

## **A Podcast for North Coventry Group – 27 September 2020 - a Harvest Thanksgiving**

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for the 27 September, and is an act of worship for Harvest Thanksgiving.

Much of this material is also being used this weekend in Harvest worship as our church at Keresley resumes worship in the church for the first time since March.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and I would like to thank Erica and Nora for their help in preparing this week's edition.

Our introductory music is a way of celebrating the work of God in Creation. This is the first choral movement from the oratorio *The Creation* by Haydn. *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* Be warned that there is a very sudden crescendo as God creates light that puts any surprise in Haydn's Surprise Symphony well into the shade...

**Introductory Music<sup>i</sup>** – *In the beginning, God...* from *Creation* by Haydn.  
Performed by Michael George, the Choir of New College  
Oxford and the Academy of Ancient Music,  
Conducted by Christopher Hogwood

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void. And darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light. And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good. And God divided the light from the darkness.*

**Call to Worship:** *God's promise to Noah, in Genesis 8.22:*

*As long as the earth endures,  
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,  
summer and winter, day and night will never cease.'*

We give thanks to God for his Creation, for his goodness through all ages and for the harvest, as we hear the well-known words, *We plough the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land.*

**Hymn:** *We plough the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land.*  
words by Matthias Claudius, tr. Jane Campbell (1817-1878)  
Sung by the Scottish Festival Singers, from their album,  
*Timeless Hymns, Vol. 6: The Wonderous Cross*

*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.*

*He only is the maker  
of all things near and far;  
he paints the wayside flower,  
he lights the evening star;  
the wind and waves obey him,  
by him the birds are fed;  
much more to us his children,  
he gives our daily bread.  
All good gifts...*

*We thank thee, then, O Father,  
for all things bright and good,  
the seed-time and the harvest,  
our life, our health, our food:  
no gifts we offer  
for all thy love imparts;  
but that which thou desirest,  
our humble, thankful hearts.  
All good gifts...*

## **Prayers**

Let us pray

God of Creation, God who has given us all things, God of the Harvest, we gather in your house and offer you our sacrifice of praise. We would offer more if there was any credible way of reckoning up and delivering to you what we owe.

But the total of that sum is everything. Everything in the world, your world. Everything we claim we own, our possessions. And all the good things we experience, the lovely things we sense and see and smell and taste day after day.

Although we invent a festival of thanksgiving and call it Harvest, help us to see that this special thanks is only what we should offer day by day and minute by minute in response to your truly infinite goodness.

The story of the ancient Jewish people included an obligation laid on them in the Law to commemorate their rescue from slavery and to acknowledge with sacrifices the plenty they were to find in the land to which they returned.

We believe your people have a special freedom from the ancient law, and yet you lay on us the New Commandment of Christ, that we love one another.

Help us to obey, help us to observe this commandment, even in a difficult time.

We come together to praise you after long separation. After a six-month exile from our places of worship, permitted to return only under special constraints. Threatened with months longer without the blessing of full visiting rights with family and friends, freedom to spend our time as we wish. Amidst all of this frustration and anxious waiting and as we give to our government what we owe to those in lawful authority, may we give you what is yours – our love and our lives.

Where we fall short, forgive us. And where we wander from the right path, correct us. Where we fail to notice our own shortcomings as we criticise others, remind us of Jesus' word picture of the plank in our eye that prevents us from removing a speck of dust from the eyes of our neighbours.

We are your creatures, Lord, may we also be your agents for good in the world you brought into being. Let there be light in our world and in our lives.

In Jesus' name we offer all of our prayers. And as he taught us so we pray together:

## The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

**Scripture<sup>ii</sup>:** Deuteronomy 8.7-18

<sup>7</sup> For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land – a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; <sup>8</sup> a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig-trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; <sup>9</sup> a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

<sup>10</sup> When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. <sup>11</sup> Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. <sup>12</sup> Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

<sup>15</sup> He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. <sup>16</sup> He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.

<sup>17</sup> You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' <sup>18</sup> But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

The Gospels have many stories about harvest and about seed – we will pick up on a couple from Matthew's Gospel a little later but another Gospel passage now gives a lesson on attitude to the fruits of the harvest...

**Scripture:** Luke 12.16-30

<sup>16</sup> And Jesus told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. <sup>17</sup> He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops."

<sup>18</sup> 'Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. <sup>19</sup> And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

<sup>20</sup> 'But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

<sup>21</sup> 'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.'

<sup>22</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples: 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the

body more than clothes. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! <sup>25</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life<sup>al</sup>? <sup>26</sup> Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

<sup>27</sup> 'Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. <sup>30</sup> For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.

## Reflection (1)

I will be honest with you. After over thirty-five years of leading worship in the churches of Coventry and Warwickshire and twenty-four years in the ordained ministry I am afraid the challenge of the Harvest is almost the same as the challenge of Christmas. What can we say that is new?

Or to put it another perhaps more positive way, what should we say about God's recurring goodness at this once-in-a-year festival when in fact the gift of recurring seasons and sufficient food and drink is something to celebrate **every** day and not just on the day we have picked for the Harvest Festival.

Is this an outmoded idea?

I often reflect at harvest time on how we fix up our Harvest Festival months before we have any idea of what sort of Summer the farmers are going to get and always at the same time of year. So surely we can't really be celebrating the outcome of our farmers' labours or at least not just that. As a community we're not all involved in farming any more, even if I know very well that some members in our congregations and particularly at Keresley have been connected with farming in the not too distant past.

All that I've harvested in our own garden this season is the quartet of gooseberries that the squirrels left us after stripping the plant of the rest. There are no doubt some very productive gardeners in our Group congregations, but virtually all of the food in my house comes off the supermarket shelf and the market stall, My own work back in the day generated nothing natural. Quite the opposite, it helped people to design car parts. Nothing edible and nothing I could really call a harvest.

We're not harvesters and yet we hold a Harvest Thanksgiving. So why do we do it? There must be a good reason. Let's look in the Bible for a few clues. First in the Old Testament, the book of Deuteronomy. In amongst all the laws and commandments that God gave to his chosen people we find a reminder in Chapter 8 of his care of them during the escape from Egypt., and of his continuing care for them after he leads them to the promised land..

*Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. <sup>2</sup> Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.*

And so it goes on and we get to the section that Nora read for us.

<sup>10</sup> *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.*

God wasn't afraid to remind his people then, and we shouldn't be afraid to remind ourselves now, that all the good things we have, all the privileges we enjoy, our survival from day to day - all these things are not ours because of anything special that we did, but rather because of what God did, and continues to do for us. So in celebrating the Harvest Thanksgiving, we needn't worry that we haven't been doing any work out in the fields this summer.

Even if we had been, our task today would not have been to draw attention to anything clever that **we** might have done but rather to glorify God for what **he** has done. God's amazing power put life into the seed from which all the corn has sprung up. And he is also behind the continuing cycle of seasons of wet and dry times, that give the right conditions for things to grow. Just as we heard from the story of Noah (Gen 8 15-22), 'While the earth remains, seedtime and harvests, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.' This continuity, whatever the scientific explanations, is God's gift to us all and we are here to thank him for it.

Is that what we are here for? Or should I say is that **all** we are here for? 'We can get other clues – and a great big one is found in another favourite Harvest hymn:

**Song/Music:**            *Come, ye thankful people, come* (words by Henry Alford 1810-1871)  
sung by the Huddersfield Choral Society,  
with Gregory Batsleer & Christopher Stokes  
from *The Hymns Album, Volume 2*

*Come, ye thankful people, come,  
raise the song of harvest home;  
all is safely gathered in,  
ere the winter storms begin.  
God our Maker doth provide  
for our wants to be supplied;  
come to God's own temple, come,  
raise the song of harvest home.*

*For the Lord our God shall come,  
and shall take his harvest home;  
from his field shall purge away  
all that doth offend that day,  
give his angels charge at last  
in the fire the tares to cast;  
but the fruitful ears to store  
in his garner evermore.*

*All the world is God's own field,  
fruit unto his praise to yield;  
wheat and tares together sown  
unto joy or sorrow grown;  
first the blade and then the ear,  
then the full corn shall appear;  
Grant, O harvest lord that we  
wholesome grain and pure may be.*

*Then, thou Church triumphant come,  
raise the song of harvest home;  
all be safely gathered in,  
free from sorrow, free from sin,  
there, forever purified,  
in God's garner to abide;  
come, ten thousand angels, come,  
raise the glorious harvest home.*

## Reflection (2)

That second verse begins "We ourselves are God's own field, fruit unto his praise to yield. Wheat and tares together sown, unto joy or sorrow grown." It has reference to a parable about things growing in fields that Jesus told his disciples – noted in Matthew's Gospel and actually part of the theme in our podcast of 19 July. (Matthew 13, 24-30) He said,

*“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.*

After a little enquiry and conversation between the landowner and his servants he concludes he will let the good seed and the bad seed grow together till harvest time and dispose of the bad stuff at that point.

Now here's quite a harvest warning to us, if we look for parallels between the parable and our own lives. There is wheat growing in the field, and there are weeds. When everything begins to grow, it's very difficult to tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds, so difficult that the landowner, the farmer, decides not to bother trying to weed his field until the plants are fully grown. If “we ourselves are God's own field”, then we need to make jolly sure that we're with the wheat! Jesus is announcing or confirming a sort of change of policy on God's part. Remember the flood? [well of course, despite appearances, none of you remember the flood!]

Remember the story of the flood? In sending the flood, God was wiping out all those people who had displeased him, and saving only Noah, and his family, who were righteous. That is not to happen again. God told Noah after the flood, and Jesus now confirms that the wheat and the weeds, the sheep and the goats, the righteous and the sinners are to live and grow together until the day of the harvests when God will sort everybody out.

“We ourselves are God's own field”: Is not our Harvest Festival also an opportunity for us, **not** to try and proclaim that we are of the righteous, of the wheat, but to pray to God to give us strength to **be** righteous in this world. to grow correctly and fruitfully despite the choking influence of the world? From the same verse of the hymn: “Grant, O Harvest Lord that we wholesome grain and pure may be.” When these particular weeds were growing in the farmer's fields it was impossible to tell the difference at first, between what was good and what was bad - every plant looked just the same. In just the same way we have no power, in looking round at each other or at the other people we come across, of telling how we are going to end up. We mustn't jump to conclusions about our own merits, or about where anyone else stands, in relation to God. We all have the **chance** to be wheat and not weeds, the field may be full of wheat, not a weed in sight, but we are still in the hands of the God of the Harvest, who knows what we are, and who will deal with us as we deserve.

Of course there's more can befall a wheat grain than that it be sown together with weeds. I am not going to take the time to retell the parable of the sower, but you will recall from **that** tale how we might be identified as different sorts of seed, or rather seed that has a different fate, depending on where it lands.

But then again, and with harvest in mind, I would say we can see our own selves in that story in two different ways. We are either the seed, or the sower.

As those who hear the word, we are like the seeds

If we look on ourselves as **sowers**, then from this parable we can get some reassurance and consolation. As the sower casts out his handfuls of seed at sowing time, and knows that not every seed will grow up into a plant that bears fruit, so must we realise that what we do in the way of spreading God's word cannot always be fruitful. Although we do our best, and we hope to improve our technique as time goes on, there will always be times when our words are simply cast in the wrong direction, or at the wrong time, or at the wrong people.

There is actually so much in the Harvest theme that concerns our lives. We can be like the sower, spreading the seed of the Gospel story, we can be like that seed, growing well,

growing badly, or not growing at all, depending on the way we fix ourselves in the soil of our surroundings and our attitudes. In growing, it isn't obvious to us or to other people whether we are like the good wheat or like weeds, good for nothing, even if they do look like the real thing.

We have our final reassurance in the knowledge that, even if some seed is lost, the Harvest still comes round. There is enough in God's Harvest to give us our daily bread and more. We thank him for that, and also pray to him that we in turn will be worthy to be harvested, bearing good fruit for his service.

Amen

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Let us pray.

Lord of the harvest, you are God of all times and all places, the God of sowing and the God of reaping. We bring before you now our hopes and fears for your people, for the church and for the world.

We pray for the places where the harvest has failed or been difficult to gather in. Places affected by drought, or by flood and places where the ground has lost its goodness through over cultivation over too many years. We pray for all subsistence farmers, that their land might yield enough for them to feed their families, buy other necessities, and plant again for the next season. We pray too for agencies working with farmers to help them to be independent and to protect them from exploitation.

We pray for a harvest of peace and plenty and we promise to play our part.

We pray for the harvest of the church, for Christians fed and nurtured to be living examples of your love and your teaching wherever they go.

For churches reopening for worship, we pray for a right spirit to prevail and for mutual regard and concern for those able to attend and those staying away. We pray that despite the restrictions, those who attend may feel your presence. And we pray too that those worshipping at home through podcasts, radio broadcasts and telephone worship may continue to feel included, inspired and sustained.

We pray for a harvest of active, empowered churches and we promise to play our part.

We pray for there to be harvest in our own lives, and in the lives of those we know and love.

We pray for those who are sick or troubled, for those who are lonely or who have suffered loss...

We pray for ourselves, that, whatever difficulties we face, our lives may be grateful and joyful

We pray for a harvest of faith, hope and love, and we promise to play our part.

Lord of the harvest, you are God of all times and all places, the God of sowing and the God of reaping and we thank you.

Amen

**Hymn:** *Now thank we all our God*, words by Martin Rinkhart (1586-1649), tr by Catherine Winkworth (1827-78) sung by Gloucester Cathedral Choir, from the album *complete New English Hymnal, Volume 4*

*Now thank we all our God,  
with heart and hands and voices,  
who wondrous things has done,  
in Whom this world rejoices;  
who from our mothers' arms  
has blessed us on our way  
with countless gifts of love,  
and still is ours today.*

*O may this bounteous God  
through all our life be near us,  
with ever joyful hearts  
and blessed peace to cheer us;  
and keep us in His grace,  
and guide us when perplexed;  
And free us from all ills,  
in this world and the next!*

*Il praise and thanks to God  
the Father now be given;  
the Son and Him Who reigns  
with Them in highest Heaven;  
the one eternal God,  
whom earth and Heaven adore;  
for thus it was, is now,  
and shall be evermore.*

## **Blessing**

May we share with the God of the Harvest in his work of sowing the seed that is the Gospel. May we grow as good seed. May the fruits of our growing in Christ be acceptable at harvest time. And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all today and for ever. Amen

**Music:** *Harvest Hymn*, by Percy Grainger  
performed by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields  
conducted by Sir Neville Marriner  
from the album, *English Seasons*

Thank you for listening to our podcast. We always welcome feedback, suggestions, and volunteers to read. A full archive of all of our podcasts is on our website [<https://revdbill.uk>].

## **Credits**

*In the beginning, God*, from *Creation* by Haydn was performed by soloist Michael George, the Choir of New College Oxford and the Academy of Ancient Music, conducted by Christopher Hogwood

*We plough the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land* was sung by the Scottish Festival Singers, from their album, *Timeless Hymns, Vol. 6: The Wonderous Cross*

*Come, ye thankful people, come* was sung by the Huddersfield Choral Society, with Gregory Batsleer & Christopher Stokes from *The Hymns Album, Volume 2*

*Now thank we all our God*, was sung by Gloucester Cathedral Choir, from the album *Complete New English Hymnal, Volume 4*

and *Harvest Hymn*, by Percy Grainger was performed by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields conducted by Sir Neville Marriner, from the album, *English Seasons*

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<sup>i</sup> All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067

<sup>ii</sup> Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition