

“Do not worry about anything” says St. Paul. “Just think about all the good things that make you happy, and keep on doing what you have been doing.”

Now, we wouldn't be human if we didn't worry about things. That's the way we are built. But on a day when we are giving thanks for creation in general, and the harvest in particular, we should think first of all the wonderful and beautiful things that just are, without us having to worry about them. Long before humankind could express the experience, humans looked at the skies, the creatures, the trees, and the sunshine, and knew that they were part of something bigger and more amazing; that they lived inside a miracle.

Our oldest written scriptures say that God told humans to populate the world and make good use of its resources. “Make good use of them.” God didn't tell us to just make ourselves comfortable and everything would be taken care of for us, and served up to us. Yes, there is plenty in creation that is beneficial to us, but it takes work on our part to find it and cultivate it and prepare it.

Quite a lot of things that grow all by themselves provide good food for humans, but not everything that grows wild is intended as food for us. Rhubarb leaves in a salad is something you'll regret, and quite a lot of those berries and mushrooms that look so enticing will kill you. Some of the things you might want to hunt and kill might taste very good – as long as they don't kill you first!

Humans learned long ago that it isn't very practical to rely for your food on what you can find by foraging and hunting. We have to work at growing things that wouldn't grow by themselves, in places where they wouldn't grow without help, in weather conditions that are unpredictable and potentially disastrous, and in quantities that are unnatural, if we want to survive.

Of course we have things to worry about!

Perhaps Paul's point was that we worry about the wrong things, and we worry about them far too much. Time is precious, but we waste it worrying about things we can't change or about things that probably won't happen or about stuff that we don't have.

The more we worry about these things, the more they fill up our minds and block out our appreciation of all that we have. The more we dwell on them, the more they take over our lives. And that road leads us away from God.

We all have days in our lives when sorrows and troubles overwhelm us. We all sometimes have mornings when it seems like the only thing there is to be thankful for is that we are still here - and some mornings we aren't sure that's a good thing. Those are the days when we most need to remember that we are living inside the miracle of creation. Even in the darkest times, the grateful heart can still look up and see that we are surrounded by more blessings than we could ever count.

We set aside some time at this time of year to remind ourselves of these things. We do this at harvest time, because this is the time when the season of worrying about this year's crops is over: whether it was a good year or a bad year, the growing season is coming to an end, and it is what it is.

Whether the harvest was great or small, we give thanks for it, and for the beauty of fall that surrounds us. And while we give thanks for the bounty of creation, we also give thanks for the remarkable gifts of skill and ingenuity, for the energy and capacity to work, and for the network of human effort that sustains us.

We give thanks at the end of the growing season for the things that grew, the food that will sustain us through the winter, but also for the work that went into it. Remember: God didn't give us pumpkin pie. God gave us the ingredients, and the skill and desire to create something delicious with them, and only then do we get pumpkin pie.

Bread and wine are especially significant symbols in our worship, and nothing could be a more perfect symbol of how we work together with God's world. We don't pick bread off a tree, and wine doesn't spring up out of the ground. God's creation provides the grains and fruits, and the fermentation enzymes that just exist, invisibly, in the air. And God has given us the knowledge, the skill and the motivation to make something new. Only then do we have bread and wine.

So we give thanks. And if you feel swamped by your worries and think that you have nothing to be grateful for, give yourself a shake and try a little harder.

- we are all here, and we are together, even if it is electronically.
- there isn't a blizzard outside.
- it's a beautiful morning in a beautiful part of the world.
- and we are surrounded by people we care about, who care about us.

In the words of one of my favourite prayers, let us give thanks for this beautiful world and ask that "we may never grow dull to its wonder. May we keep our eyes open to the beauty of the sky, the majesty of the stars and the mystery of moonlight. May we see in every sunrise the miracle of life and light renewed, and in every sunset a pledge of unfading light, so that every day may bring the benediction of immortal brightness to our souls."

Lift up your hearts and smell the roses. Life is good!