As some of you know, I was a curate near Nottingham, at a parish called Saint Mary's Greasley, which is just outside Eastwood. It had some DH, Lawrence connections and things like that, as well as being a former mining area. And, of course, we had a harvest festival. If you just looked at the church building, it was in quite a rural-looking location. At my first harvest festival, I still remember my vicar saying to me, “you'll need a red stole on Sunday”. That struck me as unusual, as we normally wore green at that time of year. He explained that we used red because the altar frontal has got fruit on it. The altar frontal sometimes has the colours of the season in some churches, and that particular one, the red one, had fruit embroidered on it. That was to represent the fruits of the Spirit, because we use red at Pentecost. At Greasley they got it out at Harvest Festival because it looked right.

It’s often struck me that there are so many the things that we do in church where people invent a retrospective sort of explanation. They’re looking for a kind of spiritual and theological holy reason for it. In fact, the truth is often rather more mundane. For example, someone might say this church has got three doors to speak of the Holy Trinity. But it isn’t true; they just built it with three doors. It happens all the time.

Obviously some things are genuinely symbolic, but I think sometimes we can forget the reality. I'm one of those slightly annoying people who often asks that question why. Why do you say that? Why do we wear that? Why do we have whatever it is? Why do we have Harvest Festival?

Harvest Festival is connected with the seasons of the year and the life of people, but here in town, we aren't an agricultural community. So, what does harvest festival mean for us and why do we have it? They used to be a rather eccentric vicar in Coventry who was still around when I was first a vicar there. Back in the early nineties he had a church with a door big enough to get a car through. On harvest festival Sunday, there would be a car parked at the front of his church because there was enough space to do that. And there would be gearboxes, engines, and all sorts of other components round the windowsills of the church. His argument was that that was the harvest that we had in Coventry. In those days Peugeot were still making cars there, as were London Taxis, and that industry was still a significant employer.

Car making in Coventry has had its heyday, but that was their harvest, and that was his way of dealing with this dilemma. What about us?

I think that Harvest serves a purpose for any community to remind us of some very important issues. They are brought out strongly in the gospel reading that we had today from Luke chapter 12. It's a parable - a story that Jesus is telling. He probably told these stories time and time again, as he toured around the area. And this one speaks of a rich man who wants to build bigger barns. There are a few features about the man, which are a warning to the rest of us. We may not have barns and we may not have the budgets to build bigger ones, but I think they are warnings which have a wider principle and application for all.

The first thing I noticed about the man was that he forgot who he was. I think that's something that Jesus is trying to convey. The man said to himself, “what should I do? I have no place for my crops”. It's all *me* based, isn't it? Later on, he says “I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods”. The man had no reference to God or to anyone else. He had no sense of being a creature - a created being. He had no sense of accountability to anyone. He had no sense that he owed thanksgiving for what he had to any other party. It was all focused on him.

I think that is the first point that Jesus is trying to convey - that we all have an accountability, but we also all have things for which we can be thankful. We all have a need to acknowledge our origins, as indeed we do in the words of our service each week. But perhaps Harvest focuses that a little more sharply and helps us to understand that we owe our very existence and all that we have, and all that we enjoy to God.

The second thing I noticed is that the man seems to have no sense of appreciation - which is related to that first point. If you forget who made you, you have no sense of appreciation of what you have and who you are. He wasn't content with what he had. He wanted more and he wanted bigger, larger, extra. And he saw that as the source of his *spiritual satisfaction*. We should note fact that he's addressing his soul. What's the satisfaction? What is he saying? He's saying you have ample goods, and I will build bigger barns to store and to put them in. He's a man who's expanding. I remember a prime minister many years ago – a Conservative Prime Minister, actually – who talked about the unacceptable face of capitalism. And if there's a Bible story that illustrates that it is this man.

This man has no real appreciation that overflows into wanting to give something back. And that takes us into the third thing. He has no sense of responsibility for anyone else from what's been provided for him. All he wants to do is stack up his barn and enjoy for himself. Relax, eat, drink, and be meerry. There's no sense that he's wanting to relax and eat with others. There's no sense that eating is going to include hospitality. There's no sense that he's going to be buying a drink for his friends or his family or anyone else. He's wanting to be merry himself, but there's no sense that he wants to bring joy to anywhere else or anyone else. It's all about him.

It's a tale of self-centeredness and self-focus and that Bible word sin, which is sometimes very hard to describe and has all sorts of connotations at its root is about self-centeredness. It is about looking to self for everything that we need and an ignorance of our dependence on God and a lack of thanksgiving to him. And so in the parable, Jesus says “You fool. This very night your life is being demanded of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

He's reminded at the end of this tale of woe that everything we have has a transient nature to it. I'm sure we've all been through crises in our life when we've realized that money or possessions aren't going to solve them. I don't know often refer to this, but I remember when when my late wife, Debbie, was first diagnosed with cancer, my Dad asked me if some money would make any difference? He was just wanting to know if we could turn to private care would it make any difference. It wouldn’t have in her case, but we all know we would have emptied our bank account if it had. Money can't solve some things, and at moments like that we realise what’s more important than anything we possess.

I'm sure we've all been through experiences like that, where the human value of something struck us as being so much more than the monetary, financial, or any other kind of material value There are more important things in life than possessions. I don't think you need a religious faith to understand that. However, for those of us who are Christians, we've got a reason to believe that even when we’re not having a crisis. We know that God has provided for us. We know that God has made us. We know that we depend on him day by day for all we are, and that ultimately we are sustained by his love. When we understand and appreciate that love, and we have a relationship with God, there's a richness to that, which goes beyond any financial or material value. I think that's what being rich towards God is, rather than storing up treasures for ourselves is all about.

Once we is able to engage with us and to enter our lives and bring us all as he wants to give, that richness towards God actually has its origin in God himself. All things come from your Lord, and of your own do we give you.

I think the Harvest Festival helps to remind us of all of those things. It helps to remind us that actually it's not about us. Life is not ultimately about us, but it's about God who provides for us. Encountering the God who provides for us, and his generosity expressed towards us, cannot but make us generous towards others.

Our Harvest gifts are a symbol, a token, of that as we bring them. We know that they will benefit other people who need them more than we did, so thank you for bringing those today. Most of all, let's take away from this Harvest service a new sense of dependence upon God, a new sense of thanksgiving towards him, a new sense of the fact that our origin lies in him, and a new appreciation for all his wonderful gifts. Amen.