

29th September – Harvest

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

1. GATHERING MUSIC ‘The Harvest Home Suite’, Jay Ungar and Molly Mason

<https://youtu.be/n2gdEzY0pHA?feature=shared>

WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING

Welcome to you all, those of you here in the church and all of you joining us online this morning for our Harvest Celebration.

This is our annual gathering to wonder at creation, to give thanks for all our blessings, to appreciate our interdependence and to share what we have with others. Perhaps also to look a little more deeply too. 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

2. 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)

3. Let's begin by giving. If you have anything you'd like to bring forward to the stage as an offering please do so now...If you are online perhaps you could donate to your own local foodbank after the service.

4. PRAYER

God of All
Source of life and goodness.
You fill the earth with abundance
and love all that you have made.
As we join creation in singing your glory,
teach us to care for our common home.

Divine Spirit

Incarnate in every one of us
We share your yearning
to find a path to a better future.
Guide our hands to repair what's broken,
help us build a kinder and more peaceful world.

Praise be to you, O Great Mystery,
who enfolds and sustains us.
Call us deeper into the heart of love,
to comfort and disturb.
Give us strength and encouragement
to work with you to make all things new.

Amen

5. MATTHEW 13:3-9

'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'

6. **STORY** *This is a passage from a novel by Jim Crace called, appropriately enough, Harvest. Harvest is set in a rural village in England at some point in the 16th century – the exact time and place are never made clear – but it's around the time of enclosure, when open common land was fenced off and rights limited to land owners. A time when harvest was such an important part of life, when everyone would work together as one.*

'On harvest days, anyone who's got a pair of legs and arms can expect to earn supper with unceasing labour. Our numbers have been too reduced of late to allow a single useful soul to stay away. There's not a hand that will escape the brittle straw

unscratched. The children go ahead of us, looking for the grey of any thistle heads that have outstripped our rust-gold barley, then duck below the level ears of grain to weed out nettles, teasels, docks; 'dealing with the grievances,' we say.

'The broadest shoulders swing their sickles and their scythes at the brimming cliffs of stalk; hares, partridges, and sparrows flee before the blades; our wives and daughters bundle up and bind the sheaves, though not too carefully – they work on the principle of ten for the commons and one for the gleaning; our creaking fathers make the lines of stooks; the sun begins to dry what we have harvested. Our work is consecrated by the sun. Compared to winter days, let's say, or digging days, it's satisfying work, made all the more so by the company we keep, for on such days all the faces we know and love (as well as those I know but do not like entirely) are gathered in one space and bounded by common ditches and collective hopes.

'If, perhaps, we hear a barking deer nagging to be trapped and stewed, or a woodcock begging to make his hearse in a pie, we lift our heads as one and look towards the woods as one; we straighten up as one and stare at the sun, reprovngly, if it's been darkened by a cloud; our scythes and hand tools clack and chat in unison. And anything we say is heard by everyone. So there is openness and jollity.'

7. 2nd 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.

Music Ralph Vaughan Williams, words © Peter Sampson

8. READING – Hymn 277 (G) Autumn ways

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

9. **READING** excerpt from 'Gratitude' in *Consolations* by poet David Whyte

Gratitude is not a passive response to something we have been given, gratitude arises from paying attention, from being awake in the presence of everything that lives within and without us. Gratitude is not necessarily something that is shown after the event, it is the deep, *a priori* state of attention that shows we understand and are equal to the gifted nature of life.

Gratitude is the understanding that many millions of things come together and live together and mesh together and breathe together in order for us to take even one more breath of air; that the underlying gift of life and incarnation as a living, participating human being is a privilege; that we are miraculously part of something, rather than nothing. Even if that something is temporarily pain or despair, we inhabit a living world, with real faces, real voices, laughter, the colour blue, the green of the fields, the freshness of a cold wind, or the tawny hue of a winter landscape.

11. **REFLECTION/SILENCE**

12. **INTERLUDE** 'September morning', Gerard Fahy

<https://youtu.be/C7zZju0f7n8?feature=shared>

13. **ADDRESS**

Why should we celebrate Harvest in today's world? After all, very few of us actually work on the land any more – which is a huge change from a time not so very distant that was less urbanised and less mechanised. Although some of us perhaps have window boxes, or gardens, or maybe even allotments, and may well grow our own herbs or some fruit and vegetables, or enjoy deliveries from nearby organic farms such as Riverford, nevertheless the bulk of most people's food comes from supermarkets, where the sense of the seasons is blurred, and where any direct connection between labouring on the land and eating at the table is lost.

Which is in itself a good reason to celebrate harvest. Simply to remind ourselves that our basic and essential human need for food is dependent on forces we can't control: the gifts of sun and sky, rain and earth. It's dependent too on the labours of countless people across the world most of whom we will never know or meet or even consider. That surely gives us reason to pause, and cause for humility as well as gratitude.

Harvest is also a moment for us to open our eyes to the reality of famine and food poverty, not only in less developed parts of the planet but also here in the UK. Our offerings today will go to our local food bank and other charities. Shockingly the Trussell Trust foodbanks gave out more than 3 million emergency food packages last year, the most ever distributed in a single year. Harvest a chance to take some small action by bringing offerings and sharing what we can.

And we celebrate harvest also for its metaphorical significance, not just literally to be thankful for creation and its bounty, but also to awaken our spiritual lives, which also need to be nourished.

The parable of the sower is a well-known story – probably one of the best-known parables in the New Testament. And, being a parable, rather like harvest it works on different levels. At its most superficial, it appears to be simply an illustration of what happens to good seed when it falls on poor soil. Farming for beginnings, then. Then, just below this most literal of readings, it carries a wider inference, that all our best intentions and efforts – in whatever sphere – will be for nought unless they are directed wisely and tended with care.

But if you know this passage you will probably also know that this is the one parable that Jesus actually explains to his disciples. He uses it to teach them how parables work. He explains that the parable is not really about a sower and seeds at all, nor even about us sowing metaphorical seeds in our own lives. Instead, the parable is about our ability to hear the word of God. Our readiness, if you like, to be open to inspiration and revelation. It asks 'are we ready to receive these insights, are we fertile soil for them to grow and flourish?' Or are we closed, like rocky ground? Will wisdom simply wither and perish.

So parables work on many levels, and the deeper we look, the more layers of meaning we peel away, the more we learn.

Which brings us back to Harvest. Here this morning yes, we are celebrating the fruition of our efforts and the efforts of others, and we are giving thanks for the miracle of the seasons that allow us to sow in the spring and reap in the autumn and continue the cycles of life. And that is good in and of itself. It helps to remind us of our dependence on, and interdependence with, the earth for sustenance, for life itself. It reminds too us of our fragility, our vulnerability, in the face of bad weather, drought or flood. Slugs and birds. Bad luck. It teaches us to be grateful, because we have so much more than so many, and it gives us the opportunity to practise compassion as we make gifts to those who have less.

It reminds us that, as David Whyte powerfully says: 'many millions of things come together and live together and mesh together and breathe together in order for us to take even one more breath of air; that the underlying gift of life and incarnation as a living, participating human being is a privilege; that we are miraculously part of something, rather than nothing. Even if that something is temporarily pain or despair, we inhabit a living world, with real faces, real voices, laughter, the colour blue, the green of the fields, the freshness of a cold wind, or the tawny hue of a winter landscape.'

And it says to us, once again, be ready, be prepared, be open, be already grateful for the many gifts we have as well as those yet to come, in whatever form they may manifest in our lives.

May it be so.

3rd Hymn 44 (P) Give thanks for life

Give thanks for life, the measure of our days,
mortal, we pass through beauty that decays,
yet sing to God our hope, our love, our praise:

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Give thanks for those whose lives shone with a light
caught from the Christ-flame, gleaming through the night,
who touched the truth, who burned for what is right:

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Give thanks for all, our living and our dead,
thanks for the love by which our life is fed,
a love not changed by time or death or dread:

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Give thanks for hope that like a seed of grain
lying in darkness, does its life retain
to rise in glory, growing green again:

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Music Ralph Vaughan Williams, words Shirley Erena Murray © 1987 Hope Publishing Company

CLOSING WORDS Deuteronomy 6: 10-12, adapted by Peter Raible

We build on foundations we did not lay.
We warm ourselves at fires we did not light.
We sit in the shade of trees we did not plant.
We drink from wells we did not dig.
We profit from persons we did not know.
We are ever bound in community.

May you walk your week in ever-grateful attention.
Blessed be.

CLOSING MUSIC 'Autumn', Vivaldi

<https://youtu.be/8x4GC0-Z0ZI?feature=shared>