

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 26/09/21
A service prepared by Peter and Chris Bennett for use at home

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 – Songs of Fellowship 75 - Henry Alford (1810-1871)

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| 1. Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest home!
All is safely gathered in
Ere the winter storms begin;
God, our Maker, doth provide
For our needs to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home. | 2. All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto 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 take His harvest home,
From His field shall in that day
All offences purge away,
Give His angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast,
But the fruitful ears to store
In His garner evermore. | 4. Even so, Lord, quickly come,
Bring Thy final harvest home;
Gather Thou Thy people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin;
There, forever purified,
In Thy garner to abide:
Come, with all Thine angels, come,
Raise the glorious harvest-home. |

Prayer of Praise and Thanks

Father God, great Creator I come to You today in this special harvest season, with a heart of gratitude for all You provide. I 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.

Now think back over the week and thank God for His provision for you – perhaps there are particular things you want to thank Him for now.

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

HYMN - Singing the Faith 51 - Thomas O Chisholm (1866-1960)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou for ever wilt be:
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand has provided.
Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!

Reading – John 6: 1-14 ²

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing those who were ill. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, 'It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!' ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'

¹⁰ Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.'

Reflection

We have heard again one of the best known incidents in the life of Jesus. It is one of those miracles that is recorded in all four gospels, the biographies of Jesus. I am sure you have heard it many times. Maybe like me you first heard it in Sunday School when the focus was on the unknown boy who generously shared what he had. Then later perhaps you were encouraged to think about the astonishing miracle of multiplication and what it tells us about Jesus and who is.

Today in this harvest service I want to draw your attention to what this event might say to us about harvest and about our shared responsibility for the good earth God has given us to care for as His representatives.

So let's think firstly about the barley loaves and fish that Jesus shared with this vast crowd of hungry people sat on the grass that late afternoon overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Where did the fish come from? Well pretty certainly from the sea they could see below them. Those two fish were part of the harvest of the sea. Someone caught them, harvested them, just as Peter and Andrew, James and John were doing when Jesus called them to harvesting people instead of fish. We are still harvesting and enjoying fish today. Let's spare a thought for the fish harvesters and fish farmers working in difficult conditions, many away from home for long periods. We have overfished, over harvested our seas too and must learn again how to preserve and rebuild those fish stocks not only for human consumption but also as food for the other creatures who live in the sea or who depend upon it for food.

Then what about the barley bread which this unknown boy's mother had made that morning. The barley had to be sown, tended and harvested perhaps by the boy's father. Perhaps the lad had helped too, scaring away the birds or gathering up the stalks. Think again about those who grow barley, wheat, rice, vegetables or fruit in this country and the many in other countries to provide the food on our tables. Remember them with thanks for all their hard work, and dedication, their struggles with the weather, government policy, and changing prices to bring the harvest to market.

Let's notice today what Jesus did when he was given the loaves and fish. He gave thanks. Harvest is a day to give thanks. Come ye thankful people come we sing. He gave thanks for the gifts of earth and sea that He held in his strong hands and give thanks to God the Creator of the earth and seas just as He did. All our thanks must go to Him. This was one meal on one hillside. The people were hungry again next day as Jesus was. I'm sure He gave thanks at every meal and for every meal. Is that something you do? Do you thank God for the food you have? Do you value it as a sacred gift as Jesus did? Perhaps you should!

And finally let's notice what happened after the people were fed, all 5,000 of them. It is curious that in all the accounts it is noted that there were 12 baskets of leftovers. Everyone had enough and there was more than enough. What happened to the leftovers, I wonder? I'm pretty certain they were not wasted. Each of the disciples had a basketful of scraps to remind them of that day; to remind them of what Jesus did and to remind them that there was more than enough, that with God there is always more than enough. He is a generous, more than enough God.

We waste huge amounts of food in this country – roughly one third in the manufacturing, one third in the shops and one third in our homes. We have begun to do better at cutting down our waste but there is so much more we must do. There is more than enough as there was on that Galilean hillside. More than enough for everyone yet many are still hungry.

They are hungry for many complex and interrelated reasons but for sure our waste does not help and our waste contributes to global warming, climate change, which in turn contributes to food poverty around the world.

So let's think today about the harvesters of land and sea. Let's remember to give thanks to our generous God for them and for our food every time we eat and let's remember that there is more than enough and do what we can to avoid waste, to use the leftovers, to be generous and to share our surplus just like they did so long ago. Amen.

HYMN – Singing the Faith 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 You, 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 Your love imparts,
And, what You most desire,
Our humble, thankful hearts.
All good gifts around us

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

Prayers for ourselves and others

At this special harvest season, we pray for all those involved in harvesting in any way, whether in agriculture, horticulture, forestry, mining or fisheries, and for those involved in processing and distributing our food, including factory workers, delivery drivers and shop workers.

(If you happen to know anyone working in any of these areas, you might like to name them before God now.)

Heavenly Father, we ask that You would bless the work of their hands, that they'd feel valued for what they do and would be paid a fair wage. Where people are working in difficult or lonely circumstances, we pray that You would be at work to improve their situations. We ask that You would meet the current need for delivery drivers in our country. It's when there's a shortage that we realise just how valuable they are.

We thank You for the network of Food Banks up and down the country, proving such a support to so many at this time. Please continue to provide workers, buildings, food and any other resources needed to enable them to continue to operate. We pray especially for our own local West Berks Food Bank, asking Your blessing on each worker and each person who visits. If anyone is reluctant to come forward for help, please give them the courage to do so.

We name before You now anyone known to us personally in particular need today, perhaps because of illness, loneliness or bereavement. We ask You Lord to make Yourself real to them in their situation and meet their needs.

Finally we pray for ourselves Lord, knowing that you care about even the smallest details of our lives. Maybe you'd like to ask God for whatever you need most today.

Lord, we commit the week ahead to You, knowing You will be with us in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. May You be glorified in our lives.

We ask all our prayers in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now say the Lord's Prayer out loud remembering that you are just one of the many who will say or sing this prayer today.

HYMN – Singing the Faith 82² - Stuart K Hine (1899-1989)

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling 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 see 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 take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration
And then 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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