

Sunday 4th October 2020 Harvest Thanksgiving
Church of the Holy Rude

Call to worship

The heavens declare the glory of God
The skies display the work of his hands

Prayer

Lord of creation , whose glory is all around and within us
you crown the year with your goodness
and you give us the fruits of the earth in their season
for giving us your gifts
and the fruits of the earth in through the seasons.
we offer you our praise
Open our eyes to your wonders,
that we may serve you with reverence
and know your peace.

Psalm 65

Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion;
and to you shall vows be performed,
O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.
When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,
you forgive our transgressions.
Happy are those whom you choose
and bring near to live in your courts.
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.
By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.
By your strength you established the mountains;
you are girded with might.
You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.
Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.
You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.
You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.
You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Prayer of Confession

Let us confess our sin, and the sins of our society,
in the misuse of God's creation.

God our Father, we are sorry
for the times when we have used your gifts carelessly,
and acted ungratefully.
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 given them to us.
Father, in your mercy:
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 are thoughtless,
and do not care enough for the world you have made.
Father, in your mercy:
forgive us and help us.
We store up goods for ourselves alone,
as if there were no God and no heaven.
Father, in your mercy:
forgive us and help us.

Hymn Come, you thankful people, come

Deuteronomy 8: 6-18

Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper.

You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you. Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today.

When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible

wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.

Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

Sermon

Each Sunday through September, we have heard the story unfold of how God rescued the people of Israel from persecution and death in Egypt, and through generous provision for their needs – body and soul – God’s nature as a God who is steadfast, loving and faithful is revealed in the ways in which God supplied the needs of the people, saved them from death, and nurtured them with both food for the day and water to drink. The story of the Exodus is the story of God establishing a relationship – a covenant – with the people God chose to be an example to all the nations and peoples of the world.

That story is one of Israel wandering in the desert for forty years, losing their way, taking the wrong path, forgetting God’s love and grace, and generally failing to live up to what is expected of them. Yet it was also a journey during which they were put to the test, and although often found wanting, even so arrived in the end at their destination and their destiny, the land promised to Abraham and his descendants, where God would establish them in a land where they would be safe, and prosper; a land ‘flowing with milk and honey’.

Deuteronomy is a continuation of their story, of their journey with God in faith and trust, as they enter the land, settle in it, and make a new life for themselves and the generations who will come after. Today’s reading tells us of the bringing in of the harvest – that was a time to remember and to praise God for such generous providing that for another year people would have enough to eat to see them through the lean months of winter until the spring came once again.

As we learn from Deuteronomy, the harvest thanksgiving was closely linked in their minds to remembrance of God’s liberation of Israel from the power of Pharaoh, bringing them through the wilderness to live in a land rich and fertile that had been promised to Abraham and his descendants, the proof that God keeps the promises he makes. For Israel, the importance of Thanksgiving was also a time of remembrance, in which they recounted that story of exile and liberation and homecoming so that they might not forget all that God had done, guiding them through times of danger and testing, but always ready to provide the essential food and water - manna, quail and fresh water from a rock - to sustain them on the way.

For like the people of Israel in ancient times, we give thanks to God at the harvest time, not only for the harvest safely gathered in, which provide us with the essentials of life, but also for the gifts of faith, the Holy Spirit, and above all, the gift of Jesus himself, the bread of

heaven that fills us with spiritual sustenance for the journey to another promised land, a different kingdom, and the greater glory of God.

The people of Israel, safely established in their promised land, knew that God kept the promises made to their ancestors; they knew God to be faithful and loving; they remembered the suffering of their ancestors, and rejoiced that they could live in peace in a land of plenty.

Even as we make our own harvest offering, we acknowledge that God is the creator, the maker of all, from whom all things are brought into being. This is an eternal truth that we profess as Christians, as people of faith. For us, the wonders of the universe, the multitude of stars and solar systems and planets, the world in which we live and our very lives, are speaking the language of poetry and liturgy, 'the work of God's hands', and for that we give God thanks and praise in worship.

This harvest time we thank God for the work and beauty of creation that has been entrusted into our hands; a gift which provides for each generation as it rises and falls, a precious gift which we have as a human race too often exploited and despoiled for our own purposes, poisoning the environment, destroying fragile eco-systems, greedily using up the earth's finite resources and thereby threatening to squander the gifts that God so graciously and generously provides.

Let us then remember to thank God for the world in which we live, and in thanksgiving resolve to do all we can to protect and preserve this world's resources of land and sea, forest and mountain, air and water, that they may continue to sustain the generations that will come after us, so that our children and our children's children may have reason to make their own thanksgiving to the God who both gives and sustains all living things.

Each one of us should remember that to be grateful for the lives that we have, every one a gift from God, every one to be lived in faith and hope, and every one sustained by God generous, loving and gracious nurturing and provision. And as we have been blessed with all we need, to live as God desires, then we cannot forget those who share this world with us, for whom life is a daily struggle to find food to eat and clean water to drink; whose lives know no peace in the midst of war or who find themselves strangers in a strange land, forced into exile by violence and persecution.

The gifts that God gives we know are not to be hoarded, but shared generously, whether money or food, or time and energy, the offerings we make in thanksgiving to God are given for the life of the world and for the needs of others. And it may be that in order for God's gifts to be shared as God intends, then we who are rich must learn to make do with less, so that those who have little may find their lives enriched, for the sake of the one who emptied himself of all power and glory in order to become one of us, and one with us, for it is in the example of Jesus himself, who constantly gave thanks to God, that we find the pattern and the model for our own Christian living.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We give you all thanks and praise, O God
at all times and in all places
For the colour and forms of your creation
and our place within it, Good and generous God;
your mercy endures for ever.

You provide our daily food,
and those whose work and skill
bring your good gifts to us; your mercy endures for ever.
To guide us through life you have given gifts and graces
inspired in human minds and hearts;
insight and imagination, and the skills of research
which bring healing and fulfilment to the lives of many;
We thank you for the light and shades of the changing seasons,
and their variety and dependability;
for new life and growth out of barrenness and decay;
For new hope and strength in our communities,
especially in your Church and among all you call to serve you,
For all in whose lives we see goodness, kindness, gentleness,
patience and humility, and all the fruit of the Spirit,
For the life we have been given,
and for all those with whom we are blessed to share it,
Thanks and praise be to you, O God, Maker of All.

Let us offer our prayers to God for the life of the world
and for all God's people in their daily life and work.
God, the beginning and end of all things,
in your providence and care
you watch unceasingly over all creation;
we offer our prayers
that in us and in all your people your will may be done,
according to your wise and loving purpose in Christ our Lord.

Lord of all life:
hear our prayer.

We pray for all through whom we receive sustenance and life;
for farmers and agricultural workers,
for packers, distributors and company boards;
as you have so ordered our life that we depend upon each other,
enable us by your grace to seek the well-being of others before
our own.

Lord of all life:
hear our prayer.

We pray for all engaged in research to safeguard crops against disease,
and to produce abundant life among those who hunger

and whose lives are at risk.
Prosper the work of their hands
and the searching of their minds,
that their labour may be for the welfare of all.

Lord of all life:
hear our prayer.

We pray for governments and aid agencies,
and those areas of the world where there is disaster, drought
and starvation.
By the grace of your Spirit,
touch our hearts
and the hearts of all who live in comfortable plenty,
and make us wise stewards of your gifts.

Lord of all life:
hear our prayer.

We pray for those who are ill,
remembering those in hospital and nursing homes
and all who are known to us.
We pray for all who care for them.
Give skill and understanding
to all who work for their well-being.

Lord of all life:
hear our prayer.

We remember those who have died,
whom we entrust to your eternal love
in the hope of resurrection to new life.

Lord of all life:
hear our prayer.

We offer ourselves to your service,
asking that by the Spirit at work in us
others may receive a rich harvest of love and joy and peace.

Lord of all life:
hear our prayer.

God of grace,
as you are ever at work in your creation,
so fulfil your wise and loving purpose in us
and in all for whom we pray,
that with them and in all that you have made,

your glory may be revealed
and the whole earth give praise to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn We plough the fields and scatter

Benediction