

A SERVICE OF REFLECTION FOR HARVEST
SUNDAY 26th SEPTEMBER 2021



This service is set out as a traditional “nine lessons and carols service”, which we are more used to encountering at Christmas time. Through a “harvest” of hymns, readings, reflections and prayers, we will consider, the gifts of the soil, the seed and growth; then further reflect upon gathering, abundance and offering and finally contemplate sharing, feasting and the bread of life. You will need your bible to hand for the readings.

We pause in a moment of stillness to prepare ourselves to raise the song of harvest home with our first rousing hymn!

HYMN STF 123

<https://vimeo.com/446948137>

Come, you thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home !
Fruit and crops are gathered in
safe before the storms begin :
God our maker will provide
for our needs to be supplied ;
come, with all his people, come,
raise the song of harvest home !

All the world is God’s own field,
harvests for his praise to yield ;
wheat and weeds together sown
here for 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 bring his harvest home ;
he himself on that great day,
worthless things shall take away,
give his angels charge at last
in the fire the weeds to cast,
but the fruitful ears to store
in his care for evermore.

Even so, Lord, quickly come —
bring your final harvest home !
Gather all your people in
free from sorrow, free from sin,
there together purified,
ever thankful at your side —
come, with all your angels, come,
bring that glorious harvest home !

Henry Alford (1810–1871)

adapted by Compilers of Hymns for Today’s Church

1/ THE SOIL

Harvest always begins with the soil yet we seldom consider it. I have a particular liking for Kenyan tea, because of the flavour that is absorbed as it grows in the rich volcanic soil of the great Rift Valley, and I know that the best cabbages grow in the chalky soils of East Kent, but apart from such thoughts, we can become easily remote from the soil.

With increasingly sophisticated tools and machinery and with the use of harmful fertilizers and chemicals, our attention can be deflected from the core vitality of the natural soil and we urgently need to rediscover both a connection and a respect

for the soil as the basis for sustainable farming for the long term. Jesus, in our first reading, invites us to reflect on different kinds of soil, and it is a reminder to us to notice the fertility of our own spiritual ground and our readiness to hear his word.

READING: MATTHEW 13.1–9

2/ THE SEED

In the face of the environmental crisis, we encounter today, we can sometimes feel that the problems are too vast for us to make any real difference and as individuals, we can easily feel overwhelmed and powerless to bring about change. But as the gospel reading tells us, from small beginnings can come a harvest of changes! Just a handful of seeds, reminds us that truly great things can grow from what might seem like insignificant beginnings. What an encouragement it is to allow the seeds of hope to take root and grow in our lives, when we plant ourselves in the fertile soil of God's ways.

READING: MARK 4.26–32

**HYMN- ABOVE THE MOON EARTH RISES
(HYMN TUNE- AURELIA- THE CHURCH IS
ONE FOUNDATION)**

<https://youtu.be/KO630qCQ2k8>

Above the moon earth rises, a sunlit, mossy
stone,
A garden that God prizes where life has
richly grown.
An emerald selected for us to guard with
care,
An isle in space protected by one thin reef
of air.

The mossy stone is grieving, its tears are
bitter rain,
the garden is un-leaving and all its harvests
wane;
the emerald is clouded, its lustre dims and
fades,
the isle of life is shrouded in thick and
stagnant haze.

O listen to the sighing of water, sky and
land,
and hear the Spirit crying, the future is at
hand:
the moss and garden thinning portend a
death or birth,
the end or new beginning for all that lives
on earth.

A death if hearts now harden, a birth if we
repent
and tend and keep the garden as God has
always meant:
to sow without abusing the soil where life
is grown,
to reap without our bruising this sunlit
mossy stone.

Thomas H. Troeger (1945)

3/ GROWTH

Water is essential for growth; it is the
vector for all life and has become even
more conspicuous in our lives as we have
washed our hands to keep germs at bay. As
economies and industry has grown in a bid
to satisfy the insatiable demands of people,
we have seen our climate changing, with a
devastating effect on the impact of water,
from the extremes of scarcity to deluge.
Times of drought have led to crop failure
and famine, and torrential floods have led
to lives being literally washed away, and in
the West, have seen homes inundated

with water, where we have recklessly built houses on flood plains.

Ezekiel's image of the water of life speaks of a perfectly restored balance, where, all life can flourish, where God's vision for an ecosystem in perfect equilibrium, eliminates want, and enables and heals wounds. It is also a reminder to us that we are called to keep our spiritual "eco-systems" in balance too for the flourishing and growth of our life together as faith communities and as individuals.

READING: EZEKIEL 47.6–12

PRAYER

Divine Sower, God of the mustard seed and the abundant earth, may the good news of your love for us find the good soil of our hearts, that we may embrace the changes needed to care for creation and for one another.

From tiny beginnings you brought forth the universe and all that is in it. Give us wisdom to use your gifts well that we may be the agents of change, transformation and growth in our lives and in the world.

Help us to honour you in our care for the earth and all humanity, that the earth may be fruitful for all, as we follow in the footsteps of your Son Jesus, Lord of the Harvest. Amen.

HYMN STF- 377

We hear in the words and music of this hymn, the outpouring of God's generous grace so freely given, and we rejoice in it.

<https://youtu.be/XW3ILo1U9Lw>

Down the mountain the river flows,
and it brings refreshment wherever it goes.

Through the valleys and over the fields,
the river is rushing and the river is here.

*The river of God sets our feet a-dancing,
the river of God fills our hearts with cheer;
the river of God fills our mouths with
laughter,
and we rejoice for the river is here.*

The river of God is teeming with life,
and all who touch it can be revived.
And those who linger on this river's shore
will come back thirsting for more of the
Lord.

Up to the mountain we love to go
to find the presence of the Lord.
Along the banks of the river we run,
we dance with laughter, giving praise to
the Son.

Andy Park

4/ GATHERING

We are sometimes tempted to achieve the maximum yield for short-term profits, but the long-term impact can be devastating for sustainability and biodiversity and for those on the margins of existence. The plundering and polluting of that land and of fishing grounds has led to devastating effects on ecosystems around the world, but thankfully through the media, we are beginning to recognize the need to take less, to live more lightly and to leave more space for nature and humanity to flourish.

Plundering earth's resources is like dam building in rivers, which often means that those further down-stream go without,

whilst those at the head of the dam, gather the abundance. God calls us to clear the way, to allow His abundance to flow freely and pour out upon all people, communities, and nations his grace but that requires us to become more conscious and moderated in what we consume and use.

Just as a farmer looks both to the far horizon of gathering the reward of the land, AND to the immediate needs of the farm, so too are we called to look both to the future of the planet, whilst also looking at the immediate needs of those around us and to do what we can to enable ALL to be part of the gathering of earth's God-given resources.

In the reading from the book of Ruth, we hear about Boaz who according to the law, moderates the gathering of his own crop, in order to afford Ruth a place of safety to gather and glean at harvest time, that she might not go without.

In our churches, we too, are challenged to break down the dams that have supplied our need, yet may have been a barrier to others, in order to allow the outpouring of God's love, so that others too may gather and glean, and feed their hungry and hurting souls.

READING: RUTH 2.1–9

HYMN STF 696

<https://youtu.be/Dc-2tiAfSyY>

For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord ;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.*bc*

Lead us forward into freedom ;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned ;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind ;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind ;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kaan (1929–2009)

5/ ABUNDANCE

Our planet is rich and fertile and we have enormous resources to meet our needs, PROVIDED we are willing to share and become more resourceful, ever conscious of the plight of others. Much of our life in the West revolves around our economic life with a propensity for substantial “growth” and therefore our social and political mentality can easily be swayed into thinking in terms of scarcity. Before the “age of austerity” we had little knowledge of food banks, and now they have erroneously become part and parcel of our society, as people are pushed further into poverty.

The scarcity mind-set can have a profound effect on society, where people “save up for rainy days,” in an extreme way, where the wealth of one individual can be compared to the collective income of a nation. It can drive people to hold

irrational fear of those seeking sanctuary on our shores, and during the first lock down many experienced empty shelves because some had hoarded goods for themselves, devoid of the consciousness of mind, that all that we have around us is not ours for the taking but gifted by God.

Perhaps our faith communities have also become victims of the insidious scarcity stance too, frozen into our comfort zones, unable to share the outrageously abundant message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Psalm 65 reminds us of the abundance of God's provision; a God who perpetually "visits" the earth in every season, who "moved into our neighbourhood", and who gave his life for us, that we might know the true meaning of abundance.

READING PSALM 65.9–13

ANTHEM - THOU VISITEST THE EARTH

<https://youtu.be/QCjaTjFVCTU>

Thou visitest the earth
And blessest it, and blessest it
And crownest the year, the year with thy
 goodness
And crownest the year, the year with thy
 goodness.

Maurice Greene 1696-1755

6/ OFFERING

Acts of offering are born from a sense of sincere and grateful thanks. Throughout the history of humanity, cultures have expressed their gratitude in the offering up of grain, produce, and animals, and we too consciously engage in acts of offering, particularly at harvest time, as a way of giving thanks for the goodness of God.

But we have to ask ourselves, is society losing the instinct for offering and thankfulness? Often we come across comments that essentially say, "what's mine is mine!" or "it's not my job to do that" or "someone else will do it" and in a world of "self-made people," with a sense of entitlement, the necessity of giving thanks, or offering to step up to help is lost, and our faith and secular communities become spiritually poorer. 1 Chronicles 29 reminds us that "*all things come from You O God, and of Your own do we give You.*"

When we offer our time or our gifts, we are in effect turning back to God, to say thank you, conscious of the fact that all that we possess is not ours to own but God's.

In our next reading we are reminded not to forget God, the source of all fruitfulness, and all that we possess, be it in time, money or other resources, is not held in our possession but that we are gifted it as stewards.

READING LEVITICUS 23.9–14

PRAYER

Lord of the harvest we give thanks for the harvest of our community life together and for the gift of life itself.

When we deny life to others by failing to contribute to the common good, **Lord of the harvest forgive us.**

When our narrow self-interest means scarcity for others, **Lord of the harvest forgive us**

When we fail to recognise that all our resources come from you alone, **Lord of the harvest forgive us.**

Break us open to be touched by your generosity of spirit, that we may always be a people of thanksgiving. **Amen**

7/ SHARING

When is enough, enough? The gap between the highest earners and those on low wages or benefits has never been greater. We live in a world of billionaires and beggars. But such evident inequality leads to resentment and social instability. Can there be another way – a way of sharing more fairly so that there is enough for all?

In our reading from Matthew, Jesus reminds us that there is another way as food is shared around.

The disciples offer reasons, for not being able to feed the crowd before them;

- I. the place is a desert, and there are no resources
- II. It is getting late so there is no time to get any resources
- III. They should be sent away because it is not their job to help

But Jesus overcomes the “scarcity mentality” with the blessing of multiplication.

God did it with Abraham, God did it with Elijah and the widow of Nain, God did it with the people in the wilderness, God did it with Hezekiah against the Assyrians and each and every time hope was shared.

It was a matter of faith, and as soon as the scarce resources were put into the hands of Jesus and blessed, there was enough for all. We see much inequality around us, and whilst we may feel we only have “bread and fish” resources to change things, we

are, as Christians, called to bring our world and its pains before God, because all true hope begins in the blessing and beauty of prayer and in the heart of the pray-er.

READING: MATTHEW 14.13–21

HYMN STF- 102

<https://youtu.be/K2TIFyGYFZw>

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies :

*Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

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 :

For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind’s delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight :

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
pleasures pure and undefiled :

For each perfect gift and sign
of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven :

Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835–1917)

8/ FEASTING

God’s vision for humanity is not one where some have everything, living with lavish excess, while many go hungry. In God’s kingdom, there is provision for everyone, with restoration and healing for all who have been excluded or forgotten. The celebration and offering at harvest festivals is a foretaste of the spirit of that kingdom

and Isaiah gives us a vision of just such a time and place, where all are welcomed to the feast, and where tears are wiped away.

READING ISAIAH 25.1–10

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

For all whose image of your creation is marred by pain, suffering, disease and illness.

Lord of the harvest, **feed your people**

For those who wake each morning to shellfire, destruction and environmental catastrophe.

Lord of the harvest, **feed your people**

For children dispossessed of childhood and for the traumatised and abused

Lord of the harvest, **feed your people**

For orphans and the dispossessed, wandering lonely roads to uncertain futures

Lord of the harvest, **feed your people**

For each persecuted family carrying your Cross to sanctuary

Lord of the harvest, **feed your people**

For the physically starved and the spiritually underfed

Lord of the harvest, **feed your people**

Your kingdom come in every place O Lord; grant a harvest of peace to the world, that all may reap the rewards of your creation and be satisfied. Amen

9/ BREAD

Jesus shared bread with all sorts of people as a sign of God's acceptance and love. He asked us to remember him every time we break bread. God is in the business of making bread, the bread of community. We are the yeast, the leaven in the lump. The way we live CAN change the world, if we can dare to believe that God is with us. In our final reading Jesus reveals himself as the bread of life.

READING: JOHN 6.30–40

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Loving God, you provide enough for everyone: this earth is fertile, fruitful and abundant, but we are sometimes greedy, wasteful and selfish. Many go hungry despite our plenty, many are left outside while we enjoy a feast. Lord Jesus, bread of life, break us open to your promised kingdom, give us hearts to gather and share, as we follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus, Lord of the Harvest. AMEN

HYMN STF 130

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;
then 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 winds and waves obey him,
by him the birds are fed;
much more to us, his children,
he gives our daily bread.

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, what you most desire,
our humble, thankful hearts.

Matthias Claudius (1740–1815)

translated by Jane Montgomery Campbell (1817–
1878) (alt.)

BLESSING

God of the harvest, bless the labours of our hearts and hands, bless the fruits of our cooperation and community, bless the gathering of neighbours and strangers, and especially bless the gifts that we offer and those who will receive them. Awaken us to your longing for a different world, where all are welcomed, valued and appreciated.

Deacon Selina

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