

4th August 2024 – PLYMOUTH

Lammas: Sharing the bounty, led by Rev Kate Whyman

1. **INTRO MUSIC** 'Lammas', Lisa Thiel

<https://youtu.be/ph4GEyHfENE>

2. **WELCOME/CHALICE LIGHT**

Welcome to you all, whether you're here in the church or joining us online. Welcome to this first Sunday of August. In times of tragedy, violence and unrest we gather here to re-centre ourselves, to find peace in our hearts and hope for a better, kinder world.

The opening music was called 'Lammas', by Lisa Thiel. The pagan festival of Lammas (or Lughnasadh) was on 1st August, just a few days ago. Lammas is one of the so-called 'quarter' Celtic festivals, the others being Beltane, Samhain and Imbolc. Lammas marks the very first harvest of the year – the bringing in of the first wheat from the fields and the making – and the sharing – of the first loaf.

The theme of our service today, inspired by Lammas, is 'Sharing the bounty'.

Let's begin our service, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice candle as a symbol of our free religious faith. (Do please light one with me if you are able to do so.)

LIGHT CHALICE

May this flame be a symbol of all that nourishes and sustains us, all that holds us and supports us, the light within and the light without.

3. **OPENING PRAYER** Maryell Cleary

We gather this morning in the spirit of thanksgiving:
we give thanks for this community,
for the bounty of this season,
for the beauty of earth and sky, and of human creations,
for love, given and received.

Let us make our thanks for these blessings manifest in our words and in the warmth
of our companionship.

Let us say 'thanks' to Life!

4. **1st Hymn 8 (G) Life that maketh all things new**

O Life that makest all things new,
the flowers of earth, the thoughts within;
our pilgrim feet, wet with thy dew,
in gladness hither turn again.

From hand to hand the greeting flows,
from eye to eye the signals run,
from heart to heart the bright hope glows;
the seekers of the light are one:

One in the freedom of the truth,
one in the joy of paths untrod,
one in the soul's perennial youth,
one in the larger thought of God.

The freer step, the fuller breath,
the wide horizon's grander view;
the sense of life that knows no death,
the Life that maketh all things new.

Our two readings offer two very different approaches to the idea of 'sharing the bounty'.

5. **STORY 'The Lion's Share', Aesop's fable**

A long time ago, the Lion, the Fox, the Jackal, and the Wolf agreed to go hunting together, sharing with each other whatever they found.

One day the Wolf ran down a Stag and immediately called his comrades to divide the spoil.

Without being asked, the Lion placed himself at the head of the feast to do the carving, and, with a great show of fairness, began to count the guests.

"One," he said, counting on his claws, "that is myself the Lion. Two, that's the Wolf, three, is the Jackal, and the Fox makes four."

He then very carefully divided the Stag into four equal parts.

"I am King Lion," he said, when he had finished, "so of course I get the first part. This next part falls to me because I am the strongest; and this is mine because I am the bravest."

He now began to glare at the others very savagely. "If any of you have any claim to the part that is left," he growled, stretching his claws menacingly, "now is the time to speak up."

6. **READING** Gospel of John 6: 1-13

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

7. **2nd Hymn 184 (G) The best things**

I learned it in the meadow path,
I learned it on the mountain stairs –
the best things any mortal hath
are those which every mortal shares.

The air we breathe, the sky, the breeze,
the light without us and within;
life with its unlocked treasures,
God's riches, are for all to win.

The grass is softer to my tread
because it rests unnumbered feet;
sweeter to me the wild rose red
because she makes the whole world sweet.

Wealth won by others' poverty –
not such be mine! Let me be blest
only in what they share with me,
and what I share with all the rest.

We learn it in the meadow path,
we learn it on the mountain stairs –
the best things any mortal hath
are those which every mortal shares.

Music John Ambrose Lloyd, words Lucy Larcom

8. Sharing bread and juice

I'd like us to now to take part in a simple ritual of sharing bread and juice. This is not a communion in the usual sense – I'm certainly not suggesting that the bread or the juice represent the body or the blood of Christ. They do not. But I do believe that sharing such simple food and drink, and offering each other a simple blessing, can be a powerful experience in its own way.

I have some bread – gluten free – to share which in a moment I'll pass round. I invite those of you in the room to take a piece and pass the basket on to your neighbour with the words 'The bread of life for you'. 'The bread of life for you'. Once you've pass on the basket, then you're invited to eat your bread.

To those of you online I say now, symbolically to you 'The bread of life for you'.

And I have some juice in little glasses that we will pass round to you with the words
'The cup of blessing for you'.

And to those online I say now 'The cup of blessing for you'

In sharing this broken bread
we acknowledge our dependence
on the divine bounty of the earth;
our unity with all people who, like us, receive their daily bread in gratitude and
humility.

In sharing this juice from the fruit of the vine
we acknowledge that we are part of the vine of life, with its branches and tendrils in
every
nook and cranny of this good earth,
its roots in the divine source of all that is.

9. Sharing of bread and wine in silence

We'll begin in silence and after a while the music will begin

10. INTERLUDE: 'Lammas', Dermaptera

11. ADDRESS

In the past there was reverence and ritual surrounding the first grain harvest – it was a religious occasion in the original meaning of that word, which was 'to bind' or 'form a bond'. So Lammas helped to bind people together, both with each other and with the cycles of nature. The first sheaf of corn in particular was considered to be very important. It was thought to produce the best seeds and provided assurance of future harvests. It would be ceremonially cut at dawn, winnowed, ground and baked into

special Harvest Bread which was then shared by the community in thanks.

This idea of sharing bread has deep roots, across time and cultures, so perhaps it is not surprising that we find the story of the loaves and fishes in the Gospels. The story is told as a miracle. In John's version there is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish 'but how far will they go among so many?', asks the disciple Andrew, reasonably enough. After all we're told that there were 5000 men in the crowd, so we might assume there were also around 5000 women, as well as children, even if they were not thought worth recording at the time! That's a lot of hungry mouths to feed.

The story suggests that Jesus was able to make the 5 small loaves and 2 small fish feed all these people, and still have 12 basketfuls of food left over. We might understand this as Jesus demonstrating his own divine capacity to make the impossible possible, or maybe to show that with faith in God anything is possible.

But I wonder whether a more human, a more earthly miracle might also have been unfolding that day in the desert, one that is just as inspirational. Could it have been that the small boy who offered his 5 loaves and 2 fishes unwittingly started something amazing – a kind of miracle even. It's not inconceivable is it – it's perhaps likely even – that others in the crowd, seeing the small boy's unselfconscious act of generosity, were themselves prompted to offer whatever they had with them. It's easy to imagine such a scenario. The boy showed the way, and his spontaneity sparked an outpouring of offerings, a wave that could have spread around the entire crowd, with everyone saying 'you know what, I've got some bread', or 'I have some fruit' until it became clear that actually there was enough to eat. Not just enough, but MORE than enough for everyone, provided they were willing to share with their neighbours.

However we choose to read the story, it's clear that we're being encouraged to understand that there is enough for us all. Whether that's enough bread, or enough love to go round, the Gospel story shows us there will always be enough to sustain us if we have faith. We have to take the first step of *believing* there is enough, and then we will find ourselves willing to be generous, and share the bounty with each other. That first act of belief will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

On the other hand, the Aesop's fable 'The Lion's Share' (I had never realised where that expression came from before) presents a very different attitude to sharing. It depicts a world in which power and selfishness, fear and insecurity rule, and nothing is shared fairly. The underlying belief of the Lion, surely, is that there *isn't* enough for everyone, therefore he has to grab and keep all the meat for himself by false logic (an early example of fake news, perhaps?) and intimidation.

If any of us were asked which kind of world we'd prefer to live in I'm sure we'd all choose the version taught by Jesus, which is a teaching shared by other religions too. The rule that says do as you would be done by is the golden thread that runs through all faiths.

It's easy to feel that we are living in the Lion's version of the world. And yet of course we see so many examples of the golden rule woven through it. What can we do to help strengthen that much more beautiful vision?

It seldom helps to preach or argue or blame others. Instead, let's begin with ourselves. The next time we notice we're feeling there isn't enough to go round, the next time we feel fear that we may lose out in some way – and let's face it we all feel that at times – maybe we can try to follow the example of the small boy in the Gospel story. Instead of reacting like the lion, can we be the first to offer what little we have? It's a risk, it takes a leap of faith, and more genuine courage than any lion will ever possess, but the rewards can be beyond price.

12. THIRD HYMN 271 (G) 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.

13. CLOSING WORDS based on Glennie Kindred

At Lammas time may we give thanks for the abundance of the land.
Let us celebrate our generosity of spirit and our deep joys, the things that make
our hearts sing and our spirits fly, knowing that the more we give from our hearts,
the more returns to us and the more we experience ourselves as intrinsically part
of the power and flow of the life force.

May it be so.

14. CLOSING MUSIC 'Lammas Fair', Henry Parker

<https://youtu.be/43e5Ty0BwO8?si=izORS-ZpE-lquJu2>