

United Harvest Service 20th September 2020

Welcome and call to worship (adapted from Martin Palmer, *Advent and Ecology*, 1988):

Listen now. Be still and hear. For creation takes up its maker's call. All creation draws near to God, seeks refuge from the tightening grip of winter, the winter our destruction has wrought; seeks light and warmth to revive that which we have darkened and chilled by our abuse of God's creation. So let us draw near to God as we offer our worship and our praise.

Prayer (from Janet Morley, *All Desires Known*, 2005):

Praise to you, our God,
our help in ages past.
You have nourished us, body and spirit,
and raised up in every generation
saints and workers for justice
who gave us the ground we stand on
and planted the seeds of change.

Praise to you, our God.

Praise to you, our God,
our hope for years to come.
You make us dream generous dreams
of a harvest, and earth's resources shared,
of sufferings ended,
of the time when all shall be included
in one great feast of life.

Praise to you, our God.

Praise to you, our God.
You daily offer us this present moment
to renounce despair,
to leave behind our fear,
and choose that community of freedom
where those who are poor come first,
but all who kneel and open their hands
shall be unfailingly fed.

Praise to you, our God.

And feed us here today we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer of confession and absolution (from Michael Forster, *High Days and Holy Days*, 1993):

Let us now present before God the sins which spoil creation.
Let us confess the greed and the carelessness of which we are all guilty.

Holy God, we confess our greed,
our constant desire for more,
our repeated cries of "Bigger!" "Faster!" "Easier!" "Richer!"
We recognise the harm which creation suffers at our hands - we who should be its stewards.
We confess the sins which threaten to choke your world;
sins committed out of thoughtlessness, carelessness or ignorance,
and the deliberate words and actions which spoil creation.
Forgive us, and move our hearts to true repentance,
that from this time on we may resolve, by your grace,

to live more in harmony with creation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Hear then these words of grace:

Your sins are forgiven.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Dialogue (from Michael Forster, *Fasts and Festivals*, 1994):

Voice 1: It's a strange business, farming.

Voice 2: What do you mean?

Voice 1: Well, in what other industry do you have to take your raw material and throw it away in order to produce anything?

Voice 2: I'm not sure I follow you.

Voice 1: I was thinking about these words in John's gospel: *Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds.*

Voice 2: Oh, I see. It's an interesting thought.

Voice 1: A frightening one I'd say. When the farmer sows the seed there's no guarantee that it will actually grow.

Voice 2: All kinds of things can happen - floods, droughts, pests, disease...

Voice 1: and even with modern methods you can't always deal with the problems.

Voice 2: You're right, it's a risky business.

Voice 1: But farmers are really in something of a dilemma.

Voice 2: How's that?

Voice 1: Well, if they don't sow the seeds but keep them safe, then nothing will happen anyway.

Voice 2: It sounds to me as though they're better off taking the risk.

Voice 1: So why don't *we* do that?

Voice 2: We're not all farmers you know!

Voice 1: Not literally, but we've all got seeds to sow. And I'm not just thinking about us individually - I mean as the church as well.

Voice 2: What seeds have we got then?

Voice 1: We've got the talents of the congregations, which often aren't used as they might be.

Voice 2: I wonder why that is.

Voice 1: Because people are afraid of getting it wrong, or because they think their talents are too small to be important...

Voice 2: or because they think that only people like ministers have gifts to offer.

Voice 1: Or because they're afraid of looking pushy - all kinds of reasons - the point is that the church is full of seeds going to waste for not being sown.

Voice 2: Anything else?

Voice 1: What about buildings? Before the pandemic, most church buildings were under-used. Often it's because of fear - if the 'wrong' people come in they might damage the place.

Voice 2: Sounds reasonable to me - there are some dangerous people around.

Voice 1: Yes, like the ones who nailed Jesus to the cross. You can't get more 'damaged' than that!

Voice 2: Yes, I see what you mean. And then there's our money.

Voice 1: Ah well, of course we always have to be careful with money. Good stewardship and all that!

Voice 2: But I thought good Christian stewardship was about giving, not saving.

Voice 1: That's right, but it's difficult, so over the centuries thrift has been portrayed as a Christian virtue - not because it's good but because it's safe.

Voice 2: As safe as leaving seeds in barns. But isn't there an awful responsibility in all this? What if we take risks with our seeds and lose them?

Voice 1: In the parable of the talents, the third servant wasn't punished for failing, or for losing. He was punished for not trying.

Voice 2: Because he was afraid of failure.

Voice 1: Right again. So, if we really want to celebrate harvest...

Voice 2: We've got to go and sow some seeds!

Bible Reading

Sermon

Prayers of intercession (from Janet Morley, *All Desires Known*, 2005) - based on psalm 126:

O God, our creator, whose good earth is entrusted to our care and delight and tenderness, we pray:

For all who are in captivity to debt,

whose lives are cramped with fear from which there is no turning except through abundant harvest.

May those who sow in tears

Reap with shouts of joy.

For all who depend on the earth for their daily food and fuel,

whose forests are destroyed for the profits of a few:

May those who sow in tears

Reap with shouts of joy.

For all who labour in poverty, who are oppressed by unjust laws,

who are banned for speaking the truth,

who long for a harvest of justice.

May those who sow in tears

Reap with shouts of joy.

For all who are in captivity to greed and waste and boredom,

whose harvest joy is choked with things they do not need.

May those who sow in tears

Reap with shouts of joy.

Turn us again from our captivity and restore our vision,

that our mouths may be filled with laughter,

and our tongues with singing.

We pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer:

Our father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come,

your will be done

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of Christ, the Son of Peace, to you.

And now may the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us and remain with us, and with all whom we love, now and always. **Amen.**