

Harvest Service for 25th September 2022

A Psalm 65 people

Welcome

Hello everyone and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 25th September 2022. Today we celebrate God's provision in our harvest, and we ponder our part in the world's search for a sustainable way of life.

Call to Worship

Scriptures tell us that food is good and is received with thanksgiving as from God. We gather to praise our Lord for the fruitfulness of the earth in this, our harvest service.

Hymn (BPW 120) **Come, Ye Thankful People, Come**

Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest home;
All is safely gathered in
Soon the winter storms begin.
God, our maker will provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of harvest home.

All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto his praise to yield!
Wheat and weeds together sown,
Until joy or sorrow grown;
First the blade and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure maybe!

For the lord our God shall come,
And shall take his harvest home;
From his field shall in that day
All offences purge away,
Give the angels charge at last
In the fire the weeds to cast,
But the fruitful ones to store
In his storehouse evermore.

Even so, Lord, quickly come,
Bring thy final harvest home!
Gather now your people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin;
There, forever purified,
In your storehouse to abide;
Come, with all your angels come,
Raise the glorious harvest home!

Prayer of Thanksgiving for Life on Earth (Tony Burnham)

Loving God, we praise you
for giving to the world
fish, birds and animals
and trusting us to name them

Whales that sing beneath the waves jellyfish and crabs
sticklebacks and sharks
friendly dolphins and porpoise schools
rainbow trout and brilliant neon
halibut and lemon sole
carp and cod and coelacanth

Living God you made them and these are their names

Thrushes singing
swallows skimming

herons fishing
buzzards hovering
skuas diving
puffins shuffling
robins chatting

Creating God you made them and these are their names

Elephants and midges
gorillas and gerbils
badgers and hedgehogs
cows, pigs and sheep
kangaroos and kittens
lions and lemurs
crocodiles and monkeys

Enlivening God you made them and these are their names.

Loving God, we pray now for the unity of the breathing world that we and all your creatures many live together in harmony and peace in the name of Jesus.

Thanksgiving for the Harvest

Lord, we thank you for making our planet one of abundant life and rich provision.
For the food we grow in many different ways we give you our thanks.
We thank you, too, for the work of agricultural labourers and farmers,
for the produce of our gardens and allotments,
for the systems that distribute food around the world,
and for the shopkeepers, markets and supermarkets who sell it to us.
Thank you for cooks, dietitians, chefs, lunch clubs, cafes and restaurants who help
us to take a healthy delight in our food.
Every good and perfect gift comes from you.
We bless your holy name for the harvest of the world.
Amen.

We hear two Bible readings. The first is Eugene Peterson's translation of Psalm 65, which is a beautiful celebration of the provision of the earth. The second reading from the work of the apostle Paul encourages us to be cheerful givers and generous sharers of life.

Bible Readings

Psalm 65 (from The Message translation)

65 ¹⁻² Silence is praise to you,
Zion-dwelling God,
And also obedience.
You hear the prayer in it all.

²⁻⁸ We all arrive at your doorstep sooner
or later, loaded with guilt,
Our sins too much for us—
but you get rid of them once and for all.
Blessed are the chosen! Blessed the guest
at home in your place!
We expect our fill of good things
in your house, your heavenly manse.
All your salvation wonders
are on display in your trophy room.
Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer,
Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser,
Muzzler of sea storm and wave crash,
of mobs in noisy riot—
Far and wide they'll come to a stop,
they'll stare in awe, in wonder.
Dawn and dusk take turns
calling, "Come and worship."

⁹⁻¹³ Oh, visit the earth,
ask her to join the dance!
Deck her out in spring showers,
fill the God-River with living water.
Paint the wheat fields golden.

Creation was made for this!
Drench the ploughed fields,
soak the dirt clods
With rainfall as harrow and rake
bring her to blossom and fruit.
Snow-crown the peaks with splendour,
scatter rose petals down your paths,
All through the wild meadows, rose petals.
Set the hills to dancing,
Dress the canyon walls with live sheep,
a drape of flax across the valleys.
Let them shout, and shout, and shout!
Oh, oh, let them sing!

2 Corinthians 9: 6 - 15 (NIV)

Generosity encouraged

⁶ Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: 'They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures for ever.'

¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

¹² This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift

And now we'll listen to a song made famous by the Isley Brothers'

Harvest for the World.

Sermon

A Psalm 65 people

Suppose you see the sixty-fifth Psalm as a video. You might start with an image of a silent and empty Holy of Holies. If anyone were present, they would feel an anticipatory stillness.

The camera pans out to include the surrounding courts of worship. People are gathering, but there is a hush about them. The majestic God cannot be adequately expressed in human words. *Silence is praise to you, Zion-dwelling God.*

Then more people begin to flood into the place of worship. *Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.* They come and prostrate themselves before the nothing that contains everything. *Our sins are too much for us,* they declare.

But then the image of the people bowed before no single earthly thing is overlaid with a lively sequence of vibrant scenes. We glimpse the south pole with penguins feeding their young. We see the ocean roaring in foaming chaos and then calm in a silver sunset; we see the snowy high peaks of the Himalayas and the vast expanse of a plain filled with tens of thousands of antelope; we see heather-clad rolling hills, soaring eagles and leaping salmon... and the glorious landscapes and seascapes, and the teeming life of the planet, leads us into a second type of awe.

God is in his heaven and all is well on earth. All is harmony and interconnectedness and wholeness and living and dying and rising and blessing...

God is *Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer, Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser, Muzzler of sea storm and wave crash, of mobs in noisy riot.*

Of mobs in noisy riot... So the camera takes in the vast array of human existence... the multitudes of India, China, and Brazil; pockets of forest-dwelling tribes in remote

corners of the jungles of Indonesia; great cities of several million; solitary folk in hamlets and cottages... and then a remarkable moment arrives...

They come to a stop... As a nation stops to remember a beloved Queen now the whole world stops in the Psalm 65 footage, and everyone stares in awe, in wonder.

We see the dawn perpetually making its way across the globe; and dusk travels on sweeping over ocean and land... They are calls for souls to worship the wondrous source of it all...

The video moves into the realm of prayer... We see what the prayer imagines... Spring showers watering the crops, rivers full of clean water, fields golden with wheat, drenched ploughed fields, flowers in bloom, trees fruiting in abundant gifts, waving fields of grains ready for harvest, squashes ballooning, hillsides decorated with flocks of sheep; rose petals floating across sunlit meadows.... There is a sense of the very earth alive with the praise and blessing of God. All on the earth shouts, and shouts and shouts for the glory of it all...

* * *

How astonished I feel that so much of this vision of Psalm 65 remains... The earth is home to nearly eight billion people all deserving of food, water and clean air, and still we are managing to feed most of our children. In spite of warfare, of pollution, of poisons and fossil fuels still the good earth yields its fruit in season.

God knows, we feel perilously close to some calamity... An out of control dictator with a finger on a nuclear trigger, conflicts over scarce resources, balanced ecosystems destabilised by human-induced climate change... Apocalyptic films, video games and novels reflect the looming doom felt by many. Is it too late?

The Psalm speaks of silent praise in Zion. Mount Zion is a tiny dot on planet earth, by most measures without significance. Yet its silent holy of holies and its noisy festive worship are like the nucleus to a cell, or like the DNA to the living organism which is the earth.

God gives seed to the sower, and through the work of human hands, bread to the hungry. God scatters gifts for the poor of the earth. Paul mused on this in his letter to

the Corinthians. God's people, too, should be a giving people, because that's how God is.

How should they give? With **cheerfulness** - for it's a joy to be free not to cling on to excess possessions. With **generosity** - because the need is great. With **faith** and **hope** - for God will return a harvest of righteousness back to them all.

* * *

As a little community of faith at Hearsall, we are less than a millionth of a percent of the population of planet earth right now. In a tiny human cell there is a tightly packed strand of DNA. If it were unfurled, that strand would be about two metres long. If all the DNA in just your particular body were laid end to end in a straight line, it would stretch to twice the diameter of the solar system. Life is mind-bogglingly wonderful.

In that mind-boggling wonder, small things can make all the difference. In a tiny space in a corner of planet earth, we worship the God who encompasses not only the wonder of our amazing planet, but the inconceivable vastness of the universe.

Small things can indeed make all the difference. So here's my challenge for this week:

As far as it depends on you, right now, live life the way everyone should live life. As a community of people, let's, for this week, live lives that are green, sustainable, generous to the poor, and in balance with our earth, which is like a mother to us.

Let our prayers, our silences, our liturgies, our scriptures be like the DNA for the world. Let us be just one healthy cell in the body that is all of humanity. Let's live in the Psalm 65 vision of a fruitful earth providing food for all its creatures.

What does that mean for you in practice? We are supporting the brilliant charity Practical Action this harvest time. They are about healthy farming practices, reusing waste and building resilience in poorer communities around the world. They support such schemes as recycling plastic in Bangladesh or improving water access in Turkana in Kenya, where many people have to walk 15km to find fresh water. Search *Practical Action* online and give **today**.

Share food with your local food bank. We collect in our church buildings in Hearsall, but many collection places can be found. Don't just say prayers; do it! Share your food with the hungry. Do it **this week**.

And let's do whatever we can this week to live as sustainably as possible. Travel as ecologically as you are able. If you're fit enough, walk and cycle more; drive less. Use public transport. Get in the habit of saying *No* to plastic as much as you can.

Let's be Psalm 65 people now... Let's **be** a living prayer for a better world, a worked example of sustainable and beautiful living...

Let's show the world at large that if we pause and worship the source of all life, it is possible for harvests to continue, for climate change to be ameliorated, for humanity to thrive with God's blessing.

Perhaps no one will notice. Perhaps no one will care. But they might! And we might be one of a billion cells in the body of humanity that restores its healthy DNA as the population of the planet learns again how to live well. May it be so.

Our prayers continue now as we express our concerns for the world in words written by Jan Clemons and read by Anne Thompson.

Prayers of Intercession

Dear Lord, we thank you for this harvest time and for the food we eat. Help us to remember not to take this for granted as many people around the world will go to sleep hungry tonight.

We pray for these people not only those in this country, but around the world where floods, droughts and extreme weather caused by climate change has resulted in poor harvests and food shortages.

We pray for the work of local foodbanks that provide food for Coventry people in need. Help us to share the harvests of the world more fairly, so nobody goes to bed hungry.

Dear Lord, help and encourage us to buy local produce and fairly traded goods

whenever we can, and bless all those who grow, protect and prepare our food. Thank you for all the life on this Earth, as summer gives way to autumn, with the bright colours of autumn leaves, clean crisp air and frosty mornings, and help us to be grateful for this harvest food that will see us through the winter ahead.

As we grieve for the passing of our beloved Queen Elizabeth, we pray for King Charles and the royal family and our government as they all face new responsibilities and challenges in the weeks ahead.

We will now silently pray for those mentioned in our prayer book, our own individual concerns and for those people we care about.

Dear Lord, please accept these prayers for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ.
Amen

Song Creation Sings the Father's Song

Verse 1

Creation sings the Father's song;
He calls the sun to wake the dawn
And run the course of day
Till evening falls in crimson rays,
His fingerprints in flakes of snow,
His breath upon this spinning globe.
He charts the eagle's flight,
Commands the new-born baby's cry.

Chorus

Hallelujah!

Let all creation stand and sing,

Hallelujah!

Fill the earth with songs of worship;

Tell the wonders of creation's King.

Verse 2

Creation gazed upon His face,
The ageless One in time's embrace,
Unveiled the Father's plan
Of reconciling God and man.
A second Adam walked the earth,
Whose blameless life would break the curse,
Whose death would set us free
To live with Him eternally.

Chorus

Hallelujah!

Let all creation stand and sing,

Hallelujah!

Fill the earth with songs of worship;

Tell the wonders of creation's King.

Verse 3

Creation longs for His return
When Christ shall reign upon the earth.
The bitter wars that rage
Are birth pains of a coming age.
When He renews the land and sky,
All heaven will sing and earth reply
With one resplendent theme:
The glory of our God and King!

Chorus x 2

Ending

Fill the earth with songs of worship;

Tell the wonders of creation's King.

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;

And the love of God;

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all, evermore.

Amen

Sung Blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you

Wherever he may send you;

May he guide you through the wilderness;

Protect you through the storm;

May he bring you home rejoicing

At the wonders he has shown you;

May he bring you home rejoicing

Once again into our doors.