

Sunday 01November 2020, a service for use at home; Haddington West Church

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

Deut.10,12: 'What does the Lord your God ask of you? Only this: to fear the Lord your God, to conform to all his ways, to love him, and to serve him with all your heart and soul.'

Ps.16,11: 'God will show us the path of life; in his presence is the fullness of joy, at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.'

Mt.7,7: 'Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.'

Collect: Almighty and ever-living God, increase in us your gift of faith, that forsaking what lies behind and reaching out to what is before we may run the way of your commandments and win the crown of everlasting joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN

1 Praise the Lord, you heavens adore Him –
Praise Him, angels in the height!
Sun and moon, rejoice before Him;
Praise Him, all you stars and light!
Praise the Lord, for He has spoken;
Worlds His mighty voice obeyed;
Laws, which never shall be broken,
For their guidance He has made.

2 Praise the Lord, for He is glorious!
Never shall His promise fail.
God has made His saints victorious,
Sin and death shall not prevail.
Praise the God of our salvation!
Hosts on high, his power proclaim;
Heaven and earth and all creation,
Laud and magnify His name!

3 Worship, honour, glory, blessing,
Lord, we offer to Your name.
Young and old, Your praise expressing,
Join their Saviour to proclaim,
As the saints in heaven adore you,
We would bow before Your throne,
As your angels serve before You,
So on earth Your will be done.

From Ps.148

Psalm 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.”

Dear friends

Sometimes we see things differently, don't we? When people see things differently, they don't do so because they are looking at different things, but they do so as they look at the same thing. One person may see what the other one does not. For instance, someone may show us something and say 'Have a look at this' and we say after a while 'What am I looking at?' because we realise that we ought to see something which we don't. Demonstrations, for instance, and campaigns are there to make people and authorities see what in the view of the activists they don't see or do not see clearly or do not see in the right way. And there is, of course, also sometimes simply a refusal to see – I don't want to see what others are pointing out to me because I don't like what that would mean.

What in all such situations is needed is an eye-opener. You will remember an occasion when you said to someone: "That was a real eye-opener!" You meant that something opened your eyes, changed your optics, so that you perceived a thing in a new way, and were affected by it, knowing it more deeply and more truly.

Psalm 67 wants to be an eye-opener. *“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.”* It wants our eyes to stand wide open to the reality of God so that we perceive his ways on earth – **that they are saving**, and are so affected by what we see that we become glad and sing for joy.

The occasion is harvest and harvest thanksgiving. We are not just to see the harvest, in terms of size and income, quality and usefulness and with respect to the means of its development, but we are to see the harvest and all that pertains to it, we are to know what we are looking at, what it is saying to us and is showing us.

And what harvest is showing us, to eyes that are open to it, is the wonderful fact that God is involved in his world and with his world. *“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.”* God is involved in his world, that is why the soil has the qualities it has and why the seed fits these so well in a way yielding a harvest; God is involved in his world, that is why there are laws governing gestation and growth, why there is this amazing interdependence and mutual benefit enabling and sustaining life; God is involved in his world, that is why we sow and reap and why we reap what we sow.

What all this shows is that God's involvement is of such a kind that we depend upon his blessing and governing and that our life in all its aspects is relating to him via all that we receive from him and then do with it. Indeed, the last line of the psalm, reading *‘so that all the ends of the earth will fear him’* points us to what attitude in us fits the world as the place of God's involvement – the fear of God. For it is the fear of God that keeps our eyes open to the ways God is involved and to the way we measure up to that involvement in our own.

But to this we need to have our eyes opened. The usual, unseeing optic is that of God in the background, relevant as a first cause, setting things up initially and making things ticking along in a distant and outside sort of a way, but is not involved beyond that such that would call for our response and actually make it inevitable.

But this world is one which God is involved in, in which the most relevant and best thing we can do, therefore, is to seek and need his blessing and the most needed thing is for us to know him and to know the way of salvation – to come and be under his care and rule.

You will remember a passage in Matthew where Jesus tells his disciples to look at the birds, ‘they do not sow or reap or store away in barns’, he says; and he tells them to look at the lilies of the fields, how they grow, ‘they do not labour or spin, yet I tell you not even Solomon in all his splendour was clothed like one of them’. And what he wants is that this should open their eyes to the way their heavenly Father is involved in *their* lives – that their eyes should be open to God’s care for them and that they should trust in him and seek “*his kingdom and his righteousness*” - the way of aligning their involvement in his world with his.

But what opens their eyes to it is not just these examples from the natural world – as a harvest might as well -, but their union with Jesus Christ, because he is God’s way of salvation.

Dear friends, as we look at the harvest, with thankfulness in our hearts, let our eyes move to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith because it is through him that God involves us in his way of salvation.

AMEN

1 Lord of creation, to You be all praise!
Most mighty Your working, most wondrous Your ways!
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,
and yet in the heart of the humble You dwell.

2 Lord of all power, I give You my will,
in joyful obedience Your tasks to fulfil;
Your bondage is freedom, Your service is song,
and, held in Your keeping, my weakness is strong.

3 Lord of all wisdom, I give You my mind,
rich truth that surpasses man’s knowledge to find;
what eye has not seen and what ear has not heard
is taught by Your Spirit and shines from Your word.

4 Lord of all bounty, I give You my heart;
I praise and adore You for all You impart,
Your love to inspire me, Your counsel to guide,
Your presence to cheer me, whatever betide.

5 Lord of all being, I give You my all;
for if I disown You I stumble and fall;
but, sworn in glad service Your word to obey,
I walk in Your freedom to the end of the way.

Words by Jack C Winslow
Music by John Barnard

Lord God, if it were not for your gracious giving, we would be in want of everything. With thankfulness we acknowledge joyfully that all living things receive from your gracious bounty. In your grace open our eyes and give us a seeing heart, so that we may know your ways of salvation and walk in them by faith, through 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