

## 24<sup>th</sup> September – Harvesting

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. Thank you for making the time and the space in your lives to be here in community.

It's Autumn and it's Harvest time. Yesterday was the autumn equinox, so this morning we will be celebrating this pivotal time of the year, as well as considering what the idea of 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. But the modern British tradition of celebrating Harvest Festival in churches only began in 1843, when the Reverend Robert Hawker invited his parishioners to a special thanksgiving service at his church at Morwenstow in Cornwall, not a million miles away from here.

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

If you have anything you'd like to bring forward to the stage please do so now...

**1st HYMN 13 (P) Bring flowers to our altar**

Bring flowers to our altar to show nature's beauty  
the harvest of goodness in earth, sky and sea.  
Bring light to our altar to guide every nation  
from hatred to love and to humanity.

Bring a dove to our altar its wings ever flying  
in permanent quest for the peace all may share.  
Bring bread to our altar the hungry supplying  
and feeding the poor who depend on our care.

Bring hope to our altar in your gentle dreaming  
of all the good things that will make your heart glad.  
Bring love to our altar, a bright witness beaming  
to all who are burdened, or lonely or sad.

Bring work to our altar to help every nation  
and celebrate all that's already achieved.  
Come yourself to our altar in true dedication  
to all the ideals we in common believe.

*Words: Lena Baxter (Cockroft)*

**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

**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, each time in a different translation.

### **King James Bible**

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

### **New Revised Standard Version**

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 towards God.'

### **2<sup>nd</sup> HYMN 277 (G) Autumn ways (piano only)**

I walk the unfrequented road  
with open eye and ear;  
I watch afield the farmer load  
the bounty of the year.

I gather where I did not sow,  
and bind the mystic sheaf,  
the amber air, the river's flow,  
the rustle of the leaf.

A beauty springtime never knew  
haunts all the quiet ways,  
and sweeter shines the landscape through  
its veil of autumn haze.

I face the hills, the stream, the wood,  
and feel with all akin;  
my heart expands: their fortitude  
and peace and joy flow in.

*Music from John Wyeth, har. Henry Leland Clarke, words Frederick Lucian Hosmer*

**READING** 'Autumn' by Ann Willever

the swirling colours of autumn surround us  
glorious gold, yellow, and orange  
bronzy brown, deep vibrant red  
how can we not feel amazed and grateful?  
here in our front row seats, watching  
the rhythm of the changing seasons  
the never-ending cycles of birth, growth, change, death

death in turn making ready  
for new life

just for this moment  
let me be still  
let me rest  
in the quiet of this sacred place  
in the presence of the spirit gathered  
held gently, yet mightily, by the threads of love  
that bind us together  
may whatever pain or sorrow or loss I feel today  
be eased  
if only for this moment  
even as I feel tossed and turned by the wind  
a fallen leaf, blown about  
with no seeming direction  
may I abandon the illusion of control

if only for this moment  
and sense the love surrounding me  
and the strength of the love within me

in reaching out  
to receive and  
in reaching out  
to give back  
may I bear witness  
to love  
may I bear witness  
to life

## **REFLECTION/SILENCE**

**INTERLUDE** 'Green Song', Anne Sofie von Otter and Elvis Costello

[https://youtu.be/AwjzJeAR8-I?si=nMVOc6sUr\\_sfAnaL](https://youtu.be/AwjzJeAR8-I?si=nMVOc6sUr_sfAnaL)

## **ADDRESS**

Harvest is traditionally a time of gratitude and abundance as we celebrate and give thanks for the great bounty of the earth, god's gifts, if you like, as well as the work that has been done by so many people all through the year: ploughing, sowing, planting, weeding, feeding, watering, and then waiting, watching, hoping – and finally harvesting. It's also a festival of huge relief, surely, that the effort has been worth it, that once again the barns can be filled, the people will eat. Perhaps many of us have come to take our food supply for granted, but certainly this was not the case for our ancestors, nor is it for many people in the world today. However, much work is put in, there is always the risk the crops will fail – famine is never far away. And recently, empty supermarket shelves, war in Ukraine, changes in the climate have all perhaps begun to unsettle even us from the ease we've felt for so long. But still, we are the lucky ones and harvest reminds us to be thankful for all that we receive, and mindful of how our food gets to us.

Harvest, too, is about sharing our bounty with those who have less, so all our offerings today will be donated to our local food bank. It's time to be generous. We know in our hearts that giving not only helps others less fortunate survive and flourish, but also feeds our own souls. We humans, though we often forget this, thrive most when we share rather than hoard. After all, to share is an act of trust. It's a way of putting our faith in abundance the natural the flow of things.

Autumn has a quite pleasing mournfulness to it, don't you think? There is a sense of buckling down, drawing in, preparing for colder times around the corner that is oddly comforting. And for me, and I'm sure for many of you, autumn is also a more inward looking, reflective season than summer. The colours are turning, the leaves are beginning to fall, the flowers fading – though you wouldn't think so to look at ours this morning – and all this reminds us of the miraculous cycles of life and death. Particularly we see once again how death and decay are essential to maintaining the flow of life: enriching the soil and ensuring the continuation of what otherwise would simply grind to a halt. We live at all only because of these eternal rhythms of the universe, the self-sustaining processes which we can observe happening all around us, but also can be conscious of within us. For of course we are not separate *from* nature but we are *of* it, and our bodies are subject to the very same rhythms of ebbing and flowing as any other form of life.

I think that's true of our hearts and souls too. So, autumn – especially this still point of balance at the equinox – seems to offer an invitation for each of us to pause and reflect. If you cut an apple in half across its equator – horizontally rather than vertically, in other words – you see something quite surprising. A star! Hidden in the middle of this everyday fruit, a 5-pointed star.

So here are 5 questions for you to consider over the coming days...5 questions for your own hidden inner life...

1. What have I sown this year?
2. What have I harvested, both blessings and disappointments?
3. How is my heart at this time?
4. Where is my spirit calling me next?
5. How is my relationship with the Divine?

These questions may not have answers, or at least not right now. But can simply be held. They can be left alone for a while, and given time for possibilities to arise, maybe in thought, or in dreams, or in the messages of angels.

In the parable Jesus chastises the man who thinks he'd better build another barn to store all his produce. I was thinking about this as I was stewing apples last night – apples are much in my consciousness at the moment. I have so many eating apples it's ridiculous. Some of them are down here. The trees on my allotment, which I didn't plant, and haven't done anything to nurture, except a bit of modest pruning now and then, just keep on giving. I can't possibly eat them all, or even give them away – everyone has too many apples already at this time of year – but I do at least try to process as many as I can, and freeze them for the winter. And find myself wondering – yet again – whether I need a bigger freezer. Oh dear.

But though the parable is on the face of it about not hoarding food, it's delivered in response to a question about inheritance, and is usually understood as a warning not to mistake making money or acquiring material goods for the things that *really* matter in life, and *really* matter to God.

The line: 'This night your soul shall be required of you, this very night your life is being demanded of you, and the things you have prepared whose shall they be?' There is a real urgency to those words, don't you think. 'This very night your life is being demanded of you.' I don't know how you hear that? What do you make of it? I hear it as a wake-up call for whole heartedness. For immersing ourselves in what matters and letting go of the rest. It's a call to love, not fear.

In your own life, I wonder, how fully do you feel able to give freely of yourself? To live in love rather than fear? I think I could do a lot better myself, to be honest. I know I worry more than I need to about the future, and don't always trust in abundance. But I think the parable is saying it doesn't help anyway to fear and hold on so tightly. Going back to my apples, one year I decided to try to store them. I carefully laid dozens of them out on newspaper on the floor of my spare room, as recommended by a friend, hoping they'd last. But one by one they just rotted anyway.

Even our learnings, and our values, and our beliefs can get stuck and stagnate, and get in the way of living wholeheartedly if we grip on to them too tightly. It's easy for spiritual growth itself to turn into a kind of self-satisfaction, another sort of pride, a belief that we're better or wiser or more knowing than others. But of course that doesn't serve us or anyone else, any



more than stockpiling grain in barns, and my sense is that it doesn't serve God either, however you may understand him or her or them or it. I'm pretty sure the Divine – helpfully untroubled by pronouns – isn't much concerned about what we believe, or how much we know, or even how impressive a list of values we've drawn up. I reckon the universe flows best when we hold those things and ideas lightly, when they are allowed to breathe and move, and perhaps even die back from time to time and fall gently away like autumn leaves, making space for new insights and curiosities and generousities to emerge as they go.

May we enter this gentle season of mellow fruitfulness with something of that willingness to loosen up, let go a little, love a little more, and make room for the holy in our lives.

Amen

### **3<sup>rd</sup> HYMN 271 Give thanks**

Give thanks for the corn and the wheat that are reaped,  
for labour well done and the barns that are heaped,  
for the sun and the dew and the sweet honeycomb,  
for the rose and the song and the harvest brought home.

Give thanks for the commerce and wealth of our land,  
for cunning and strength of the hard-working hand,  
for the beauty our artists and poets have wrought,  
for the hope and affection our friendships have brought.

Give thanks for the homes that with kindness are blessed,  
for seasons of plenty and well-deserved rest,  
for our country extending from sea unto sea,  
for the ways that have made it a land for the free.

*English traditional melody, author unknown.*

### **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** Max Richter, Vivaldi Recomposed, Autumn 3, Chineke! Orchestra

[https://youtu.be/sUEeqvp\\_BrQ?si=IOpDfr-ApZ5lf2uQ](https://youtu.be/sUEeqvp_BrQ?si=IOpDfr-ApZ5lf2uQ)