

## ***“Stone Soup” – a story for Harvest 04<sup>th</sup> October 2020***

This is a very old story, and it's told in many ways, but this is the version I've got. It's set in war-time. It's about 2 soldiers who got separated from their army, and spent weeks wandering the countryside trying to find their way home. They were hungry. Their rations had long run out. They tried to scavenge what they could from the fields, but there was nothing left after the armies had fought over the land. They passed through village after village, begging for something to eat: but the answer was the same: we've got nothing for our own families. We can't give you anything.

Eventually they came to a last village. They got the same blank response: there's nothing here for you. Exhausted and famished, they decided to make one last effort. Even if you haven't got anything to give us, one said, lend us a cooking pot, and we'll make soup like my mother taught me. It's called stone soup, and it will be good, and tasty and nutritious. So, as the villagers stood around wondering what the soldiers what stone soup is, the soldiers lit a small fire. They got some water from the village well, filled the cooking pot, and set it on the fire. Then they bent down to the ground, searched around a bit and each found a stone. 'Look', said the one, 'this stone has got a bit of lichen on it: that's got to give it some flavour'. And the other said, 'mine's a great stone, full of minerals – it'll really add something'. So they dropped the stones into the pan, gave it a stir, and waited for the water to boil.

'Looks like it's ready!' said the one soldier. 'Why don't you taste it?' All the villagers crowded in to see whether they would really eat stone soup. The one soldier dipped in his spoon, drew out the liquid, blew on it, and tasted it on his tongue. Mmm, he said, good, really good, but just missing something. If only we had a potato to add in it would just make the perfect soup.

There was a small girl who'd been watching intently. She quietly slipped away and ran into the next field. She knew where last year's potatoes had been planted, and found one that had been missed when they were dug up. So she grubbed it up with her hands and came running back and presented to the soldiers. They thanked her so much, and popped it in the pan.

That's so much better, the soldier said, trying the soup again. But if only we had an onion, it would really bring out the flavour. The mother of the little girl said, well, if it's only one onion you need, I'm sure there must be one left in my store house. In a moment she was back with onion in hand, and the soldiers took it gratefully and popped it into the soup.

Mmm, that's so much better, but if only we had ...

"I know", said a man at the back of the crowd, 'if only you had a carrot'. Well it just so happens I have got one left, so you might as well have it." So in went the carrot as well. And someone else said, 'I bet what you could do with now is a leak' and sure enough he had one to give them. Someone else produced a swede, and that too went in the pot.

Well, with all those extras, it needed a bit more cooking, but eventually the soup was ready, and they found some bowls and started to ladle it out... into one dish, ... and another, ... and another and another; not just for the two soldiers, but for those who'd helped out, in fact for the whole village. The stone soup was warm, and nutritious, and tasty, just as the soldiers had said at the beginning – and no one actually needed to eat the stones. It's amazing what can happen when everyone starts to share. The Lord loves a cheerful giver.