

KSAT Worship Service for Sunday – 20th September 2020.

THEME – ‘Harvest in the year of Covid!’

We thank Penny Hilland for this week’s service on the theme of ‘Harvest’

CALL TO WORSHIP— from Psalm 67

Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you. Then shall the earth bring forth her increase, and God, our own God, will bless us.

PRAYER of ADORATION

Almighty God and Creator, *You only* can make the seeds to grow and the land to bring forth the crops for our food. On You we rely for the warmth of the sun and the refreshing life-giving rain; on You we rely for our well-being. We thank You for the beauty and variety in the world around us...for life springing new every morning, for the life You have given us, in all its richness, and for family and friends to share it with... and we thank You that You are with us, sharing Your life with us moment by moment in Christ and through your Spirit. Teach us the valuable lesson of humility, that we may work *always* and *only* in harmony with Your law. Make us righteous and just to all of Your creation, mindful of our part in Your plan, and with hearts full of praise for Your loving-kindness and for the bounty of our harvest.

PRAYER of CONFESSION

Even as we acknowledge Your care for the world You have made.... and the abundance of Your provisionwe confess our own *lack* of care and the misuse of Your good gifts to us. God, our Father, we are sorry for the times when we have used Your gifts carelessly, and acted ungratefully, so often failing to protect resources for others. Lord, hear our prayer and, in Your mercy, forgive us and help us.

We enjoy the fruits of the harvest, but sometimes forget that You have made them available to us. In Your mercy, Lord, forgive us and help us.

We belong to a people who are full and satisfied, but ignore the cry of the hungry. Father, in Your mercy, forgive us and help us.

We store up goods for ourselves, as if there were no God and no heaven. Father, in Your mercy, forgive us and help us.

We may be reassured by the words we read in the first letter to Timothy: ‘*Here are words you may trust, words that merit full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*’ **Amen.**

THE LORD’S PRAYER.

READING

Let’s hear again some familiar verses from the story of the Creation in Genesis 1 v 11, 29-31 ‘*And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth vegetation: plants yielding seeds, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with seed in it.’ And it was so ... And God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, every bird of the air, every creeping thing, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so ... God saw that it was very good.*’

And, even though we turned away from the one who gave all the richness of the earth to us, God made this promise to Noah in Genesis 8 v 22: ‘*As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease*’.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN MP 153 –For the fruits of his creation, thanks be to God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbBUFSOkbdM>

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.

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 worldwide task of caring for the hungry and despairing,
In the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

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.

THE OFFERING IN PRAYER OF SYMBOLS OF THE HARVEST

As we join in these prayers, let us reflect on our offering of ourselves to God's work on earth.....and on the spiritual as well as material gifts that God has provided as signs of his kingdom.

We offer **water**, the source of life and nourishment to the land, to the plant and animal worlds



and to ourselves. It is the symbol, too, of our spiritual life through Baptism. We offer **the topsoil** of our fields, symbol of that which God has created, and His sun and rain have nurtured. You have laid the foundations of the earth: the heavens are the work of Your hands. We remember that *'the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.'* (Gen. 2:7)

Lord, out of emptiness You brought forth everything that we need for life. Accept these offerings of earth and water as a token of our gratitude for Your loving renewal of them, and bless them.

We offer the produce of the harvest, and the **seeds** for next year's crops: seeds for oil, for silage and hay. You cause the grass to grow for sheep and cattle, and cereals for our daily bread



Almighty and ever-loving God, though we scatter the seeds on the land, though we tend and care for them, without Your aid they would lie barren and dead. We offer You grain and bread as symbols of this truth and in thanksgiving that Christ took bread and broke it to feed us all, the sign that He has given His own body, broken on the cross, for the life of the world. Christ is the bread of eternal life.

Words from the Gospel of John: *Lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are ripe for harvesting. Gather the fruit for eternal life.*



We offer the harvest of **roots, plants and trees** – given for the health of humankind and for the sustenance of animal and bird life. We offer **grapes** that have been pressed as a symbol of our communion wine and remember with thanksgiving the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Almighty God, we give thanks for the variety and freshness of our food, and for our enjoyment of it. We offer the abundance of fruits and vegetables as a sign of Your great goodness. May we never forget the need to share what we have with those who have little or nothing in this world. *The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.* (Gal 5: 22-3)

Words from Hosea: *Sow for yourself righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.*

We offer a **shepherd's crook** to symbolise the labour of all who care for animals upon our farms. We offer our thanks that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gathers His flock with His arm and gently leads the young.

Great creator, we give thanks and praise for the beauty of all Your creation. All that we offer You is Your own, and yet we ask that, in Your great mercy, You will bless them and look kindly upon us. Take these offerings – and take us – to be a sign in this, Your world, of Your power and glory. **Amen.**



READING: Psalm 65 vv. 1-4 and 9-13

Praise awaits you, O God in Zion; to you all our vows will be fulfilled. O you who hear our prayer, to you all people will come. When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

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 desert 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.

SERMON

When I was growing up, Harvest was very much a local affair. The church groaned with local produce: fruit, vegetables, homemade bread and preserves, even sacks of grain to invite in the church mouse! After the harvest thanksgiving, it was distributed to homes in the neighbourhood wherever it was needed. Later, living in SE Asia, we experienced a different kind of harvest celebration. Singapore produced very little food, but it is a wealthy nation. Our church was generous in donating sacks of rice and large cans of powdered milk and vegetable oil, which were blessed and shipped off to some of the poorest areas of South India.

And several times I experienced harvest celebrations deep in the rainforests of Borneo, where I took Year 6 children to stay as guests in a village of the Iban people. The village was all under one roof in a longhouse, built on stilts. Family rooms were at the back and along the whole length of the structure was a wide thoroughfare, the shared space which served many purposes, but was essentially the meeting place. There we were invited to join in the harvest celebrations: there was a lot of dancing and feasting, interspersed with drumming competitions, and bargaining for their arts and crafts. The staple for these people is mountain rice, which they store in the roof-space of the longhouse along with rice wine, some of it distilled into rice whisky – large quantities of which are drunk at the harvest festivities! As well as rice, the Iban grow vegetables and herbs...keep a few pigs and hens underneath the longhouse...and they fish in the river: a simple but plentiful harvest.

All of these harvest festivals revealed great joy in the successful gathering in of food and *generosity* in sharing it out. All of them showed reverence to God as the one who has provided for us. But I always felt there was something extra in the reverence of the Iban tribe. They tread very lightly upon the earth. They take care to preserve the sacredness of the earth. They had *enough*.....and enough means they were content.....satisfied with the yield from their rainforest home. Planting and harvesting involved cutting down trees, but it was done so that, every few years they would leave the plot and clear a new plot a distance away.....allowing the gap in the forest to quickly close and regenerate. The cut wood was put to good use for the village. Nothing was wasted and nothing was destroyed.

So, how does this relate to us? I think that this year has changed us. It has given us a glimpse of a simpler life. Covid-19 was an unforeseen crisis which has stopped us in our tracks literally! We have been forced to tread more lightly upon the earth.....and if we are prepared to acknowledge that God is always in control, we might see that we have been given a wake-up call.....and we might reflect on just how much we need to return to working *with* God and *for* God and His world.....rather than pursuing our own interests.....and often our greed. It is up to us to decide how much we allow the changes we have experienced to influence the way we live and to safeguard the future of the earth and the earth's yield.

As Christians we know that God works *with us*. He works wonders – perhaps far more of them than we notice – but He calls on *us*, His people, to help Him in His work. He asks us if we will be His co-workers. When God parted the Red Sea to let His people pass through, He instructed Moses to raise his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea to divide the water. Jesus provided enough wine and more for the wedding feast at Cana, but He did so by giving instructions to the servants. When He fed the hungry crowds, He instructed the disciples to bring to Him what little food they could muster and to start dividing it up. When Jesus appeared to Mary on Easter morning, He told her to go and tell the others that He was alive. I can't think of a story in the Bible where God does not give authority to *someone* to accomplish His will for us. He is in control, certainly, but He *uses* us and *empowers* us, if we will put our trust in Him. This is as true today as it ever was in biblical times. We should not forget, at harvest time, all the people God has used to work with his gifts of earth and water, sun and warmth to provide for our needs. While we were in lockdown, week after week, the farmers were out looking after their sheep and lambs, their cattle and calves, managing the land, cutting the silage, providing for our markets of meat, milk, butter, cheese, eggs...and more.

Stewart and I were walking in Mallerstang on a beautiful day in late spring – and quite by chance, we met Donald and Christine Marston, clearing up after repairing some fencing. We were all so pleased to see each other in that time of lockdown that we chatted for a while about the situation we all found ourselves in. The seasons, the land, the animals, cannot stand still while we see out the viral threat, but even they had found more time to think about what God might be saying to us about Himself ... about the world ...about the church ...and about the future. What might God want his church to look like when we come through this? Has it brought mission more into focus, for instance?

Wouldn't you agree that we have shared a glimpse of something better? We were stunned by the beauty of the spring because we could stay still for long enough to listen to the birdsong, watch the flowers grow and bloom ... and trees bud and blossom ... and notice all the subtle changes in nature day by day. In China and elsewhere, city dwellers saw the stars of the night sky for the first time, as car and factory emissions stopped. Their eyes were opened to the dazzling array across the whole dome of the sky, and they were amazed.

Everywhere God's wonders had been overlooked, neglected, obscured by our clutter and our trampling over the earth. Separation from one another is a tough price to pay, I know ... and for many, unbearable ... we are relational beings. But perhaps we could think now of better ways of relating. Perhaps this is also a good time to forge a deeper relationship with the natural world ... more appreciative of its importance to the quality of our lives, both material and spiritual.

We talk now of moving back to '*normal*.' But as people of faith and of hope in a future that God has prepared for us, we need to define '*normal*.' Our normal way of life should be God's way ... the way of His purpose in creating us. It is God's purpose for us that we work, as He Himself works. If God works *for* us, as we believe, then He asks us to work with Him for the good of all. In lockdown we spoke of KEY workers. These are the people God is using to see us all through

this crisis. And we were surprised, perhaps, to find who these people are, people we easily take for granted but cannot manage without. God needs all kinds of workers from NHS workers to farmers, from the factory manufacturer to the local shopkeeper, from the driver of the delivery van to the rubbish collectors, from scientific advisers to leaders in government. And God needs *us*, to proclaim His name and to make Jesus known, as key workers in His church. This means showing a different way of living, one that reaches out to our neighbour, of course, but also one that treads lightly upon the earth. Just the fact of travelling less and buying local produce has done much to save energy, reduce pollution and to support our farmers, growers and distributors. We need to continue to be satisfied with *enough for our needs* (that means less!) because then there is a chance that we will preserve the earth's yields for future generations and that – once again – God's beauty will be seen in all the earth. **Amen.**

HYMN MP 857 – I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgLwH5RdtPk>

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin, My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them? Whom shall I send?
*Here I am Lord, Is it I, Lord? I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me. I will hold Your people in my heart.*
I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne My people's pain.
I have wept for love of them, they turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them whom shall I send?
I, the Lord of wind and flame I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them, My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide, Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them, whom shall I send?

LET US PRAY to God our Father, the Lord of the Harvest that He will bring to fruition all that He desires for His creation.

Lord of creation, we see that the fields are ripe for harvesting. We pray for Your Church, that it may be ready to gather fruit for eternal life. **Lord of the harvest, in your mercy, hear us.**

You have created the universe by Your eternal Word, and have blessed humankind in giving us stewardship over the earth. We thank You for Your farmers all over the world who work all hours and in all conditions to provide food for our tables. We pray for the world, that we may honour and share its resources, and live in reverence for all creation and in harmony with one another. **Lord of the harvest, in your mercy, hear us.**

Your Son has promised that the Spirit will lead us into all truth. We pray for this community, where You have placed us. May we bear the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace. **Lord of the harvest, in your mercy hear us.**

You have given Your people a rich land, yet we have made a world of suffering and sorrow. We pray for those who bear the weight of affliction, and pray that they may come to share the life of wholeness and plenty that You have ordained. **Lord of the harvest, in your mercy hear us.**

Your Son, Jesus Christ, is the first-fruits of the resurrection and will reap the harvest of the dead at the end of time. We pray that He will gather us all together, with those who have gone before, in the great banquet of the age to come. **Lord of the harvest, in your mercy hear us.**

Source of all life and giver of all that is good, hear our prayers that we offer in the name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

HYMN MP 467 –Morning has broken, like the first morning

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KqZBSP5t-o>or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=we-n-Zmgl0>

Morning has broken like the first morning, blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning, praise for them springing fresh from the Word

Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven, like the first dew fall on the first grass
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden, sprung in completeness where His feet pass

Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning; born of the One Light Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning, God's recreation of the new day

BLESSING

May God bless the sun that is above us, the earth that is below us, the creatures all around us
and lead us all into His peace. **Amen.**