

**Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
Service at Home, 1 October 2023**

A Service for Harvestⁱ prepared by the
Revd Peter Rayson

*We begin by sharing some words from Psalm 104
(24-28, 31 NRSV):*

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with
good things.
May the glory of the LORD endure for ever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works

HYMN: StF130, We plough the fields and scatter
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccVEjKfKAV4>

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.)

Introduction:

I know that those of you using our Service at Home do so for a variety of reasons and you may or may not also be attending church in person but today is the closest Sunday to the Harvest Moon and is the traditional day for holding the Harvest Festival so it seems an appropriate theme for our worship. Our harvest celebrations and the hymns we sing at them often concentrate on our arable crops – “all is safely gathered in ere the winter storms begin” – but there are other harvests which are celebrated too. For coastal communities, the harvest of the sea used to be, and in some cases still is, just as important as that of the land. In the words of the opening Psalm, we heard a poem celebrating all of God’s creation. The earth is pictured as abounding in fruitfulness and creativity; the earth is full of animals and its fruits provide for their needs. God loves everything he has made, and we, His creatures, all bring glory to him - just by being our created selves and fulfilling our roles in creation. We only need to look at creation to know that our God is good, and worthy of our praise.

Let us join in a prayer of praise:

Creator God,
The earth is alive
with all that your hands have made.
You have provided for all your creatures:
the birds of the air, the fish of the sea
and every creature that moves on the land.
Great and small, you know each one,
and in your love, you care for them.
The earth is yours and it proclaims your glory.
We praise you for all your wonderful gifts.
Your name is great
and your works are wonderful. Amen.
God, we thank you for your creativity,
for imagining our world with all its diversity,
and for speaking it into being.
The earth displays the glory of our Lord
God, we thank you for the ways
we can fulfil your calling as your stewards,

to tend and care for your creation,
and to participate with you in making it fruitful.
The earth displays the glory of our Lord.
God, we thank you for the fruits
of your creation, that we can taste its goodness
and see your love directed to us.
The earth displays the glory of our Lord.
For all of your good gifts and loving kindness,
we thank you.
In the name of Jesus, your precious Son. Amen.

Having praised and thanked God, let us recall the times when we know we have done things which have not brought praise and honour to him:

Loving God,
We come to you, asking for your forgiveness
for the times when we have forgotten that this world,
and all that is within it, is yours.
We are sorry for the times when
we have kept your gifts and resources to
ourselves,
for our own benefit and selfish gain.
Help us to be wise in how we use
the good gifts that you give us,
so that we may give generously
to help those in need.
Help us to live lives that are fruitful,
to bring you glory and honour in all that we say
and do.
Help us to be your good and faithful servants,
for the sake of your kingdom.
In Jesus' name. Amen.
Remember that the Father sent his Son not to
condemn but to forgive. Know that if your
repentance is true then your sins are forgiven.

Read Deuteronomy 26:1-15 (NRSVUE):

“When you have come into the land that
the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance
to possess and you possess it and settle in
it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit
of the ground, which you harvest from the land
that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall
put it in a basket and go to the place that
the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for
his name. ³ You shall go to the priest who is in
office at that time and say to him, ‘Today I
declare to the Lord your God that I have come
into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors
to give us.’ ⁴ When the priest takes the basket

from your hand and sets it down before the altar
of the Lord your God, ⁵ you shall make this
response before the Lord your God: ‘A wandering
Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into
Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number,
and there he became a great nation, mighty and
populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us
harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour
on us, ⁷ we cried to the Lord, the God of our
ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our
affliction, our toil, and our
oppression. ⁸ The Lord brought us out of Egypt
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,
with a terrifying display of power, and with signs
and wonders; ⁹ and he brought us into this place
and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk
and honey. ¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit
of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.’
You shall set it down before the Lord your God
and bow down before the Lord your God. ¹¹ Then
you, together with the Levites and the aliens who
reside among you, shall celebrate with all the
bounty that the Lord your God has given to you
and to your house.

¹² “When you have finished paying all the tithe of
your produce in the third year (which is the year
of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens,
the orphans, and the widows, so that they may
eat their fill within your towns, ¹³ then you shall
say before the Lord your God, ‘I have removed
the sacred portion from the house, and I have
given it to the Levites, the resident aliens, the
orphans, and the widows, in accordance with
your entire commandment that you commanded
me; I have neither transgressed nor forgotten any
of your commandments: ¹⁴ I have not eaten of it
while in mourning; I have not removed any of it
while I was unclean; and I have not offered any of
it to the dead. I have obeyed the Lord my God,
doing just as you commanded me. ¹⁵ Look down
from your holy habitation, from heaven, and
bless your people Israel and the ground that you
have given us, as you swore to our ancestors, a
land flowing with milk and honey.’

Now read Matthew 25:31-46 (NRSVUE):

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory and
all the angels with him, then he will sit on the
throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be
gathered before him, and he will separate people
one from another as a shepherd separates the
sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep

at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.' ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life."

Reflection:

Today, we are giving thanks to God for his wonderful creation and the great gifts he has given to us – the fruits of the earth, the wonderful creatures and the diversity of landscapes. God has also generously given us many other things – the gift of his Son, the gift of his teaching, the gift of his Spirit, the gift of each other, and each of us having different gifts and skills. Think for a moment about your gifts – what has God given to you? Perhaps you're a good organiser, or you have a musical gift, or you are a brilliant designer. It is through the Church that each of us can bring our individual gifts together, where we complement, bless and strengthen one another in God's service.

One way we could think of our lives, and our local and global communities, is as fields where God has planted seeds, and that, using our gifts, we are responsible for nurturing and getting the best harvest from them.

In the Deuteronomy reading, we witness how the Israelites were in no doubt that God was the one who gave them their land and all the good fruits it produced. To acknowledge this, they presented their 'first fruits' to God, in an act of worship. The worshippers visited the sanctuary with their baskets full of freshly grown fruit, aware of the abundant goodness of God. However, these things were not to be hoarded by an individual or to benefit only the person who brought it. Each year, as part of this celebration, people in the community who were deprived and easily neglected, were also to enjoy sharing in these gifts.

God cares for people who are vulnerable and in need in every community. The Deuteronomy passage reminds us that worship is not only using our words and songs to honour God; we should also be worshipping God in our actions and the way we live our lives. When we look up to God as we worship, we must also remember to look out in love to our neighbours, and particularly to those in need.

All good things that are produced are achieved through our partnership with God and the good things he has given to us. That is true when we consider growing fruits and crops, and it is also true in relation to our gifts and resources. God plants the seeds and gives us gifts, but we are to work to draw out their fruitfulness. It is often tempting to take all of the glory for ourselves when we use the gifts and resources God has given to us, but that would be denying God of the worship he deserves.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus clearly warns us of the need to care for our neighbour in need, whatever that need might be. I understand Jesus' list to be examples rather than as a complete list of all possible needs but all Jesus' examples have one thing in common; they are all symptoms of poverty. The inclusion of the foreigner, along with Jesus' words of explanation to the sheep, emphasise that we are called to tackle poverty

wherever we find it. We cannot limit our response to our family or our friends or our community or our nation or even (perhaps especially) fellow Christians. One thing which has changed since Jesus' time is the speed at which news travels and we now find out, often within hours, of the needs of people far across the world; Morocco and Libya being two recent examples. And the Church rightly responds to these needs through high profile campaigns and aid charities such as our own All We Can, or Cafod or Christian Aid. You will have heard of these organisations and the large scale relief programmes they support but how many of you know about the Fund for Human Need? This is British Methodist charity which was formed in 1960 and which provides emergency grants to those in need but focussing particularly on those who are completely destitute. You can find out more about them on their website, <http://fundforhumaneed.org.uk/>

Whilst we celebrate our (very worthy) work with the developing world, we are more reticent to do so with organisations working in our own land. Is this embarrassment or ignorance or a refusal to accept that in our "green and pleasant land" such problems exist? I do not know the answer but I do know that organisation such as FHN or Christians Against Poverty are having to fight this reticence in order to support the work they do. It is not that the needs of those in poverty in our own lands are more important than the needs of those elsewhere in the world but they are no less important either. And if we succeed in tackling poverty in our own land then we will actually have more resources to help those elsewhere. People whose lives have been turned around by the love of the Church often return and give far more than they have ever received.

As Christians, we are all called to worship God, to spread the Gospel of Jesus and to do good works in his name but which of these takes priority? Deuteronomy makes it clear that these are in fact one. It is in celebrating and thanking God for the harvest that provision for the needy is made.

This celebration of the harvest is, at least symbolically, a celebration of faith in action but our actions on one day a year will never be enough to meet the ongoing needs of the world.

Like those needs, our efforts too must be ongoing; each day striving to use the gifts and skills that God had given us to eradicate poverty in all its forms.

At times the task of tackling poverty, at home and abroad, may seem impossibly big. Jesus knew this well. In the parable, not only is he warning the goats, he is also encouraging the sheep, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these ... you did it to me." Jesus does not expect any one of us individually to be able to fulfil all of these requirements but each and every small deed works towards the whole and if we do this then we are fulfilling our call to serve Christ in one another and worshipping God with our whole lives.

A prayer for all seeking to help those in need:
Lord God, we thank you for the work of Christian charities striving to alleviate poverty and spread your love across our nation and across the world. We pray that you will strengthen, and guide them as they seek to bring signs of your love to some of the world's most deprived and suffering communities. We thank you for the opportunity you give to them and to us to work in your vineyard and for the opportunity to reduce poverty in communities here and abroad. Give us and them wisdom to remain focused to their vision.

In Jesus' name. Amen

HYMN: StF662, Have you heard God's voice
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzJr9T5JYRU>

- 1 Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve, though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you the disciples of tomorrow?*

- 2 Will you use your voice; will you not sit down when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground when the crowds are turning violent?

3 In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships
start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?

4 Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of
grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

*We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.*

Jacqueline G. Jones
Words and Music: (c) 2008 Jacqueline G. Jones
www.spiritualsongs.co.uk

We pray for the Church and the world:ⁱ

Loving God
we pray for those who make decisions about the
resources of the earth,
that we may use your gifts responsibly;

we pray for those who work in the land and sea,
in city and in industry,
that all may enjoy the fruits of their labours and
marvel at your creation;

we pray for artists, scientists and visionaries,
that through their work we may see creation
afresh;

we pray for all who through their own or others
actions are deprived of the fulness of life,
for prisoners, refugees, those who are
handicapped, and all who are sick;

we pray for those in politics, medical science,
social and relief work and for your Church,
for all who seek to bring life to others.

We thank you that you have called us to
celebrate your creation.
Give us reverence for life in your world.

We thank you for your redeeming love;
may your word and sacrament us to love as you
love us.

God of grace, strengthen and renew us ,
and, through you Holy Spirit, bring us to newness
of life:
in Christ's name we ask it. Amen

HYMN: StF 550, Forth in thy name

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUVAbXgJyqQ>

- 1 Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue,
thee, only thee, resolved to know
in all I think, or speak, or do.
- 2 The task thy wisdom has assigned
O let me cheerfully fulfil,
in all my works thy presence find,
and prove thy good and perfect will.
- 3 Thee may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes my inmost substance see,
and labour on at thy command,
and offer all my works to thee.
- 4 Give me to bear thy easy yoke,
and every moment watch and pray,
and still to things eternal look,
and hasten to thy glorious day;
- 5 For thee delightfully employ
whate'er thy bounteous grace has given,
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with thee to heaven.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

*A commission and blessing for all worshipping
today.*

We go ready to use our gifts and resources
for the benefit of people in need,
and for the glory of God.
We go, ready to affirm the potential of others,
with a willingness to share and work together.
The blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.

ⁱ Parts of this service have been adapted from material originally published by "All We Can".

ⁱⁱ Taken from "A New Zealand Prayer Book": The Church of the Province of New Zealand.