



HARVEST FESTIVAL

By Bill Pugh

Its beginning goes back to ancient times. The Greeks, Romans and the children of Israel gave the first fruits of the harvest to the priests as a thank you offering for the successful yield of the crop. The Christian Church developed a service of thanksgiving called Harvest Festival. Our churches were decorated with greenery. A large table was loaded with all kinds of produce and flowers. Hymns of praise were sung and the readings, prayers and sermon were focused on joyous thanksgiving to God.

Leftovers were given to local hospitals and needy people. Harvest Festival in a country church was a special time, so close to the heart of things. "We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God's Almighty hand."

Country children well know milk does not originate in bottles and there is more to cereals than supermarket packets. A character of a farmer came into our church

one day as we were setting up and put his contributions down. "There you are minister, a jar of the wife's plum jam. I can't stand the stuff!" Thank goodness she wasn't around. This brings me to the experience of our local Op shop, staffed by a wonderful group of volunteers.

So many organisations and needy people helped via the sale of second hand items. Over Christmas, after having a well-earned break, in spite of well worded signs, they return to find heaps of stuff dumped outside overflowing bins. Much of it rubbish, unsuitable for sale or recycling costing money to be carted to the tip. What kind of giving is that?

As Christians, faithful stewardship is our response to God, the bountiful provider. The practical expression of the two great commandments is how generously we do give, and give again. For God deserves the very best.

Reflection:

TIS 154, Great is your faithfulness, Great is your faithfulness, Morning by morning new mercies we see; All we have needed your hand has provided: Great is your faithfulness, Lord God, to me.