

October 13, 2013 – Harvest Thanksgiving - St. Marks Anglican Church-Halifax
The Rev. John K. Morrell, Rector

This weekend in Canada we celebrate the agricultural harvest and other blessings of our life. The first Canadian Thanksgiving day was proclaimed in 1879 and has been celebrated the second Monday of each October since then. Harvest festivals, of course, are found in agricultural communities around the world and throughout history. Three Jewish festivals - Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles -- had connections to agricultural events.

Passover occurred at the time of new births in animal flocks; Pentecost at the time of the grain harvest and Tabernacles at the time of new wine.

In the Jewish calendar the SUKKOT or Jewish harvest usually fell in Sept or Oct. It lasted 9 days, beginning 5 days after Yom Kippur on the day of the full moon. It has three other names marking special times in Jewish history as well as the end of the harvest.

The Festival of Ingathering: long ago during this festival the Jews brought offerings of food to God in the Great Temple in Jerusalem for the year's harvest which had been completed.

The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles: A little hut or SUKKAH is built outdoors and decorated for the 9 days of the festival. The family would try to live the whole time in the hut or tent to represent the 40 years of wandering in the desert sleeping and eating under the stars.

The Season of our Rejoicing: special prayers are said both in the SUKKAH and the synagogue. Symbols of the ancient Palestinian harvest - palm shoots, myrtle twigs, willow branches and citron. On the seventh day these symbols are carried around the synagogue 7 times in procession, while the congregation sings hosannas or prayers of salvation. On the eighth day prayers are said for rain no matter what the weather. The last day called Simchat Torah is a time of reading from the Jewish sacred books. The yearly reading of the Torah is completed on this day, and then the beginning of the cycle starts the same day. The hearing and study of God's word is an unending process. Everyone is jubilant and there is lots of music, joking and excitement even dancing.

The second aspect of Thanksgiving -- gratitude for a specific event - is also widespread in human experience. Indeed, such thanksgivings have influenced the liturgies of both Judaism and Christianity ---- as in the Passover Seder and the Christian Eucharist.

The Anglican Tradition of Harvest Festivals still remains in the older Canadian Prayer book as - "A form of thanksgiving for the blessings of the harvest and the Sunday has been traditionally called ' HARVEST THANKSGIVING.

Thanksgiving in Canada was NOT started by the pilgrims or puritans or their immediate followers. 53 years before the Pilgrims celebrated Thanksgiving in North America, English settlers under Sir MARTin Frobisher held a harvest festival in what is now Newfoundland.

So Tomorrow, Thanksgiving Day, we celebrate as a feast for all people living within our country. We give thanks to God for all the blessings we have received -- for food, shelter and citizenship, friends and family. We must also realize that such blessings demand responsible use of every resource available to us to do God's will. Thanksgiving Day invites us to actions of remembrance, gratitude and stewardship/. Let these be the hallmark of our feasting, and the hallmark of our lives in Jesus Christ.

So today, as we think and give thanks for all that God has given us, we offer prayers of thanksgiving and hope. This year's harvest, gainful employment, and even unemployment checks are viewed as part of God's great care giving. These things just don't happen--- they are God's provision for us.

Prayer --- Thank you Father of our Lord Jesus
and our Father in heaven, for your bountiful provision.
Give us faith to see all that we enjoy we owe to you.
In every circumstance help us to remember your fatherly love
and kindness and look to you for blessing.
Thank you in Jesus' name. AMEN.