

3rd October – Harvesting and sharing

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

GATHERING MUSIC ‘Gathering the harvest’, Harvey Reid

<https://youtu.be/qEoNpmQcStE>

WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING

Welcome to you all, those of you here in the church and all of you joining us online. This morning we extend a special welcome to everyone joining us from Brighton. It's lovely to have you back again to share worship with us.

It's October and it's Harvest time. So this morning we will be celebrating this autumn festival as well as considering what harvest might mean to us, today. You may know that the word harvest comes from the Anglo-Saxon word hærfest, meaning "Autumn". It then came to refer to the season for reaping and gathering crops. And I didn't know this, but apparently the modern British tradition of celebrating Harvest Festival in churches began in 1843, when the Reverend Robert Hawker invited his parishioners to a special thanksgiving service at his church at Morwenstow in Cornwall.

But let us begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice candle as a symbol of our free religious faith. *If you're at home I invite you to light a candle with me now.*

Some words by Katie Gelfand...

We light our chalice as a symbol of gratitude
may we celebrate the abundance of our lives together.

In this sanctuary we harvest bushels of strength for one another,
may we offer our crop with the hands of compassion and generosity.

In the authentic and gentle manner of our connections,
may we cultivate a simple sweetness to brighten our spirits.

And may we be grateful for the ways we nourish and uplift each other,
For it is the sharing of this hallowed time together that sustains us. Amen

Let's sing. And, as always, today I invite you to bring your own understanding to the word 'God', wherever it is used, and to interpret it in the light of your own experience and relationship with the divine.

HYMN 90(P) Let us give thanks and praise

Let us give thanks and praise for the gifts which we share,
for our food and our friendship, for water and air,
for the earth and the sky and the stars and the sea,
and the trust we all have in God's love flowing free.

Give a shout of amazement at what life can bring,
put your heart into raising the song all can sing.
What a world we could build with our minds and our hands
where the people live freely and God understands.

Let us give of our best with the tools we shall need,
use our eyes, hands and brains so that we may succeed.
Inspire us to cultivate what we have sown
so that nature and nurture make a world we may own.

We adore you, great Mother, O help us to live
with a love for each other that each one can give.
Let the pain of our brothers and sisters be faced
and the healing of all souls on earth be embraced.

English traditional melody, arranged Ralph Vaughan Williams. Words © Peter Sampson

PRAYER by Judith L Quarles

Let us join our hearts and minds in the quiet of meditation and prayer.

How shall we pray?

- First, let us be open to the silence. Let us hear the sounds in the room, and the noises outside. Let us tune in to the soft beating of our hearts. And let us listen intently for messages from within. *Pause*
- Next, let us feel gratitude for our lives and for our beautiful earth. As hard as life gets, as sad or lonely as we sometimes feel, let us always be warmed by the gifts of this life. *Pause*
- Now, let us hold in our hearts all those, known or unknown who are in need. May we find in ourselves the energy and knowledge to bring care to the world. *Pause*
- And finally, let us be aware of the blessing that it is not ours alone to do the work of the world. Love and community work wonders that we by ourselves could never manage. *Pause*
- In this time of silence let us form our own prayers out of the concerns of our hearts. *Pause*

Amen

READING From 'Anam Cara', John O'Donohue

'There are four seasons of the heart. Several seasons can be present simultaneously in the heart, though usually, at any one time, one season is dominant in your life. It is customary to understand autumn as synchronous with old age. In the autumn time of your life, your experience is harvested. This is a lovely backdrop against which we can understand aging. Aging is not merely about the body losing its poise, strength, and self-trust. Aging also invites you to become aware of the sacred circle that shelters your life. Within the harvest circle, you are able to gather lost memories and experiences, bring them together, and hold them as one. In actual fact, if you can come to see aging not as a demise of your body but as the harvest of your soul, you will learn that aging can be a time of strength, poise, and confidence. To understand the harvest of your soul against the background of seasonal rhythm should give you a sense of quiet delight at the arrival of this time in your life. It should give you strength and a sense of how the deeper belonging of your soul-world will be revealed to you.'

STORY The story today is a short parable from the Gospel of Luke 12:16-21 in the spirit of Lectio Divina, Sacred Reading, we'll here it read twice.

Then he told them a parable. The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.

REFLECTION/SILENCE

Let's take some time in silence for our own prayer and meditation. You may like to use this time to reflect on the readings. And this quiet time will be followed by reflective music.

INTERLUDE Roots, Holl Morrell

<https://soundcloud.com/hollmorrell/sets/earth-album>

ADDRESS

Three things have inspired me writing this service.

Firstly, as many of you know, I have an allotment so you won't be surprised to hear that recently I have been attempting to harvest runner beans, tomatoes, apples, courgettes, blackberries and so on, as I know some of you have also been doing. And I've been finding it overwhelming. There are just so many of them! I've been struggling to pick them in time, and then I have struggled even more to eat, or process, or store, or even give them away in time. And rather like the rich man in the parable, I did find myself wondering whether I needed to get a bigger freezer. And staff, perhaps!

But then at our wonderful Big Green Eco Festival last weekend, our friend Tess Wilmot led a very engaging session on permaculture, which she both teaches and practices. And I was

struck by the simplicity of something she said, which was so heartfelt. She said 'I love harvesting and I love sharing the abundance'. And in that moment I determined to find a more positive way way of thinking. To truly relish the harvest, and the harvesting, as well as the sharing of it, and making time for both.

Finally Jane Blackall, who some of you know from Kensington Unitarians, recently quoted some words from Buckminster Fuller, who was an American architect, inventor and visionary, which spoke to me. He said: 'Everyone has the perfect gift to give the world — and if each of us is freed up to give the gift that is completely ours, the world will be in total harmony.' And that seemed to me to open up the concept of harvesting and sharing to another level - from something we might do just once to year into a whole way of living.

But let's begin with the literal harvest we have brought with us today. Thank you to all of you for bringing your offerings, including those of you online who have brought something symbolic with you too. And let's connect with Tess Wilmot's sense of the joy and gratitude of the harvest. Let's stop for a moment and just notice all that we have. It's miraculous, isn't it? We're living in a strange time at the moment where the news is all about shortages. And yet what extraordinary gifts we have received from the earth, from the universe, from our God. And what an opportunity we have today to give thanks that actually we have enough – more than enough. Because of the sun, and the rain, and the soil. Because of the people who grow and pick and supply. As well as those who store, and process and market. Perhaps now more than ever this is a great time to appreciate how fortunate and how blessed we are – never mind the petrol queues - as well as how completely and utterly dependant and interdependent we are on nature and on each other. It's so easy to forget all that and take it for granted, and only notice when something we're so used to having on tap isn't there for once, rather than appreciating all that we do have.

And let's also pay attention to the sad fact that very many people in our own country, and even more in the wider world, really do not have enough. Not enough to eat, or enough money to buy what they need. They suffer real and enduring shortages rather than temporary inconveniences. And so today is a chance remember that truth, which is also easy to forget or push aside because it's deeply uncomfortable to contemplate.

Harvest is a chance, just in a very small way, for us to share our abundance. So we will give this food and these toiletries to our local food bank. And we invite each of you, wherever you live, to make donations to your own local food banks or other charities. And in the process of

doing all that maybe we'll reconnect with something we already know really, which is that sharing our abundance, rather than hoarding it, is an act of joy and of love and of freedom. As God reportedly said in the parable to the rich man with his 'ample goods, laid up for many years', 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

Clearly that parable isn't just about storing grain. It's about the folly of sitting tight on all our gifts and squirreling them away in case of some imaginary future lack. It's about the absurdity of causing a blockage in the universe rather than being a part of its flow. And the waste in letting our own special gifts – which we each have - wither on the vine rather than using them. The tragedy of not even realizing what gifts we have, or valuing them properly, or seeing their potential and how they could contribute to the world if only we let them.

Which brings me to John O'Donohue's piece on aging. We are all aging, of course, all the time, and so we're always accumulating experience, and learning as we go, and – we hope, if being on a spiritual path is doing the work it's meant to do – we are gradually becoming wiser and kinder and freer and more true to ourselves as we travel. We are ripening, if you like, and growing in spiritual maturity. OK, I know it's not a linear journey. We go back and forth, and round the houses a bit on this journey. But still, by the time we are in the autumn of our lives, which let's face it, many of us are, we have acquired a wealth of experience and insight, and possibly we have a bit more time, too. And all this is our personal harvest. A time in our lives when we can begin to gather in what we have sown, and appreciate it, and most importantly share it - which is soul work.

It can be tempting as we age to go smaller, and withdraw, and whittle our lives down. I'm tempted myself because I crave quiet and simplicity. But then again I don't want to end up with a brittle stick of a life. And surely there are other ways to simplify that are more life giving, and one of those is to open ourselves up and let our lights shine with less fear. To become a channel, a conduit for the spirit. To relish harvesting the abundance of our wisdom and insights and compassion, and enjoy letting them flow outwards in ways that nourish ourselves and the world.

So whoever you are, whatever your age, rejoice in the harvest. Gather your gifts with gratitude and share your abundance with joy.

For, as Buckminster Fuller says: 'Everyone has the perfect gift to give the world — and if each of us is freed up to give the gift that is completely ours, the world will be in total harmony.'

Amen to that.

2nd HYMN: 37 (P) For the fruits of all creation

For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God;
for the gifts to ev'ry 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, be to God.

For the just reward of labour, God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbour, God's will is done;
in the world-wide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing,
God's will, will is done.

For the harvest 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, be to God.

Music © Alan Williams, words by Frederick Pratt Green © Stainer & Bell Ltd

CLOSING WORDS Andrew Pakula

May you know fully and deeply the blessings of each of your heart's seasons
The inward turning of Winter

Springtime's lush renewal

The effortless, steady growth of summer

And autumn's rich harvest

May your passage from season to season be blessed—

Eased by hands to hold, and by the light of love to guide you on.

Blessed be.

CLOSING MUSIC Harvest for the world, 'Average White Band' with Chris Jasper

<https://youtu.be/slcm9YNLh74>