

A Harvest Celebration 2nd October, 2022 (StF)

Call to Worship: 2 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 6 to 8

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Cecil Frances Alexander, the wife of the Bishop of Kerry and Raphoe, William Alexander. Her first name was the result of a quaint Irish custom of naming a child after a family sponsor. Needless to say, she was called 'Fanny' by her friends! This hymn was one of a number written to explain the catechism to bored children at Sunday school, but is one of the most loved by adult, too. Number 100, 'All things bright and beautiful,'

*All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.*

**1. Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings: *Chorus:***

**2. The purple-headed mountain,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky: *Chorus:***

**3. The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one: *Chorus:***

**4. He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well: *Chorus:***

© Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 95)

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we come to worship you with joyful hearts, for you are the Creator of life throughout the universe who faithfully provides our daily needs. You are holy, wonderful and loving in all your ways. We see your glory in the vast galaxies of stars, planets and moons and the beauty and intricacy of plant and animal life. Gracious Lord, we welcome you into our hearts and into our lives as we meet here to celebrate the harvest of your love.

Heavenly Father, thank you for our lives, our work and rest, our homes, our families and friends. Thank you for opportunities you give us to enrich our lives and, at particularly at harvest time, for the food you provide for us, both our material food and our spiritual food. Thank you, Lord, for guiding us through life, for being our comforter in times of trouble, but more than all these gifts, thank you for loving us so much that you sent your beloved Son, Jesus, to be our Redeemer and Friend. Amen.

Let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving and confession. Let us pray.

Merciful God, although we live on this beautiful, self-sustaining planet, a world with enough resources to ensure the well-being of everybody, we are aware of the pain and suffering around us, much of which is the result of our failure to act as good stewards, of our foolishness, greed, selfishness, pride and, worst of all, indifference. For our failure as stewards of this planet, we ask your forgiveness.

Heavenly Father, for the part we have played in misusing the resources you have given us; for our thoughtless words and deeds which hurt and harm our neighbours; for our failure to help people who are in distress or need; for being preoccupied with our own wishes, rather than the well-being of others; for taking more than we need at the cost of people who do not have enough, we ask you to forgive us and help us change the way in which we live.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have forgiven us. In response to your grace, Lord, fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit to live out the Good News in both words and deeds in the blessed name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

We shall say the prayer that Jesus gave us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Our second hymn was written by Revd. Folliot Stanford Pierpoint after he had been inspired by a magnificent panorama near Bath. We shall sing hymn number 102, 'For the beauty of the earth'.

© F.S. Pierpoint (1835 – 1917)

- 1. For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies: *Chorus:*
*Gracious God, to Thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.***
- 2. For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale and tree and flower,
Sun and moon, and stars of light: *Chorus***
- 3. For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight: *Chorus***
- 4. For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above,
Pleasures pure and undefiled: *Chorus***
- 5. For each perfect gift of Thine
To our race so freely given;
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven. *Chorus***

We shall now bring our concerns to the Lord our God.

Heavenly Father, as we consider the harvest you faithfully produce year by year, we are moved by your generosity and goodness to offer ourselves in your service to share blessings we receive from you with those around us. May we be given the courage, wisdom, steadfastness, faith and, above all, compassion, so we are able to work for the well-being of our neighbours. Generous God, where we are unable to bring about healing and change on our own, we ask you to act, for all things are possible for you.

Loving God, even in years when we have a poor harvest, we can buy in food from overseas. We pray for the many countries in the Developing World, where harvests have failed and there is no means of buying in the food they need. Help establish a just world, where the needs of the poor, thirsty, sick, hungry and homeless are met by nations that have more than they need. Bless charities like Christian Aid, Cafod, All we Can and the Disasters Emergency Committee for their support of the world's poor and, despite the world's financial problems, may wealthier nations offer the Developing World support to help them build a secure, fulfilling future. We offer our prayer for victims of severe flooding in Pakistan, asking that the nation receives much needed help as soon as possible.

We remember, too, people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to record levels and we thank you for food banks and for other organisations which help the poor. Nevertheless, we pray the Government and other agencies, including the Church, find ways of helping all who are finding it difficult to manage.

Lord of healing and well-being, we pray for people who are sick in body, mind or spirit. Let them find healing and renewed strength, not only through the professional care and support they receive, but through your gracious presence in their time of need. We remember, too, those who are living with a dementia, for whom their environment is a strange land, who feel estranged from both those they love and from God. May they receive the support and comfort the need day by day. Grant them comfort, encouragement and companionship on their journey with dementia. Bless and uphold their families, carers and friends, helping them face the inevitable changes and loss that mark dementias' progress.

Hear our prayer for all who are experiencing troubles and traumas, especially those who have been bereaved. Loving God, help us be sensitive to the needs of our neighbours in distress, so we can offer them both friendship and practical support, but we ask you to reach out to hold everyone for whom we have prayed in the warmth of your love which bestows healing, hope and peace.

Gracious God, hear our prayer for peace in the world, especially in Ukraine. Warm the hearts of national leaders and leaders of opposition parties, so they work for justice and mercy which create lasting peace, rather than their own vested interests. Breathe the Spirit of truth and love upon this troubled world and grant that our own lives display the peace we ask from others.

Holy God, we pray for our church, for all churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church. Inspire and renew us as we seek new ways to serve our communities, as we emerge from the dark shadow of Coronavirus. Teach us to speak of the saving grace of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity of mission, so we bear the gospel light to our suffering, sin-darkened world.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our friends and our families. Help us to lead Christ-centred lives and, as you give us an abundance in the harvest of love, may the Holy

Spirit help us to share it freely wherever we go, in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our first reading is Deuteronomy chapter 24 verses 19 to 22

When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this. Amen.

The Gospel reading is Luke chapter 12 verses 13 to 21

Someone in the crowd said to him,
“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus replied,
“Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them,
“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them this parable:
“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself,
“You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”

But God said to him,
‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” Amen.

Our next hymn was written by a retired Methodist minister, Revd. Fred Pratt Green, who was born in 1903 and died in 2000. It is set to ‘Ar hyd y nos’, or ‘All through the night’. Hymn number 124, ‘For the fruits of all creation,’

**1. For the fruits of all 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 his 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.**

© Fred Pratt Green {1903 – 2000}

Address: “Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow,” Deut. 24: 19

This summer’s drought has seriously affected this year’s harvest in the United Kingdom, added to which the war in Ukraine has reduced the supply of wheat and cooking oil dramatically. Two hundred years ago, we might have faced famine, for centuries ago, a failed harvest could prove disastrous – just consider the Potato Famine in Ireland in the 1840s and 50s in which a million died and more than a million emigrated out of a population of under four million. However, nowadays in the Northern hemisphere if our harvests fail, we can import food from around the world. Indeed, because of global markets, we don’t have ‘seasonal foods’ any more, unless we grow our own. Nevertheless, many countries are experiencing serious famines at present, especially countries like Afghanistan and lands in the horn of Africa where crops have failed because of a prolonged drought, resulting in the risk of mass-starvation.

We are indebted to farmers, who grow our food, to those who prepare and process the crops, to distributors and to people who sell us food. Their work provides our needs, though as city-dwellers we frequently forget how important they are to our well-being. Nevertheless, we are most indebted to God, who provided us with a fertile, self-sustaining planet upon which our crops can be grown. If the ecosystem he created should fail, then we would be doomed, which is why campaigners like David Attenborough ought to be listened to.

In Hebrew books of God’s Law, there is a section for social justice, or compassion if you prefer. Our reading from Deuteronomy deals with harvesting and looks to help the disadvantaged: the foreigner, or outsider, the orphans and widows, none of whom had any security in the ancient world. Farmers are directed to leave some of the crop that has been overlooked, so that the poor and socially – excluded may not starve. It reminds them that God brought them out of slavery and they had been aliens in Egypt beforehand.

Tragically, we live in a world where, despite our technical advances, millions of people in the Developing World don’t even have one proper meal each day, a world in which hundreds of thousands of children die because of poverty every week, whilst food waste in this country is enormous. As we offer praise and thanksgiving to God for our harvest, let us support efforts to relieve hunger in other lands.

The reason why the farmer in our gospel reading is described as ‘a fool’, is because, in Proverbs, a book of wisdom literature, the term ‘fool’ is used for one who does not recognise God’s involvement in human life and who lives for himself or herself alone. Such people often make gaining wealth their goal in life, leaving no room for God and neighbour as a result. The result of the farmer’s desire for earthly riches is a personal disaster: he dies before he can enjoy what he has striven for. Torah commanded Jews to share excess harvests with the poor, the orphaned and widows, but the foolish farmer wanted to keep everything for himself, forgetting that the harvest itself was God’s gift. He may have died wealthy in material terms, but his conversation was self – centred, all ‘I’ and ‘my’; no mention of other people or of God. What kind of relationship can he have had with family, friends – or, indeed, with God?

It is easy to agree with Jesus in the case of the rich fool, but how would we stand if Jesus were to come to us now? The coming winter is likely to be a hard time for us all, with high energy costs and record inflation to contend with. We may need to draw in our horns in financial terms, but we ought not neglect the needs of struggling neighbours. We may not be able to offer as much as we would like in material terms, but there are other things we can do as individuals or 'Church'.

It is not only the Developing world that faces major challenges: the rise of food, fuel and energy prices in this country will push many people into food and fuel poverty, when some will have to choose whether to keep warm or eat. I shall resist the temptation to launch into a tirade against a society where hard-working people can't earn enough to survive without help from charities, but that would take me away from thanking everybody who has supported them.

We must recognize the work done by foodbanks around the country, including, the Black Country Foodbank, The Well and the Good Shepherd in Wolverhampton. The Good Shepherd provides food, hot meals and support not only to homeless people, or the unemployed, but to working people whose wages are so low that, after they've paid their rent and utility bills, they have insufficient money to feed themselves or their families

I pray that all of us acknowledge the price Christ was willing to pay to free us from slavery to sin and respond as generously as we can to our neighbours' needs, not only in giving but in care and prayer. God bless you for your kindness and may God bless the work of all who are working to relieve deprivation and poverty. Amen.

We conclude our worship with a hymn written by Matthias Claudius in the 18th Century, not as a hymn, but as a poem in a German play, 'Paul Erdmann's Fest', of 1782! It was translated into English by Jane Montgomery Campbell and has been a harvest-time favourite ever since. We shall sing number 130, 'We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land'.

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. Chorus:

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. Chorus:

**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. *Chorus:***

© *M. Claudius {1740 – 1815} Trans. J.M. Campbell {1817 – 1878}*

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.