

Writing this in August with a fifth heat wave on the way, I wonder how long the hot, dry summer will last. Will we have rain in autumn? This year the meteorological start of autumn is 1st September and on 23rd September the autumnal equinox brings equal lengths of night and day. It is hard to imagine a "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" described by John Keats in his poem, "To Autumn". Keats later depicts the blessing of harvest foods to store. Although the harvesting of crops is sometimes later in the year or, as this year, much earlier, autumn is a time of year to give thanks for all that we receive. The churches in our parish each have a harvest festival, both Findon and Patching on 6th September and Clapham on 20th September.

I recall as a child we made up small boxes of fruit and vegetables which we took to church and laid at the altar. These gifts were then taken to elderly people in the community. Today harvest service gatherings provide community support differently. Donations include non-perishable goods that can be given to centres that cater for homeless people such as Turning Tides or community pantries, a number of which are located in Angmering and Littlehampton. At Patching church, the gifts of home produced or purchased fruit, vegetables, cakes, breads, preserves, groceries and more are auctioned, raising funds for a local charity. This year the beneficiary will be St Barnabas Hospice. You are welcome to join the harvest auction at Patching church on 6th September at 11.15am, following the 10am harvest service. The event is always good fun.

There are many types of supportive communities, faith groups, youth organisations, special interest groups, neighbourhood communities and many more; as time goes on new communities develop and some disappear. I recall post war life in a northern industrial town. There was very little motor traffic so children played in the streets, whip and top, skipping, marbles, hopscotch and rounders, using the street lamps on the four corners of crossroads as bases. Games were rarely paused for 'traffic'. Occasionally a car came by or the 'rag and bone' man with his horse drawn cart, shouting unintelligibly. Recognised by occupants they brought out items that nowadays would be taken to a charity shop or an amenity tip. Such communities dispersed as people were moved to better housing, often in tower blocks.

I was interested recently to read that in Leeds residents who fulfil certain requirements can close their streets for periods and allow children to play there. It seems a good way to build neighbourhood communities that have been adversely affected by rehousing, moving for work and latterly the isolation of covid and that of social media, where at times those that are isolated can experience harmful approaches.

I wonder if John Keats was a member of a supportive community. He died from tuberculosis one year after publishing 'To Autumn' in 1820, at the age of 25. The ministry of clergy and church communities can help celebrate marriages and baptisms and provide support in times of ill health and bereavement. Although the parish is 'in vacancy' we are able to provide clergy to cover all the services listed in this publication. Contact details for information or assistance are included.

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