

[Genesis 8:15-22](#)

If I turned up this morning with all three volumes of The Lord Of The Rings, opened one of them at random, and read to you about the battle of Isengard, you might think it was interesting but how much sense would it make to you?

If you saw on the stage a part of Romeo and Juliet where the two lovers are professing their devotion to each other but you knew nothing about the hostility between the Montagus and the Capulets, what meaning would you draw?

And if the first instalment you ever watched of Eastenders was Dirty Den serving divorce papers on his wife Angie in a Christmas Day episode one year, might you ask yourself, 'Well, what led to that?'

These things don't make much sense on their own, do they?

Yet that's exactly how we often treat the Bible in church. It's why I like to preach on a sequence of readings from the same book if I can. That's why many of my sermons and videos in recent weeks have been from the Gospel according to Mark.

But on a special occasion like today we have to break the pattern and it means taking a passage out of nowhere. If only this week's reading from Mark had been suitable!

Now you will pick some of the context of Genesis 8 immediately. You will realise this is the end of the Flood, and that's useful for understanding these verses, but we'll need to set it in a wider story. This passage makes more sense in the context of what has already happened earlier in Genesis, and in the context of the great story that all the books of the Bible in their vast diversity combine to tell.

Putting it in that wider context, I'm calling this story of harvest and other good things one of 'Reversing The Curse.'

The key reference here is not so much Genesis 6, where the story of the flood begins, although that is relevant. The big connection is with Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve fail to follow the terms and conditions on the apple and the tree of life. That poetic story of the human race and sinfulness contains references to the damage that sin causes. It isn't just that it fractures our relationship with God, it also damages our relationships with other human beings as men dominate women (which only comes in the curse), and with the wider

creation. We see hard, physical toil at work as one sign of the curse, and we see the pain of childbirth as another. In the words of Bob Dylan, 'Everything is broken.'

The flood in Genesis shows then that the problems in the Garden of Eden have escalated to the whole human race. This is the point where wickedness is in such a frenzy that God resorts to drastic measures.

But now, after the flood, God expresses his deepest desire, which is for salvation rather than judgment, and it's a salvation that reverses all the curses of sin – the breaks with God, one another, work, family, and creation. And so we heard at the end of the reading,

²¹ The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart:
'Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.'

²² 'As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease.'

Despite 'every inclination of the human heart [being] evil from childhood' God will seek to save people from sin. One day it won't be Noah's burnt offerings of clean animals and clean birds (verse 20), God will take sacrifice for sin into his own being in the Person of his Son.

The brokenness between human beings is something God longs to heal, too, and human beings get a fresh start in this story with Noah's family. They are far from perfect, and soon even righteous Noah himself causes embarrassment for his sons by getting drunk.

And as God shows this preference for salvation, the other ruptured parts of existence are up for healing, even if they are not mentioned here. If work now brings toil and pain, then it is a Christian call to work to heal that. Right now in golf, the Ryder Cup is underway between the USA and Europe. Samuel Ryder, who donated the gold trophy, was a Christian entrepreneur, who

pioneered paying sick pay to his employees, not wanting anyone to go penniless because they were too unwell to work.¹

Other Christian business founders have done similar things down the years. You've probably heard the stories about George Cadbury and Joseph Rowntree, but you can add to that list people such as Sir William Hartley the jam-maker, William Colgate, Henry Heinz, Henry Crowell the co-founder of Quaker Oats, and in more recent years Anthony Rossi, the founder of the Tropicana drinks company. All said that their Christian values should imbue their businesses and make things good and honest for their employees and their customers.²

The response to the curse of pain in childbirth mentioned in Genesis 3 is seen many ways, as Christians get involved in medicine, in pregnancy crisis centres, and in adoption and fostering agencies.

But by now you're probably thinking, 'But I came to a harvest festival! Where's the harvest theme in all this?' It's there at the climax of the reading. Verse 22 again:

²² 'As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease.'

Harvest is all of a piece with this. God with his desire for salvation is not content to look at a broken world where people do not have enough to eat, whether it is a crisis, ongoing unemployment, steeply rising energy bills, or the damage of climate change, especially in the developing world.

And that calls all of us to involvement. We cannot leave things as they are. We cannot tolerate unjust suffering and the treatment of human beings as just some kind of collateral damage in a wider project.

Remember, God's final word is not judgment but salvation. And salvation is not just a private spiritual knees-up between me and God, it is the remaking of the whole broken creation. So God lays it out that this means a good and steady source of food for all (seedtime and harvest), facilitated by a balanced climate (cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night).

Therefore, when we bring our harvest gifts today and we dedicate them to Woking Food Bank, we are not just saying that we are grateful that we can enjoy our food. We are saying that, but we are saying much more.

As we have laid our gifts before the Lord this morning, I believe we are saying, we will not rest while people do not have the harvests that we have. We will give. We will pray. We will campaign and we will act. And what we shout for in the larger world we will show in our smaller worlds, by our acts of hospitality.

Because the will of God is one where not only the rich can feast, but that all can be invited to the feast of the kingdom. Every time we come to Holy Communion we look backwards to the Cross where we are put right with God, forwards to the wedding feast of the Lamb, and to the present where the Holy Spirit enables us to become junior partners in the work of God.

And within all that, harvest festival is a pledge of allegiance to the kingdom of God. As the Holy Spirit helps us to co-operate with the will of God, we promise our own parts in the remaking of the world:

- Our witness to the redeeming love of God in Christ that brings sinners into fellowship with him;
- Our experience of reconciliation with one another which we put into practice to help heal other relationships;
- Our efforts to return purpose and wholeness to the drudgery of work;
- Our concern to be pro-life, not just from conception, but all the way to the grave;
- Our campaigning and our lifestyle that seek to ensure all have a climate in which they can grow a healthy harvest.

For that is where the divine promise we read today of seedtime and harvest, summer and winter belongs in the great story of God – in a story in which our God is making all things new.

¹ <https://licc.org.uk/resources/the-ryder-and-solheim-cups-golfing-for-gods-glory/>

² https://issuu.com/salvationarmyuk/docs/wc_15_august_2020_web