

HARVEST 2020

Introduction & Call to Worship

Welcome to worship as we celebrate Harvest at Weoley Hill church, which we have already celebrated at Bournville and Weoley Castle churches earlier in the month. We join together in thanksgiving and praise for the beauty and bounty of the earth: for day and night, for the seasons, for seedtime and harvest and for all the colours and gifts which every season brings. And we give thanks for God's goodness and faithfulness for.....

You crown the year with your bounty, and your paths overflow with plenty. The pastures of the wilderness flow with goodness, and the hills gird themselves with joy. The meadows clothe themselves with flocks of sheep, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy. (Psalm 65)

Praise to you, Creator of heaven and earth.

You give us the food of the earth and the water of the well.

Praise to you, Jesus Christ, who walked our ways. You have revealed the will of God and the holiness of the earth.

Praise to you, Holy Spirit, Giver of Life and Helper. You awaken our song of praise in faith and struggle.

Hymn Come ye thankful people come

Prayer

Harvest thanksgiving provides an opportunity for us to take stock of God's blessings, and to reflect on our response to those blessings.

Creator God, you have made an intricate and diverse world, and set us to cultivate it reverently and responsibly:

Forgive us when we forget our connection with all of creation.

Creator God, you have made a world of abundance and intend for us to share so that all may have their "daily bread".

Forgive us when we lose the sense of hospitality and community.

Creator God, you have sent us Jesus, the "Bread of Life" to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst.

Forgive us when we do not respond to his justice and mercy.

Every day and all day let us celebrate your goodness.
Every day and all day let us shape our very lives by focusing our minds on what is beautiful and worthy of praise. **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

We trust that God not only hears our prayers but in God's almighty wisdom and awareness of our needs does answer our prayers.
We are a forgiven people. **Thanks be to God! Amen.**

Harvest Offering

Hymn **We plough the fields and scatter**

Scripture Reading **Deuteronomy 26: 1-11**

Short Reflection

When the people of Israel settled in the land of "milk and honey" to which they had been led by God, there was a ritual that they were commanded by God to perform. They had to bring a basket of the first fruits of the land to the temple as part of the annual harvest festival. This was to remember their story of liberation and to express their gratefulness to God. But it was more than that....

The people would process together to the temple to bring their harvest offering. It was not a charitable donation or a gift from a generous heart. It was a requirement, a commandment. And why was this so important? Yes, the harvest produce was distributed among the temple servants, the orphans, widows and resident aliens, but that was not the primary purpose. This was a basket of first fruits at harvest demanded of the people of God who lived in the land God had given them.

While the people had wandered for many years in the wilderness, they knew (or got to know) their dependence on God. And as they were brought into this new land, they still knew that they needed God. But then, as they were settling down, things would change. For as a community gets organized, becomes an established and thriving nation, there is always the temptation that it can grow arrogant and puffed up with self importance. The people may consider their success as their due and can easily forget about God. And forget about the land and the

good creation that sustain them. They may forget their dependency, forget that they are not self sufficient.

We know about this tendency. We know the temptation to become self satisfied and think that our success is purely of our own making. It is easy to adopt the assumption that we are in control. That one basket of the fruit of the land, brought to the priest to be placed on the altar at the harvest festival, that one simple requirement was an act of resistance against the delusion of self-sufficiency, of self importance and of independence.

That one simple commandment, to bring an offering of produce, was to be a reminder that all of the success and prosperity of the people was dependent on the gifts that they have been given: land, water, animals, the web of life, consciousness and creativity.....They had to acknowledge that these were given and received....and so do we. Creation in all is abundance and diversity is not of our own making; we do not create it. We are completely dependent on the web of life. We are dependent on each other. We must live in cooperation, mutuality, and respect if we are to survive.

Just the basket of fruit. The produce of the land. The act of making an offering of thanksgiving. It is demanded because it is a powerful antidote to misplaced pride and the delusion of being self reliant.

Our Harvest thanksgiving each year, as well as our weekly offering, is not simply a nice gesture of generosity out of the goodness of our hearts. This is an act of acknowledging, being honest about all that we are given. It is a powerful way of symbolizing that we know we are not self made or self sufficient; we are not independent. We are all beneficiaries of the blessings of God's good creation. All the gifts that we are offered we receive with gratitude.

So in our Harvest thanksgiving we resist the selfishness, arrogance, sense of superiority and individualism that too often dominates our society and plagues our times. In our Harvest thanksgiving we acknowledge and celebrate our dependence on nature, the air, water, soil, plants, animals, beauty, consciousness, creativity as well as our mutual dependence. *We give thanks for all these gifts, freely offered to*

us from the hand of LOVE (with capital letters). Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers

Loving God, we thank you for the many ways in which we are provided for:

For food, family, friendship, housing, health, happiness, and the many ways to use our time and talents. We lift up to you too the ways in which we remain in need of these things.

God of generosity, May your kingdom come.

We pray for people in our community and beyond who are facing unemployment, ill-health, isolation or money worries at this time of the continuing corona crisis. And especially we pray for those who are unable to afford enough to eat and have to rely on foodbanks. We pray for supportive relationships, practical provision and real hope.

God of compassion, May your kingdom come.

Thank you that you call us to play our part, working with you and with others to bring about change. We pray for political decision-makers and leaders: Give them courage and insight to develop policies and structures that support the flourishing of all, so that even in these challenging times, no-one goes hungry and everyone has dignity.

God of justice, May your kingdom come.

Thank you for those who are serving and caring for others, in public services, in schools, in hospitals, in care homes, in churches, in charities, in the community and in our homes. Would you give them strength, rest and perseverance as they work to support others. May they receive all they need to thrive. God of love, May your kingdom come.

And we pray for.....

And we pray together.....OUR FATHER

Hymn

I sing the almighty power of God

Blessing

Go in peace, with thankful hearts, and let us continue to share earth's gifts—abundantly!