

A Harvest Celebration 20th September, 2026 (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 67 verses 5 to 7

May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him. Amen.

We praise Almighty God for his providence and grace as we sing a hymn, written in 1968 by Revd. Brian Wren, a Congregational minister, educationalist and writer. It is set to “Miniver” which was originally written for ‘Lord of all hopefulness’, as the author of that hymn also wrote the novel “Mrs. Miniver” which was made into a successful film in the Second World War. We shall sing hymn number 126, ‘Praise God for the harvest of orchard and field’.

1. Praise God for the harvest of orchard and field,
Praise God for the people who gather their yield,
For long hours of labour, the skills of a team,
The patience of science, the power of machine.

2. Praise God for the harvest that comes from afar,
From market and harbour, the sea and the shore:
Foods packed and transported, and gathered and grown
By God-given neighbours, unseen and unknown.

3. Praise God for the harvest that’s quarried and mined,
Then sifted, and smelted, or shaped and refined:
For oil and for iron, for copper and coal,
Praise God, who in love has provided them all.

4. Praise God for the harvest of science and skill,
The urge to discover, create and fulfil:
For dreams and inventions that promise to gain
A future more hopeful, a world more humane.

5. Praise God for the harvest of mercy and love
From leaders and peoples who struggle and serve
For patience and kindness, that all may be led
To freedom and justice, and all may be fed.

© Brian Wren (born 1936)

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we have come to worship you with grateful hearts, for you are the Creator of life throughout the universe who faithfully provides our daily needs, for 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 variety of plant and animal life, especially with the glorious colours of autumn. 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 the world on which we live, for the blessings you bestow on us and particularly at harvest time, for the food you provide for us, both material food and 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.

In our prayer of confession, when I say, ‘Lord, in your mercy’, please respond with ‘Hear our prayer’. Let us pray.

Merciful God, although we live on a beautiful, self-sustaining planet, a world with enough resources to ensure everybody's needs, 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 world, of our foolishness, greed, selfishness and, worst of all, indifference. For our lack of care for this planet, with the problems caused by global warming and diminishing resources, we ask your forgiveness.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, for our thoughtless words and deeds which hurt and harm people around us; for our failure to help those 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.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

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 next hymn was written by another Congregational minister Revd. Albert Bayly and set to the melody usually used for 'Morning has broken'. Hymn number 125, 'Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer,'

1. Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer

**For all things living you have made good;
Harvest of sown fields, fruits of the orchard,
Hay from the mown fields, blossom and wood.**

**2. Lord, bless the labour we bring to serve you,
That with our neighbour we may be fed.**

**Sowing or tilling, we would work with you;
Harvesting, milling, for daily bread.**

**3. Father, providing food for your children,
Your wisdom guiding teaches us share
One with another, so that, rejoicing,
With us our brother may know you care.**

**4. Then will your blessing reach every people;
Each one confessing your gracious hand.
When you are reigning no one will hunger;
Your love sustaining fruitful the land.**

© A.F. Bayly (1901 – 1984)

We come to our prayers of intercession, when we pray for people nearby and far away.

Creator God, as we celebrate at harvest-time, we ask you to bless people who provide us with our food: farmers and fishermen; those who process, prepare and transport our food; for people who work in warehouses and shops, but most all for you through whom

our food grows year after year. However, we are also aware of how broken our world is, often by human failure to live as you call us to, so in Jesus' name we ask you to guide and empower us as we seek to serve our neighbours. Lord, we recognize that we can't make as many changes we would like to see on our own. Nevertheless, help us answer our call to serve conscientiously and, when the best we can do is not enough, then reach out and inspire people who have greater power and influence to act as well.

Jesus Christ commanded us to love one another, so the many wars that are being waged across the planet are an affront to you and a source of grief to us. We ask you to bless everyone who is working for peace: for negotiators, aid-workers and medics, particularly those who are putting themselves at risk by serving on the front line. May they enjoy success in their endeavours and remain safe in your care. We pray for a just and swift end to war in the Holy Land, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, in Ukraine as well as in Congo, Sudan and Somalia where conflicts are rarely reported by our Media, but whose peoples face famines and great suffering.

Lord, guide national leaders to govern with mercy and justice which are the foundations of lasting peace. And Lord, remember in your mercy, all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression, that they may receive the courage and support they need to rebuild their lives and find healing.

We pray for our church, the churches in our Circuit, in neighbouring circuits and, indeed, the World Church. May we speak of the love and beauty of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity of mission. May the Holy Spirit guide us to employ our faith, love, gifts and graces in our discipleship, so our words and deeds steadfastly carry the gospel light to this strife-ridden and broken world.

Lord of creation, the breakdown of the ecosystem upon which we and all living beings depend is evident in the extreme weather that is affecting every continent, as highlighted by wildfires, droughts, melting ice caps and floods which are causing serious damage and loss of life in many countries. For the sake of life on this planet and for future generations, help us to live in a more sustainable way by being less wasteful, by reducing pollution and using only the resources we need.

We remember people who are sick in body, mind or spirit; for all who are lonely, afraid, or in any kind of need or trouble. We pray in particular, everybody who mourns the loss of somebody dear and finds bereavement unbearable. In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned.

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Lord, while we ask you to help us provide them with both practical support and friendship, enfold them in the warmth of your love, so they may be comforted, find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

Abba, heavenly Father bless us our families and our friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us share the harvest of your love, day by day, with everybody we meet, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

The next hymn is on your sheets. I wrote it originally in 1997, but reworked it earlier this month. I hope you will know the setting, "The Ash Grove", which isn't in "Singing the Faith" but is in "The United Methodist Hymn Book" from the U.S.A.. We shall sing 'The food that our fields at harvest-time yields'.

1. The food that our fields

At harvest-time yield

Is proof of God's faithfulness, year after year.

Through Christ we shall flourish,

Our souls he will nourish
With generous compassion that makes our souls stir;
Like plants we are growing,
Sustained by love flowing
From faith rooted deeply, both healthy and strong.
So praise we shall sing Him –
Our gifts we shall bring Him –
As acts of thanksgiving
In prayer and in song.

2. The fields and the fountains,
The moors and the mountains;
The works of your hands fill our souls with such awe.
Our minds fill with wonder;
At rainbows and thunder –
But your boundless love still amazes us more:
For Jesus you gave us
To die and to save us
From sin that has marred us from Adam's first fall.
Thus freed, may our living
Be filled with thanksgiving,
To worship you truly
And answer your call.

M. Rider (October 1997 reworked 6th Sept., 2026 - sung to 'The Ash Grove')

Our Old Testament reading is Ruth chapter 2 verses 1 to 23

Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!" "The LORD bless you!" they called back. Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?" The foreman replied, "She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."

So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled." At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?" Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have

come to take refuge." "May I continue to find favour in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls."

At mealtime Boaz said to her,

"Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, "Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her."

So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough. Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working.

"The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said.

"The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."

Then Ruth the Moabitess said,

"He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.'"

Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law,

"It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else's field you might be harmed." So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Amen.

Address Part 1: *"Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?" Ruth 2:10*

If you want a really romantic story, you can set aside Barbara Cartland, or Mills & Boon, for the Book of Ruth is better and shorter than most novels! The story is simple:

Elimelech, his wife, Naomi and their two sons left Bethlehem during a famine and settled in Gentile Moab. After Elimelech died, the sons married Moabite women and cared for Naomi, but ten years later, both young men died within a short time of one another, leaving the three widows in a terrible plight, for without husbands, they had neither status nor defence against any kind of privation. **In the unsentimental society of the time, there was no state support for people unable to support themselves.** All they could hope for was the charity of relatives, or of finding another husband, but as Naomi would have been past child-bearing age, another husband for her was out of the question! She knew she had to return to Bethlehem, if she was to avoid starvation, but her daughters-in-law decided to accompany her. Despite her protests, Ruth refused to leave her, declaring instead, **'Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried.'**

Ruth's courage was as great as her steadfast love for Naomi, because neither woman had any guarantee that they would be well-received by any of Naomi's relatives on her return. However, the story ends happily with her marriage to Boaz. Moreover, she became Great-grandmother of King David and a forebear of Jesus Christ, whose steadfast love for all of us led him to Calvary to redeem us from our sins.

Whereas both Ruth and Boaz were generous and loyal, many people aren't and our reading from Matthew is a warning against materialism and selfishness. In this age of blogs, Tik Tok and influencers, it is too easy to be seduced by consumerism when we want far more than we need, sometimes just to keep up with the Jones'. In those circumstances, we fall into the trap of self-absorption and are jealous of people who possess more than we do. It is clear that, to a lesser degree, some of Jesus' followers were also anxious about material things, so Jesus told them not to become preoccupied with exotic food and fancy clothes, for God provides our needs, rather than our wants. We, his followers, need to seek kingdom values rather than worldly ones, for we live in a consumer-driven, materialistic society, where success is often measured by our salaries, by possessions, or being famous and powerful.

As a result, there is an increasing gulf between haves and have-nots not only between the Northern hemisphere and the poorer South, but between the rich and poor in the United Kingdom. We have those who think nothing about spending several hundred pounds on a gourmet meal, whilst poorer neighbours rely on whatever food banks can give them. What then are the kingdom values that we should seek?

Our next hymn was written by Karen Lafferty at a point in her life when money was tight after she had given up a successful singing career in order to serve as a missionary to drug addicts and prostitutes in Amsterdam. She lived out the words of the hymn we are about to sing. Hymn number 254, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,'

1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And his righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you;

Allelu—, Alleluia: *Chorus:*

Alleluia, Alleluia,

Alleluia, Allelu—, Alleluia!

2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find;
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;

Allelu—, Alleluia: *Chorus:*

Alleluia, Alleluia,

Alleluia, Allelu—, Alleluia!

3. We shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;

Allelu—, Alleluia: *Chorus:*

Alleluia, Alleluia,

Alleluia, Allelu—, Alleluia!

© Karen Lafferty (born 1948)

The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 6 verses 25 to 33

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well". Amen.

Address 2: “But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.” Luke 12:31 Jesus, God’s Son, in Charles Wesley’s words, ‘**left his Father’s throne above – / So free, so infinite his grace – / Emptied himself of all but love, / And bled for Adam’s helpless race.**’ Our Saviour set aside his heavenly attributes – except for love – and came to earth as a baby, the first-born of a carpenter who lived in a most unfashionable part of Judea, with many Gentile neighbours. He grew up among such people, became a carpenter himself and then became a wandering preacher and healer, using neither for financial gain. He relied on the hospitality of supporters and people he met, for food and shelter, but was satisfied with all he received. He sought neither wealth nor power and, when his disciples argued about who was most important, he told them, **“If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”** In other words, Kingdom Wisdom turns human values on their head: the greatest followers are those who are humble and willing to serve others, irrespective of their status. This is not the way our secular society looks at greatness, for the wealthy and powerful, usually employ people to perform tasks they consider demeaning for them.

Jesus’ main concern was for the poor, the marginalised and the outcast, for those who were diseased in body, mind or spirit, for others who were considered sinners, like tax collectors, and for non-Jews. His ministry witnessed his outreach to them, offering a new start, reconciled to one another and to God the Father. Don’t forget, when he died on that cross at Calvary, he did not die just for us, but for the sins of the whole world – which includes people who never darken the doors of a church. Jesus died, so everybody has a chance to turn to God and be saved, even at the fifty ninth minute of the eleventh hour! **Yom Kippur – New Start!!!**

Today, as we celebrate God’s constant beneficence at harvest time, let us not only thank him, but those who grew the crops, processed it, delivered it and people who sell it. Let us also recognised how blessed we are in the United Kingdom, for compared with neighbours in the Developing World our ‘poor’ would be considered relatively ‘well-off’. This doesn’t mean we ought to direct our attention solely to the world’s poor, because a trip to a foodbank will demonstrate the needs of many in the area, who rely on their resources. No, we must continue to support them and work for a fairer society where the gulf between rich and poor will contract, rather than grow.

We must also strive for a world where farmers in the poor countries are not exploited by multinational corporations which won’t pay them a reasonable price for their goods, where textile workers in South East Asia don’t slave for a pittance in sweatshops to provide clothing and other commodities for us. Let us support Fairtrade, lobby shops to be more open about the sources of their goods and to call on our MPs to set aside vested interests in order to effect change in global terms. **In other words, let us display the generosity and loving-kindness of both Ruth and Boaz and the sacrificial grace of Christ as we continue to work for his kingdom. Amen.**

Our closing hymn was written in 1970 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}

Benediction

Father God, grant us faith to produce good, sweet fruit in our discipleship, so the harvest of our works is pleasing in your sight. May we always offer the first-fruits of our love to you, our Lord and Sustainer and the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit remain with us and those we love evermore. Amen.