

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 04/10/20

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Opening affirmation from Psalm 65 ¹

The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;

where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.

You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly.

The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with corn, for so you have ordained it.

You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops.

You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.

The grasslands of the wilderness overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness.

The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with corn; they shout for joy and sing.

HYMN – STF 123

1. Come, you thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest home!
Fruit and crops are gathered in
Safe before the storms begin;
God, our Maker, will provide
For our needs to be supplied;
Come with all His people, come;
Raise the song of harvest-home.
2. All the world is God's own field,
Harvests for His praise to yield;
Wheat and weeds together sown,
Here for joy or sorrow grown;
First the blade, and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear:
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.
3. For the Lord our God shall come
And shall bring His harvest home;
He Himself on that great day,
Worthless things shall take away,
Give His angels charge at last
In the fire the weeds to cast,
But the fruitful ears to store
In His care for evermore.
4. Even so, Lord, quickly come,
Bring Your final harvest home;
Gather all Your people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin;
There together purified,
Ever thankful to abide:
Come, with all Your angels, come,
Bring that glorious harvest home.

Henry Alford (1810-1871)

Prayer of Praise and Thanks

Father God, great Creator we come to you today in this special harvest season, with hearts of gratitude for all you provide. We recall your promise to Noah and his family that still stands firm today that as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease.

In the silence let's think of all the harvest produce to be enjoyed and name before God now anything for which you are particularly thankful this year, maybe something you've grown in the garden or something you've had difficulty getting at the supermarket that has now appeared on the shelves.

Father God, we acknowledge that all we enjoy comes from you and we are truly thankful. We thank you that you are a faithful loving God who keeps His promises and knows how to give good gifts to your children. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

As we celebrate your goodness and holiness so we confront our own sin.

We acknowledge our greed and insensitivity, our failure to appreciate what we have and the opportunities you have given;
our readiness to complain,
and our unwillingness to praise. **Father, forgive and renew us.**

We acknowledge food taken for granted,
work and effort unappreciated and poorly rewarded,
self-centred blindness to other's needs,
deliberate deafness to the cries of the hungry,
coldness of heart towards those disadvantaged and exploited. **Father, forgive and renew us.**

We acknowledge a landscape threatened, and an economy at risk,
a countryside disheartened,
its communities uncertain and confused,
its isolation and exclusion ignored. **Father, forgive and renew us.**

Silence

May our sins be forgiven, our blindness, deafness and coldness of heart be healed.
May your renewing Spirit rest upon us and fill our nation with your love and hope.
In Jesus' Name. **Amen.**

Reading – Deuteronomy 26: 1-12 ¹

¹ When you have entered the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, ² take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land that the Lord your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name ³ and say to the priest in office at the time, 'I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.' ⁴ The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God. ⁵ Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. ⁶ But the Egyptians ill-treated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. ⁷ Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ⁸ So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. ⁹ He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; ¹⁰ and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me.' Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before him. ¹¹ Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household.

¹² When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

Reflection

What are your memories of Harvest Festival I wonder, perhaps from school or Sunday School or church? What sights and smells do you remember? People have been celebrating and giving thanks as a community for as long as humans have been cultivating crops. The ancient people of the Bible also gave thanks together for harvest as we have heard again today. If you had actually worked long and hard to bring in the harvest and if your survival depended on it then there must have been a very different feel to the celebrations, I imagine. Did you notice that the offering mentioned actually comes at the start of the harvest, the first fruits? So it is an act of faith as well as of thanksgiving.

Today in communities in which people's lives and livelihoods are still tied to the land and its cycles of production, the celebration of harvest is much more heartfelt. This I found to my cost when we moved to serve five churches in Somerset. As someone who was born and raised in the city and who had lived in cities and large towns for the whole of my life it was quite a shock. Not only were there services on Sunday to conduct but there were extensive calorific suppers on Monday or Tuesday to be consumed, followed by produce auctions with very inflated bids for enormous marrows to swell the offering for a good cause. It was all sequenced and choreographed so that from mid-September to mid-October there was always a harvest supper somewhere and people travelled around to support the events in neighbouring villages.

The kind of harvest we know in church today was essentially a Victorian invention designed to keep those who had moved to live in the large urban conurbations in touch with their rural roots from which they had recently moved. This is where most of us are today isn't it? We do not 'plough the fields and scatter'. We have not worked so that 'all is safely gathered in 'ere the winter storms begin', so we need to remember and give thanks for those who do. We may have memories of a rural upbringing but fewer of us can even claim that. So what are we doing today in giving thanks? Well surely it is no bad thing to be reminded where our food comes from, to acknowledge the work that goes into its production and to think about those who do not have enough of it. We are ever more aware of the fragility of the planet, its climate, its soils and seas. It is a good thing to raise the song of harvest home and to declare 'all good gifts around us are sent from heaven above' and to 'thank the Lord for all his love'. The danger we face is not only an increasing detachment from the reason for giving thanks but the sense that the harvest is a once a year event. I want to remind us that the harvest is not just for harvest. We are in the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:18 'to give thanks continually' or at least regularly.

The harvest celebration described in our Bible reading is still recognisable today. There is a symbolic offering to give thanks to God for His provision and protection but notice that the celebration is shared with those who don't have anything to offer, those who are in need or outside the community - the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow who have no one to support them and no resources of their own. They too are able to rejoice because those who have, share some of what they have with them. That didn't just happen once a year.

Perhaps these last six months have reminded us of our interdependence, of the work required by so many unseen hands to produce our food and to get it to us whatever way we are now doing our shopping. Perhaps we have realised in a new and clearer way how much we have to be thankful for – simple everyday things that we overlooked but which are vital and precious.

Perhaps we have cause to remember the growing number of people who need our help because they lack the means to provide food for themselves - ordinary people, often hard working, self-reliant but who because of a crisis or emergency or a change in circumstances find they can no longer just about manage on their income. If that is you or someone you know West Berks Foodbank is there to help.

So we are encouraging support of the food bank this harvest. If you are living in West Berkshire or near to it we can ensure your food donations can be collected from your home if you are not able to donate in person at one of the local collection points in supermarkets or the other drop off places. Why not order a few extra items with your online order or the next time you go to the shop? The need is greater than ever for as donations have fallen requests for emergency food supplies have increased as people have suffered the economic consequences of the pandemic. You can also make a financial donation to the work of the foodbank if you prefer. Details of how to contact the foodbank to arrange for a doorstep collection or to donate financially will be shown at the end of this service.

This need is not going to end when this harvest festival does. The spirit of harvest must continue throughout the year. Harvest thanksgiving and generosity is for life. God's goodness and his faithful blessing is not just for harvest either it is for everyone, not just a chosen few. Amen.

Prayer

God of justice, we live in an unfair and unjust world,
a world where supermarkets get bigger
while local farmers grow poorer;
a world where the 'haves' get richer
and the 'have nots' have less;
a world with enough resources but we fail to share them.
So we pray to you, hear our prayer

God of healing and wholeness, we live in a fragile and broken world,
a world where species are dying and becoming extinct
while we continue to pollute and destroy their habitats;
a world where we devastate and poison, waste and despoil
and call it economic progress;
a world where a few global companies own and control so much
and the craftsperson and artisan is deprived of business.
So we pray to you, hear our prayer

Give us the courage to challenge our unjust systems, give us the determination to change our ways, to tread more softly and to live more simply, and give us the love to persevere in faith and hope. In the name of Jesus who died and rose again to heal and transform broken and hurting creation and to save and rescue broken and hurting people. **Amen.**

HYMN – STF 130

1. We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand;
He sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.
*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord,
for all His love.*

2. He only is the Maker
of all things near and far;
He paints the wayside flower,
He lights the evening star;
the winds and waves obey Him,
by Him the birds are fed;
much more to us, His children,
He gives our daily bread.
All good gifts around us

3. We thank Thee, then, O Father,
for all things bright and good;
the seed-time and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food.
Accept the gifts we offer
for all Thy love imparts,
and, what Thou most desirest,
our humble, thankful hearts.
All good gifts around us

Matthias Claudius (1740-1815) translated by Jane Montgomery Campbell (1817-1878)

Suggestions for your own prayers

Pray for

- All who work in agriculture, farmers and growers, those who care for livestock working long hours in difficult conditions. For vets, hauliers, contractors and all who support the rural economy providing materials and services.
- For food manufacturers and processors, suppliers and distributors who continue to ensure we have food available in abundance in our shops and supermarkets. For all who have had to adapt to many changes of supply and demand over recent months whilst adjusting to restrictions caused by the pandemic.
- For those who do not have enough to eat, parents skipping meals so that children can eat, and those who cannot provide even basic food for their families.
- For the work of the foodbanks supporting people in food poverty and especially for the staff volunteers and trustees of the West Berks Foodbank as demand has increased and a whole new system of food collection and distribution has been established.
- For all who are hungry because they have been driven from their homes by war, climate change or exploitation.
- For those we know in need family, friends members of the church to which you belong. Name them before God now.
- For ourselves - ask God for what you need today.

Lord's Prayer

HYMN STF 82 ²

O Lord my God! when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:
*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,
how great Thou art! How great Thou art!*
*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
how great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,

And when I think that God His Son not sparing,
sent Him to die - I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and lead me home - what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
and there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,

Final Blessing

Every time I eat a meal, every time I quench my thirst,
every time I enjoy your creation I experience your blessing so fill me with thanks and praise.
In the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit who blesses me now. Amen.

Acknowledgements

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