

Friends,

It seems that Autumn has arrived in Surrey. While I've mostly heard grumbling and complaints about it, I'm actually happy. You see, Autumn is my favourite time of year. I love the crisp feel of the air, the smell of woodsmoke as people fire up their chimneys for the first time, the crunch of fallen leaves on the ground.

For some reason, though, Autumn ignites in me a kind of nostalgia. I'm a big fan of history year-round, but there's something about this season that causes me to look around and wonder what this area looked like hundreds of years ago. Who lived here? What kind of lives did they lead? What was the world like?

One of my previous churches was in an area that was predominately farmland. My second year there, 'Tink' O'Neal, an 85-year-old farmer, arranged for me to ride on the combine with his son as they harvested beans. I spent about an hour up there, watching the stalks disappear under the head, talking about the way this was done when Tink was a young man, how he had to clear the field and start from scratch, shaping the land to be able to be able to feed his family.

Tink's son, Roger, was joking about how he basically just steers the combine. "When something breaks down," he said, "instead of looking for the problem, we just read off a computer code for another computer to tell us what the problem is."

Riding in that combine, I started to relate this to my own area of work, and the metaphor that could apply between farming and the church. The technology in both has changed exponentially in the past 50 years, and probably in the 50 (and 100 years) before that, but the basic process is still the same. The O'Neal's are still reaping crops, we're still reaping souls. Farmers could hang on to the technology of the past, but their yield would be a lot less. Instead, the basic process of cutting, shelling, storing, is still there, just more efficient. Churches could hang on to our evangelism and outreach practices of the past, but again, our yield would be less. The process is still the same (telling people about Jesus), but we have to acknowledge that our crops are spread farther out now, and more work is required to "get them to market".

Ok, I'm going to drop the farm metaphor now before it's played out (If it's not already). My point is that farming today is based upon the practices of the past, but looking toward the future. Our churches should be willing to do the same.

In Christ,

Revd Adam Payne