

Sunday 27 September 2020, a service for use at home; Haddington West Church

'Harvest Thanksgiving'

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

Ps.67: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us – so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him."

Collect: Almighty God, we offer you hearty thanks for your goodness and care in giving us the fruits of the earth in their seasons. Give us grace to use them rightly, to your glory, for the relief of those in need, and our own well-being through Jesus Christ, the living Bread, who came down from heaven and gives life to the world, and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN

MP 153

1 For the fruits of His creation,
thanks be to God!

For His gifts to every nation,
thanks be to God!

For the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping;
future needs in earth's safe keeping,
thanks be to God!

2 In the just reward of labour,
God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbour,
God's will is done;
in our world-wide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing;
in the harvests we are sharing,
God's will is done.

3 For the harvests of the Spirit,
thanks be to God!
For the good we all inherit,
thanks be to God!
For the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us;
most of all, that love has found us,
thanks be to God!

Words by Fred Pratt Green
Music by Francis Jackson

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Ps.145,8-21

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All your works praise you, LORD; your faithful people extol you. They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does. The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfils the desires of those who hear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.”

Dear friends

God is pleased when we are thankful towards Him for His gifts, recognising them as tokens of His goodness to all and His compassion on all. For what do any of us have that we have not received? A deep and genuine thankfulness towards God leading to the praise of His name is pleasing to Him.

But why should we think that God takes pleasure in our thankfulness towards Him? I remember a lesson in a primary school where we talked about this and the comment of a girl expressing what a number of them were thinking: “Does God not then show himself to be a rather selfish, self-centred being, ready to go into a huff whenever he is not thanked?” But, of course, we do not think that by thanking a person for a gift they made to us we are spoiling them or are pandering to their ego. And that the shoe is really on the other foot we soon realise when we think of a child failing to be thankful towards its parents – it is the child that presumably is selfish and self-centred when it can’t find it in the heart to be thankful.

When we are thankful towards God we give proper evidence that we see that all life depends on receiving and that there would not be anything to receive if there was not God who gives, that all life depends on God’s ‘Yes’ (God saying ‘Let it be’). Indeed, our thankfulness is our own joyous ‘yes’ in response to God’s ‘Yes’. And like a ‘yes’ to a marriage proposal is the answer of love to the recognition of love, so thankfulness is the heart’s answer to God’s goodness, compassion and love. This ‘yes’ of the heart to God’s ‘Yes’ that is His giving, makes for a coming together and knowing one another just like a ‘yes’ does when it is given in answer to a marriage proposal.

I remember one day at the time of my awakening (when it pleased God to open me to the truth and stop me from running) when, cycling home from school at dusk along fields and forests, hills rising and mountains in the distance catching the brilliant colours of the setting sun, I was overcome by a profound sense of what I was actually seeing and was in the middle of. Namely, an exuberant dance of joy in which creation was engaged, in praise of Him to whom all of it was pointing and from whom all of it had its being. Nothing was “just there”, everything sang to me of God’s glory, celebrating God’s abundant goodness, singing joyfully of His righteousness. And it struck me how there was this thread of dependence and of ‘being-there-for’ running through it all and connecting it, not as a system closed in itself but pointing beyond itself to God who answers both (our dependence and our being-there-for), and how it is in the praise of His name through man at worship that all things must come to dance and all things must come to sing!

I had to get off my bike, because I could not give attention to the road anymore nor concentrate on my movements. I had to acknowledge what I saw and give thanks; and with every fibre of my being that is what I longed to do, to join in the dancing and the singing, that is, to call on Him in truth and know *the LORD is near to all who do so*.

I remember reading about a girl growing up in America in a secular household who was not exposed to any religious or biblical content. At the age of 3 she went to her dad one day and asked: "Where does the world come from?" After answering her in a way consistent with his materialistic views he added: "However, there are those who say that all this comes from a powerful being, and they call him God." And then the account reads, 'At this point, the little girl began to run like a whirlwind around the room in a burst of joy, and exclaimed: "I knew what you told me wasn't true; it is Him, it is Him!"' This also is a lovely illustration of the desire in view of the beauty and richness of creation and the order running through it to acknowledge God and thank Him, because everything that has being depends on His giving, because we depend on Him and our needs are pointing to Him, and because we are made for Him.

But, dear friends, what of such thankfulness? Does it not, where it fills the heart, incline it to mercy, to do as God *is* – who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love, who opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing? To do, therefore, what is gracious and compassionate, not to erupt in anger quickly or easily or be provoked to retaliate and wrong with wrong, but to do as love commands which rejoices with the truth; to open one's hand that usually grasps tightly what is one's own and give and share it with the satisfaction of all the living things whose welfare, together with our own, God has ordered to depend on the fact that we do – that we see these desires and answer them with what God has given us.

Dear friends, let us incite each other to such thankfulness. Let our hearts be open to that which cultivates it, namely that we know that Lord's goodness to us, not only in the supplying of our worldly needs but in the forgiveness of our sins which is the seed of the harvest of love. AMEN

MP786

- 1 Yes, God is good – in earth and sky,
from ocean depths and spreading wood,
ten thousand voices seem to cry:
'God made us all, and God is good!'
- 2 The sun that keeps his trackless way,
and downward pours his golden flood,
night's sparkling hosts, all seem to say
in accents clear that God is good.
- 3 The joyful birds prolong the strain,
their song with every spring renewed;
the air we breathe, and falling rain,
each softly whispers: 'God is good!'
- 4 I hear it in the rushing breeze;
the hills that have for ages stood,
the echoing sky and roaring seas,
all swell the chorus: 'God is good!'
- 5 Yes, God is good, all nature says,
by God's own hand with speech endued;

and man, in louder notes of praise,
should sing for joy that God is good.

6 For all Your gifts we bless You, Lord,
but chiefly for our heavenly food,
Your pardoning grace, Your quickening word,
these prompt our song, that God is good.

Words by John Hampden Gurney

At this harvest time, Lord God, we acknowledge that all good gifts around us are sent from heaven above. Help us to receive them gratefully, to use them wisely and to share them unselfishly, as good stewards of your bounty, for the sake of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

- time of prayer / intercession –

‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen’

“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who has shown us such love, and in his grace has given us such unfailing encouragement and so sure a hope, still encourage and strengthen you in every good deed and word.” (2Thess.2,16)

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you.

AMEN