from the goodness of the earth, but I wonder if we also see how God works in partnership with humankind. In this story of Joseph, we see that although much goes wrong for Joseph and he faces trauma and tragedy along the way, yet he finds himself in a position to be able to help his own family when the need arises. I've often wondered what would have happened if Joseph's story had taken a different turn and he had stayed home! Although it's hard to see that God

would have planned such a course of events, yet God is able to bring something good from what has been. And that is our experience too, isn't it? Life as followers of Christ is not an easy road. We can know hardships, difficulties and tragedy along the way and yet God is present in them with us. And we hold on to the promise that "all things will work together for good".



This Harvest-time, how might we engage with God in partnership to bring something good from what is a crisis? The world is beginning to recognise the effects of climate change, the way in which we are destroying the wonderful world God has created through our own selfish actions. For too long we have thought only of our immediate needs rather than considering our neighbours. How many of us are even aware of the Graces in our world?

Even as we engage in a vaccine programme that will protect ourselves and our families from Covid 19, we appear to be unconcerned of the many around the world who have yet to have such an opportunity. In our abundance how might we be givers and sharers with others?

Joseph's story reminds us that our vision should extend not just to those immediate neighbours but to our global partners too. We share a responsibility collectively for the way in which we have neglected to care for God's world and so it seems only fair that those of us with more should share the abundance we have with others. Joseph could so easily have held back allowing personal resentment to prevent generosity but rather he acknowledged God's provision for him and wanted to share that with his family. May we recognise Grace's desire that her children should be able to "eat what they want", as a desire we can share in with her, as her extended family.

