

## Harvest 2020 'A God of Good things'

### Order of Service

#### **Gathering hymn: StF 123 Come, ye thankful people come**

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 wants to be supplied;  
Come to God's own temple, come, raise the song of harvest home!

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.

For the Lord our God shall come and shall take his harvest home;  
from his field shall purge away all that doth offend that day,  
give his angels charge at last in the fire the tares to cast,  
But the fruitful ears to store in his garner evermore.

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!

Henry Alford (1810-1871)

#### **Opening words**

We come to worship God and give thanks for the harvest.  
For the harvest of the earth, sea and field, we thank you, Lord God.  
For the harvest of good things that you give to each one of us, we thank you, Lord God.  
For the harvest of faith, hope and love we commit ourselves to again this day.  
For our lives and all that you provide for us, we thank you, O God.

#### **Hymn StF 65 Sing of the Lord's goodness**

Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom, come to him and bless his name.  
Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever, faithful to the end of days.

*Come then all you nations, sing of your Lord's goodness,  
melodies of praise and thanks to God.*

*Ring out the Lord's glory, praise him with your music,  
worship him and bless his name.*

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment, risen from the snares of death.  
His word he has spoken, one bread he has broken, new life he now gives to all.

*Come then all you nations.....*

Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow, Spirit of our God most high;  
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner, splendour of the living God.

*Come then all you nations.....*

Praise him with your singing, praise him with the trumpet, praise God with the lute and harp;

praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing, praise God till the end of days.

*Come then all you nations.....*

Ernest Sands (b.1949)

### **Opening prayers**

Creator God, in the beginning, there was nothing, and out of nothing you fashioned a universe so vast, so unimaginable that we are amazed by its breadth and resilience. And within this universe you positioned the earth and populated it, provided for it and designed for it to be a place of beauty. Creator God: thank you.

In the beginning, there was just potential; the seed within the packet, soil's nutrients, sunshine's warmth, rain clouds gathering. And within the tiny seed all that is our daily bread encoded, primed and ready should it be planted and allowed to grow. Creator God: thank you.

God of harvest, gardener supreme, you place us at the centre. You feed us, equip us and having provided for us, look to a different harvest: a fruitfulness of lives in service to you and others.

So now, we take a few moments to acknowledge the times when our lives have not brought forth fruit. For the times when we have not been the people that you would have us be.

*Pause to offer own prayers.*

Merciful God, your grace moves in our lives beyond our imagining. You never give up on us or turn us away. In Jesus, the Word made flesh, we have one who freely gives a way back to you. As we come to you seeking forgiveness, may we know it in our hearts and harvest mercy, grace and peace in our lives as we live to bring glory to you. Amen.

### **Bible reading: Psalm 84**

<sup>1</sup> How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!

<sup>2</sup> My soul longs, indeed it faints  
for the courts of the LORD;

my heart and my flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.

<sup>3</sup> Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.

<sup>4</sup> Happy are those who live in your house,  
ever singing your praise.

<sup>5</sup> Happy are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

<sup>6</sup> As they go through the valley of Baca  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.

<sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength;  
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

<sup>8</sup> O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob!

<sup>9</sup> Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of your anointed.

<sup>10</sup> For a day in your courts is better  
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than live in the tents of wickedness.

<sup>11</sup> For the LORD God is a sun and shield; he bestows favour and honour.

No good thing does the LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly.

<sup>12</sup> O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

### **Talk One - Saying thank you for good things**

The opening words of Psalm 84, A psalm with the subtitle 'The joy of worship in the temple', may have felt a little like rubbing salt in a wound for those of us who are desperately missing being in our church buildings and places of worship. The Psalmist says in words we can surely relate to, 'How lovely is your dwelling place...my soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord'. However, those of us at home do get our own back with a verse which says, 'Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise' as we can sing the hymns heartily from our armchairs whilst those who are in church are not permitted to sing at the present time!

There is no doubt that the Psalmist in certain parts of Psalm 84 is referring to a physical building for worship and praise. However, the Psalm, helpfully for us, reaches beyond this and encourages us to reflect on a spirit of worship that is about finding a place in our hearts to express gratitude and thanks to God so that our very beings, wherever we are, can sing out for joy to the living God.

For me, harvest always appears to have two aspects to it. Harvest is a season of gratitude and thankfulness for all that God has provided for us and it is also a time when we look to sharing the abundance of the harvest with others. Harvest is often a time when we think about food. Many of us, if we were in church would be sharing in a harvest meal or harvest supper today as part of our celebrations. We might also take the opportunity to donate food items to a good cause - maybe a charity like All We Can or a more local charity or food bank.

If we think about food for a moment, research suggests that folks' eating habits have changed a bit during lockdown. You might have heard of the phrase 'lockdown larder' - the suggestion that we have filled our fridges and cupboards differently over the last few months. In my bag of 'good things' that I asked you to think about in preparation for this harvest weekend I have items that reflect some of these changing habits:

- \* generally people have eaten less meat (the environment has benefitted from this too) and more pulses and vegetables, so in my bag I have lentils and beans.

- \* people have generally eaten less meat, however the consumption of sausages has markedly increased. Research suggests that there has been an increase of 6 million more weekly meals of sausages! So a tin of sausages and some sauce to go with them are in my bag.

- \* one of the foodstuffs that has proved very popular during lockdown is popcorn. People have been buying lots more of this and enjoying it at home. So popcorn is in my bag of good things too.

- \* you may have seen the research that suggests that many more people have taken up baking during lockdown (flour and eggs were in very short supply at the start of lockdown in my local supermarket). Banana bread is thought to be one of the favourite bakes of the nation. So I have some of that along with flour and eggs in my bag.

- \* Lastly, research suggests that more bread and pasta have been consumed during lockdown than at any time before. So these goods are also in my bag of good things.

What would be in your bag of good things? It may not be food items but other things that we might come to in a moment.

To return to the words of Psalm 84, the Psalmist says 'No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly'.

Whilst living through lockdown and continuing to live under some restriction is not easy for many of us, our celebration of harvest encourages us to think beyond this to the good things that are around us if we can see them and when we do become aware of them we can give thanks to God for them.

## StF 121 Autumn days

Autumn days when the grass is jewelled, and the silk inside a chestnut shell,  
jet planes meeting in the air to be refuelled, all these things I love so well,  
*So I mustn't forget, no, I mustn't forget to say a great big thank-you,  
I mustn't forget.*

Clouds that look like familiar faces, and the winters moon with frosted rings,  
smell of bacon as I fasten up my laces, and the song the milkman sings.  
*So I mustn't forget.....*

Whipped-up spray that is rainbow-scattered and a swallow curving in the sky,  
shoes so comfy though they're worn out and they're battered, and the taste of  
apple pie.

*So I mustn't forget.....*

Scent of gardens when the rain's been falling and a minnow darting down a stream,  
picked-up engine that's been stuttering and stalling and a win for my home team.

*So I mustn't forget.....*

Estelle White (b. 1925)

## Bible reading: James 1:17-18 and 2:14-17

<sup>17</sup> Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.<sup>18</sup> In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup> So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

## Talk Two - Sharing good things

One of the things I'm not very good at is sharing. I'm loathed to share certain things! You will not be surprised to learn that I am not good at sharing chocolate or sweets. Fruit pastilles are the worst in this regard. I'm happy to give away the green and yellow ones, but I like all the other colours far too much to waste on other people!!!! I also struggle to share a box of chocolates and the people in my house are very used to only being able to eat the ones that I like least! They now say when the box is offered 'Which one am I allowed to have?'

Yet, celebrating harvest encourages us to share **all** that God provides for us with others. James, in his letter to Jewish Christians living outside of Israel, implores them to put into action what they have come to believe in living a life consistent with their faith. He says 'Every generous act of giving..... is from above'. We are motivated as Christians to share God's good things with others. James goes on to use an example

that is about food and clothing but the point is that our faith should lead to doing any good work or good thing for another person. We have seen plenty of this in recent months. Here are some examples that we may have been part of:

- \* making masks and mask extenders for key workers in our communities or providing the resources for others to do so
- \* making scrubs and bags to put them in for those working in hospital and hospice settings
- \* fundraising for our NHS and key workers and clapping for them each Thursday evening
- \* delivering meals, communications and shopping to folk who have been shielding or are housebound
- \* checking in on neighbours in our own locality to see how they are coping

And there are many more things that we may have been involved in in our local community. I wonder too if you have reaped other benefits of lockdown? I know that many gardens have benefitted from extra tending during this time. I know too that some have taken the opportunity to decorate, declutter and DIY in their own homes. All of these activities, whether done at home or out and about, are examples of a different harvest for our place and time. A harvest of goodness that has been reaped in our communities as people have helped one another through a difficult and challenging time. A harvest from the extra time we have had available because we haven't been able to engage in our usual activities. Today, as we eat our lunch we might give thanks for all that God provides to nourish us each day. As we seek to live for others, putting faith into action, we might also give thanks for the harvest of goodness and love that comes from our belief in a God of good things.

### **Intercessions**

Heavenly Father, we bring our prayers to you for the world in which we live and people and communities known to us at this time.

We pray for all those who continue to be affected by Covid-19. We pray for ourselves as we seek to live within the restrictions placed upon us for our own health and for the health and wellbeing of others.

As we celebrate the abundance of harvest time today, we pray for those who are living in poverty in our midst. Those who have little resources - financially, practically, emotionally and spiritually. Help us to help others in our midst as we are able so that more may know that you are a God of good things.

We pray for all heads of government and those in positions of power throughout the world. We ask for them to be motivated to eradicate injustice and inequality and to work for peace and harmony amongst nations and peoples.

We thank you for the NHS and all those who work in health and social care. We pray for communities around the world where access to good healthcare is difficult and limited and we pray for charities and organisations that work, often in very challenging circumstances, to help in these situations.

*We pause to offer our own prayers for people and situations on our hearts this day.....*

Loving God, as we come with thankful hearts for all that you provide for us, we hear your call to live generously and to share the harvest with others. May we be aware of the needs of others and be part of the transforming of your world as we seek to share your abundant love in the world today.

We ask all these prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### **Lord's Prayer**

#### **StF 124 For the fruits of all creation**

For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God;  
for the 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 be done;  
in the help we give our neighbour, God's will be done.  
in our world-wide task of caring for the hungry and despairing,  
in the harvests we are sharing, God's will be 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.

Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)

### **Closing words and blessing**

Go now with thankful hearts to live fruitful lives.

Go in peace, and serve the Lord.

Go in love, and seek a better world.

Go in grace, and know that the God of grace goes with you. Amen.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and all those who we love and are called to love, now and forevermore, Amen.

**StF 130 We plough the fields and scatter**

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;  
now thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love.*

He only is the maker of all things near and far;  
he paints the wayside flower, he lights the evening star;  
the wind and waves obey him, by him the birds are fed;  
much more to us his children, he gives our daily bread.  
*All good gifts...*

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 that which you most welcome, our humble, thankful hearts.  
*All good gifts...*

Matthias Claudius (1740-1815)