

Sunday Update
4th October 2020

Psalm 65:9-13

*9 You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.*

*The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.*

*10 You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.*

*11 You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.*

*12 The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.*

*13 The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.*

This week our theme is Harvest Thanksgiving. For years now, the end of September has been the time for us to hold a special service in which the church is decorated with a whole load of produce which you have donated and brought to church, decorating the building quite spectacularly. You have brought your favourite foods to decorate the tables and the tables have groaned with the weight of these gifts. After the service, for the past few years these gifts have been taken to the Salvation Army in Gorgie for their foodbank and have been used to help people struggling to provide enough food for their families. That kind of service is denied to us for now, but the spirit of it can still carry on. The 2 themes of saying “thank you” to God for our food, and of helping our neighbour, can still carry on, and that is what we’re thinking about today.



Psalm 65 is a harvest psalm; the verses above are harvest verses. They paint a wonderful picture of the way in which God has blessed His people by an abundant harvest. The psalmist writes about God as the One who provides everything that people need. God cares for the land and waters it so that the soil produces fruit. The land is enriched by God providing water and warmth. Imagine in your mind’s eye, the picture that he paints of the farm cart wending its way home from the fields full of grain, crops dripping off the side and back of the cart because it is so full. The land produces these crops and sustains the animals who feed on them and so they prosper and grow. The whole notion of these verses is that harvest is something that God has given us; this is something that *God* has done.

Harvest, like everything else in 2020 it seems, has been tough this year. The weather patterns have not worked so well, and some elements of the harvest are much smaller than last year. It has been hard to gather some crops because the workers have been fewer. Covid has created its own problems for farmers and those who labour in the fields. Earlier in 2020, shops and supermarkets struggled to make food available to us, partly because of issues with supply and partly because people were behaving recklessly and stockpiling food. We need to appreciate the hard work that our farmers and others put in to make food available to us, and understand their struggles, and pray for them, but I read these words this week: "We of the supermarket culture... should be moved to say perhaps more often than we do, 'God has done this'" (Michael Wilcock) when we speak of our food. The harvest is a gift from God and we should appreciate that gift; the practice of saying "grace" before meals is a good one; do you say "grace", saying "thank you" to God for the food that you're about to eat? It is a good way of remembering that God has done this and these are His gifts to us.

Harvest has also been about helping our neighbour! A couple of weeks ago, Martin did a very thoughtful Zoom service on the story of Ruth; if you weren't there or have not seen it, you can watch it on You Tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbs8-q0PqvE> and it is well worth the visit. A major part of the story of Ruth is the effort she puts in to gathering food so that she and her mother-in-law would have something to eat. The Old Testament law cared for people who were poor: farmers were told that, at harvest time they should leave the margins of the grain-field uncut and that any grain which dropped to the ground during harvest should be left on the ground. This meant that people who were poor could come along and collect some of this crop for themselves and could glean that fallen grain for themselves. In this way, the poor were cared for and people who had no land of their own, no harvest for themselves, could be cared for by their community. There is a famous painting by Jean-François Millet called *The Gleaners* which could well be the story of Ruth.

There are people who are hungry today. There are people in Edinburgh who will depend on a foodbank this week; otherwise their family will not have enough food; there are people who will need to choose whether to buy food or to heat their home because they can't afford to do both! Some of that is Covid related, but not all of it. There are people in other parts of the world who are hungry because their crops have failed; there has been no rain in their part of the world and their crops have died; or locusts have attacked their fields and their crops are simply destroyed. The simple truth is that there is enough food on the planet to feed everyone, just not all of it is in the places where it is most needed and people don't have access to the food that is there. Equally, in the rich world so much food is wasted and the world is an unfair place.

Harvest is about helping our neighbour. As I said earlier, our Harvest gifts for the last few years have gone to the Gorgie foodbank, as have the donations you have put into the Food Box that still sits at the front door of the church building. However, there are some actions that we can still take to help our neighbour:

- we can make food donations to the food banks – most supermarkets have a box for donations to their local foodbank or some such and it is easy to put even one item there from your shopping; or you could leave something at the Manse door this week and we will deliver it for you;
- if you're not out shopping you can make a cash donation either online to the Trussell Trust at <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/ways-to-give/>, or by post to the Gorgie foodbank at Salvation Army, 431 Gorgie Road, Edinburgh, EH11 2RB.
- Earlier this year, we heard from Sandra Lindsay about a Tearfund project to bring water to one of the driest parts of the world, the Afar region of Ethiopia; water brings life to dry places and enables people to grow food for themselves. Sandra's visit is still available to watch online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxZuZQ6JSS0&t=14s> You can support this project and others like it by donating to Tearfund; for more information you can visit <https://www.tearfund.org/en-SC/latest/harvest/> or speak to Jim.

- Helping our neighbour can also be a simple thing, like sharing a meal with someone you know, leaving it on their doorstep if you can't invite them in; or some other random act of kindness to a friend or even a stranger!

Harvest is a gift that God gives to us; let's remember that and give thanks to Him for His continued love and faithfulness in providing food for us to eat. Especially in these difficult times, it is important that we continue to care for our neighbours and I've made some suggestions as to how we can do that.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for the harvest, for the world that You have made and the food that You provide for us; we thank you for the hard work of those who farm the land and produce our food for us; help us never to take either of these for granted, but to appreciate Your goodness and the hard work of others on our behalf. Jesus bids us to love our neighbour as ourselves: help us to find ways of caring for people who have hungry and sharing food with those who have little.

*Day by day, dear Lord of you
Three things I pray:
To see you more clearly,
To love you more dearly,
To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- Pray for those our children and young people: those at school and struggling with the lingering effects of lockdown earlier this year; for students who are caught in the Covid situation and the universities in the way they handle this situation.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.
- NHS staff, care home staff, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some still furloughed, others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the foodbanks across the city, looking to support needy people; may they have enough food and other supplies to meet the need. For Tearfund and other agencies caring for the poor where the need is greatest, helping people farm their land more effectively and produce food for their families and villages to eat.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- For church in our community and elsewhere – help us to care for people in need, to find ways of caring for people who are in need; for those churches who have re-opened their buildings to do so safely and carefully.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.

- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

We plough the fields and scatter	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha628Pj_Rns
All things bright and beautiful	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OAskr0F4H0
Before the throne of God above	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MUNywhsZPU
God is our refuge and our strength	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ds1VugPhznk
Great is Thy faithfulness	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k1WhFtVp0o

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of “**Every Day with Jesus**” Booklet for September and October 2020 are now available. Please contact Ian Aitken who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Michael Merriman. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Next Sunday – Communion: Next Sunday’s service will end with a celebration of communion. As we have done before, you will need to bring some bread and some wine or juice or water to drink, so that we can share communion “together” across the Zoom service.

Harvest: here are some ways of helping others as a response to the good things we enjoy in life, including the food that we eat:

- Donate food items to the local foodbanks, either through boxes in the shops or supermarkets, or to the Gorgie foodbank at Salvation Army, 431 Gorgie Road, Edinburgh, EH11 2RB
- Donate cash to the Trussell Trust which runs foodbanks all over the UK; you can do this online at <https://www.trusselltrust.org/make-a-donation/> or by post to the Gorgie foodbank at the address above.
- Donate to Tearfund at <https://www.tearfund.org/en-SC/latest/harvest/>; their harvest appeal is for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.
- Do some random act of kindness for a neighbour as long as it is safe to do so.

Harvest

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Dear God,
We thank you for all the good gifts you give us.
Thank you for the sunshine and rain that makes crops grow, and for all the people who provide us with food.
Help us to share what we have, to be generous as you are generous.
Thank you that you bless us day by day and give us what we need.
Amen.



Question...



What is your favourite thing to eat?
What's the best meal you've ever had?

Challenge 1...

Can you name a fruit/vegetable or food for every letter of the alphabet?



Challenge 2...

Perhaps you say grace in your home already, if not, try this week to give thanks before every meal or snack. You can say it, sing it, draw it, roll a dice...use imagination (or Google!) Here's one to get you started
<https://www.ultimatecampresource.com/camp-songs/camp-songs-for-grace/yankee-doodle-grace/>

Read the Bible...



Today's verses are found in Psalm 65:9-13. You can read them in a Bible or find them here:
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm%2065%3A9-13&version=NIRV,GNT>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.



Talk together...

- What stood out to you from the verses? Can you draw a picture of the scene or describe what it makes you think about?
- Is there anything in the verses that didn't make sense or makes you wonder about something?
- Verse 11 says that wherever God goes there is plenty, does that match with what the world is like? Why/why not? If not, how could that be changed? Is there anything we could do to change it?
- Why do we celebrate harvest? How often are we grateful for what we have? How often do we grumble?

Praise together...



Harvest Samba:

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

You might have sung this one in school before!

Do something...

This idea came from *Together @ Home* resources. It encourages us to celebrate harvest together with the GRAIN challenge:

G Give some food to a local foodbank to share with those in need.

R Reduce, reuse, recycle, repair! Harvest is a great time to think of our own environment. What can your family do to save our planet?

A Ask somebody if you can do their food shopping for them this week or collect anything they need from the shops.

I Invite somebody to share a meal with you. If you cannot meet because of social distancing, why not arrange to drop off a meal which they can heat up and join together virtually as you eat.

N Nature! Get out in nature and spend some time thanking God for the many different plants and animals He has created.

Pray together...

Psalm 118:1 that says: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever." It is good and right to praise God for all that we have, not only food and physical things but also for things we cannot see but that are nonetheless gifts from God.

Take some time to come up with a list of things you are grateful for then perhaps you want to choose some of those to make a thankful pumpkin you can put on display. Each time you see it say or think a quick prayer to God for one thing.

<https://www.supplyme.com/products/i-am-thankful-pumpkin-kids-craft-a7260>

