

Harvest Thanksgiving Service

Psalm 104:1, 10-15

Praise the Lord, my soul.

Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty.

He makes springs pour water into the ravines;

it flows between the mountains.

11 They give water to all the beasts of the field;

the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

12 The birds of the sky nest by the waters;

they sing among the branches.

13 He waters the mountains from his upper chambers;

the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.

14 He makes grass grow for the cattle,

and plants for people to cultivate –

bringing forth food from the earth:

15 wine that gladdens human hearts,

oil to make their faces shine,

and bread that sustains their hearts.

Harvest is a time to celebrate the world that God has made and the food that our world produces; there are lots of good food that we enjoy, and all of it comes from the planet that God has created. We are charged with looking after creation and so we celebrate those who work hard to produce our food, as we consider the needs of those who don't have.

Harvest Stories

Our world is a wonderful place; there are lots of Bible places that celebrates God as the Creator and celebrate the world that He has made; places like Psalm 104 which celebrates the fact that the world is wonderful and that it feeds us human beings and feeds the animals. Take a moment to marvel at this wonderful world that we live in, both in its beauty and in the good things that it provides for us. What's your favourite food? God, by His creation, provides it for you, even though you probably have to prepare it and cook it; someone has farmed it for you, either in the UK or somewhere else. Harvest is the time to praise God as the Creator of everything and to say "thank you" to God for the food we eat, as well as recognising the contribution of our farmers as they bring food to our tables. Give thanks to God with a grateful heart.

But all is not well in our wonderful world. I'm going to tell you two stories, one from our own community and one from West Africa, the country of Burkina Faso. 80% of people in Burkina Faso depend on farming for their livelihood, but 1 in 10 people are facing hunger. Average rainfall has fallen year on year for the last 10 years; the rivers have started to dry up and trees and animals are disappearing. "We have nothing left... Climate change is the source of all our difficulties." Families are being pushed to the brink of survival. Loyara and Tiaho and their family live in one village and have struggled as the rains have dried up and the soil has become poor; the trees don't give good fruit anymore; both of them are disabled. But the local Church partnered with Tearfund has been training people to farm with better methods and that has made a difference to people like Loyara and Tiaho; raising chickens also gives money by selling the chickens and the eggs to add to their income.

Community for Food is a local group in Juniper Green and Currie, gathering food and providing a food-bank service to local families. Val Reid explains in the video what are the reasons why people in our communities, especially families, might need the services of a food bank. Changes in the benefit system, the end of the furlough scheme which might lead to higher unemployment, and the increase in fuel prices, all combine to make life hard for more and more families. That's true not just here, but right across the city; foodbanks need support to be able to help people in need and we have done that for years through Gorgie foodbank and you can continue to support Gorgie. There are people in our community who might have to choose this winter – “do I buy food, or do I turn on the heating?” but they may not be able to afford to do both! Families are referred to Community for Food by the local schools, so they need our support with either food or money to be able to help these families.

We have a wonderful world to celebrate, but it is a wonderful world gone wrong. What can we do? It is our God-given job to look after the wonderful world, to help it provide all that we need, and to do that in such a way that the world stays wonderful and will provide for generations to come. I love the last line in the Burkina Faso video: “If the world was to end tomorrow, I'd still plant a tree today!”

Reading: Luke 10:25-37 **Sandra Paulin**

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ 26 ‘What is written in the Law?’ he replied. ‘How do you read it?’ 27 He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” 28 ‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’ 29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’

30 In reply Jesus said: ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii[e] and gave them to the innkeeper. “Look after him,” he said, “and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.”

36 ‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ 37 The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’

I have a carrier bag; it is empty; so I can pick it up and carry it really easily. I have no problem at all in carrying this bag. What happens if I put a few things into my carrier bag? It becomes a little bit heavier, and it is a little bit more difficult to carry but I can still manage to carry my bag. But some people would struggle to carry this bag either because they're not as strong as me or because they have some kind of disability. What happens if I put a few more things into my carrier bag? It becomes even heavier so that now I can't carry it at all; I can shift it by dragging it along the carpet, but that's not going to help me much. It really is too heavy for me to carry. How can I move it? The way to move my heavy bag is to get help; someone else might come and take one handle while I carry the other; we share the load and so we can carry the bag together. Share the load!

Jesus told the story that we read as a way of challenging one man to consider sharing the load in his world. He came asking Jesus what was important in life: Jesus said “Love God; love your neighbour!” The man wanted to prove that he was doing that in the right way so he asked “who is my neighbour?”

and Jesus told the story. Someone who visited that road said that “a more hot and heavy way is impossible to conceive”; the bare rocks are just ideal for thieves and robbers to hide and attack people as they pass. That’s what happened in Jesus’ story: a man is attacked and left half-dead in the middle of the road. Two people come past, a priest and another religious leader, but they walk past without stopping. The third man who comes along is part of a group of people the Jews hated, the Samaritans, their sworn enemy, but the Samaritan stops and goes to help the man; he bandages his wounds, gives him some water to drink, lifts him onto his donkey and takes him to a safe place where he can be cared for. “Who was a neighbour to this man? Who shared his load?” The man asking all the questions could not help but answer “The one who helped him!”

We only begin to understand the force of this parable when we see it in the light of the hatreds that happen in our world today. Take the racism that happens in America, for example. White people have been brought up for generations to regard black people as inferior, intellectually, morally, even simply as human beings; it is part of their way of thinking that black people are less than white people; they are not just different, they are almost lower than human beings! Or look at the sectarianism that blights Scotland; it is not just about two groups of people who happen to support different football teams; people have been brought up for generations to hate the people from the other corner of society and to consider them the enemy. Take the football teams away and the sectarianism will still exist, the hatred will still live in the hearts and minds of those into whom it has been instilled for generations.

Jesus challenges the man to think differently. Up to this point, his neighbour had been his friends and other people like him; he was a Jew, so his neighbour had been Jews in need! The Samaritan has been his enemy from the day he was born; it is instilled in him as he grew up. Jesus’ parable is designed to make him think differently and to see that his neighbour was anyone in need, no matter who they were; even his sworn enemy could be his neighbour whom he should love and care for! “To whom am I a neighbour?” We can’t care for everyone in need across the world; that is too much for us. But there are opportunities for us to care for people in need. Which of these opportunities will we take? It is possible for us to care for people that we like, or people who are like us. Jesus wants us to think beyond that; everyone in need is our neighbour, whether these are families whose children go to Juniper Green school, or people that we’ve never met in a country far, far away, whose name we’re not even sure that we can pronounce!

People carry all sorts of loads! Some people are poor, like Thiao and Loyara in Burkina Faso, and their poverty means they go hungry and thirsty and their children can’t go to school. Being poor also means that people are ashamed because they can’t manage for themselves: lots of people in Edinburgh felt ashamed when they first had to go to a foodbank for food because till then they had always managed to have enough. Some people are afraid and their fears make them really anxious: fuel prices are going up and some are afraid that they won’t be able to afford gas or electricity over the winter. For some people, the load they carry is different: it might be memories of things in the past, good things that to remember make them sad, bad things to remember make them ashamed and guilty; for others their load is all about broken relationships, family life fallen apart and that hurts; for some the load they carry is grief because someone they love has died.

How can we share the load? I’ll give you details in the e-mail that comes out with the service recording, of how you can help Community for Food and local families by giving food or money to the local foodbank; you can share the load for these families by helping them with food over the winter. Other foodbanks are available and will help other people in exactly the same way. £38 given to Tearfund will

provide one woman with the materials and training needed to start her own sustainable poultry farm to help feed her family and earn an income. We can speak up for the poor of the world, to whom no-one listens, when they are poor because of the rich countries making climate change worse and do what we can to care for the planet. We're not very good at doing that but it is a vital part of sharing the load for the future, that we campaign for a better future for the planet and for those who are suffering most. We can pray for people in need and ask God to bring them grace and mercy; we can care for people whom we know to be having a hard time, carrying a heavy load and maybe by our care and prayers, we can share the load.

The Bible looks at sharing the load in two ways. First of all there is a challenge and a warning from the book of Proverbs: *"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act."* (Proverbs 3:27) Doing nothing is not an option. But then, there is a challenge and an inspiration. Jesus said: *"A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (John 13:34,35) Jesus has loved us; we give thanks for His love by loving other people and by being inspired to share their load. For whom can you share the load this week?

Prayers:

Thanks for those who share the load, for Tearfund and their partners in places like Burkina Faso and the difference they are making to communities and farmers; for Community for Food in Juniper Green and Currie and for Foodbanks run by the Trussell Trust and the Salvation Army, providing a lifeline for people in our communities; for those who have shared our load at times when we've needed help and support.

Pray for our neighbours: for people we know and love and for the people we've never met; for the people across the street and for people on the other side of the world; for the people who look and sound like us and for people who couldn't be more different; for everyone who is struggling, for everyone who is being marginalised and oppressed. Help us to be good neighbours, to look outward instead of inward, to be more and more like Jesus.

Pray for people like Loyara and Tiaho in their village in Burkina Faso; help them when they struggle to find enough food, when rain doesn't come and the ground dries up; provide for them by the help of their neighbours; let the church share the load. People in our community who will struggle over the winter to have enough food, who will depend on the foodbanks; people who will have to choose between food and heating. Lord, provide for them; help us to share the load for them, if we can. If we are these people in need, let someone else help us.

Thank You for those who farm the land and produce food. Pray for the farming community across the UK and the pressures they are under, financial, business, weather, crops, markets. Let us not take them for granted but support them as best we can; governments make good and wise decisions that will be for the good of us all.

Pray for people we know: those who mourn, for those who are frightened and anxious, for those who are sick and in hospital, for those who are feeling shut in, weary and lost and alone;... Lord Jesus, walk with the people for whom we pray today.

In the quietness, pray for people whose names are on your heart...