**Sunday 20th September 2020**

**Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership Harvest Service**

**Service led by: Revd Richard Bradley**

*(you will need a pen and paper in the service today)*

*(Today this service is available online and I am also leading it in Church too)*

**Opening words**

Welcome to worship! (*If in Church: Welcome back to worship in Church on this Harvest Sunday!)*

Wherever you are, whether you are alone or with others, however you feel, whether reading the script of the service or watching the recording (or taking part in church) you are welcome here in this act of worship.

Some words from the Bible:

From the Old Testament: 1 Chronicles 16:34 - **“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever.”** (NLT)

From the New Testament: Hebrews 13:15 – **“15 Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name. 16 And don’t forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.”** (NLT)

**Opening hymn/song: For the fruits of his creation**

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| 1.. For the fruits of His creation,  thanks be to God.  For His gifts to every nation,  thanks be to God!  For the ploughing, sowing, reaping,  silent growth while we are sleeping; future needs in earth's safe keeping,  thank be to God. | 2.. In the just reward of labour,  God's will is done;  in the help we give our neighbour,  God's will is done;  in our world-wide task of caring  for the hungry and despairing;  in the harvests we are sharing,  God's will is done. |
| 3..For the harvest of the Spirit,  thanks be to God.  For the good we all inherit,  thanks be to God!  For the wonders that astound us,  for the truths that still confound us;  most of all, that love has found us,  thanks be to God. | Fred Pratt Green  ©1970 Stainer & Bell Ltd.  Ccli 169737  Streaming Licence 595811 |

**Introduction**

I know for some churches in the Missional Partnership their Harvest Service may still be to come, if that is you then you might, if your building is open for worship, end up having 2 harvest services! But we can never tire of giving thanks to God for all that He provides and does for us.

*(If you have food for the Rochdale Foodbank please place it at the table at the back of church before you leave today. Please leave it in the bag you have brought it in if at all possible. If you cannot get to church and are watching this or reading the script please phone Richard and he can arrange for your gifts to be picked up.)*

At this point before we come to God in prayer I want to invite you to get your pen and paper (if you haven’t got one please pause me and go and get one…)

I want you to think of things that you are thankful for (things not at this point people) and write them on your piece of paper. I am going to give you a moment or two to write those things down…

[if in church then simply ask people to think in their mind of things, they are thankful for….]

I have written things like…. A home, warmth, food, drink, money, holidays, creation…..and that list could go on….you might have some/all of these things and more….

Let us come to God with our prayers of thanksgiving, praise and confession…

**Time of prayer**

Loving God, who loves each one of us who are taking part in this act of worship today. We come on this Harvest Sunday and give thanks to you for your goodness towards us. We thank you for those things that we do often take for granted – for food, warmth, drink, holidays, money in the bank and creation. In a moment of stillness, Lord, we add to that list things we might have written on our pieces of paper…..(moment of quiet)…..we give you thanks for all these things and more.

Our only response to your goodness and for what you give us is to offer you the worship and praise that you deserve. And so we come to give to you our praise and thanks. We come also to receive through our worship today. As we reflect on the words of God in the Bible may our hearts be warmed and may we follow you more closely.

But, Lord, we are frail and weak. We do wrong in some of our thoughts…in some of our actions and in some of our words. We hurt others, ourselves and you when we fall short of what you expect of your followers. So, Lord, we come ands say sorry. Sorry for the times when we have:

\*done something when we shouldn’t have or when we have not acted when we should have done.

\*spoken words that have caused hurt to others and ourselves and for those times when we have remained silent when we should have spoken.

\*thought things that have not been good.

Help us through our relationship with you to become more like Jesus in who we are and how we live. And it is though his precious name that we offer these prayers. Amen.

(the things you have written on your papers…keep that with you and use it in your times of prayer at home as we continue to give thanks to God for all He does for us.)

**Family address – “thankfulness”:**

Today is about thanksgiving. And I have got some words of people (groups or individuals) who I am very thankful for and I am sure you are too. The words have got missing letters though….so I need help working out what they are….I hope you can help me…..

Don’t forget they are people we are thankful for…. The words will appear on the screen….

1. F \_ m \_ \_ y 2) C \_ u \_ \_ \_ 3) \_ o \_ 4) \_ r \_ \_ n \_ \_ 5) \_ \_ s \_ \_

Thank you for your help! Without you I could not have done it….

Let us think for a moment about the five words we have put together and need to thank God for…

**Family – Church – God - Friends - Jesus**

Let us pray as we give thanks to God….

Heavenly Father, we thank you for family, friends and Church family for all we do with each one of these groups of people. We thank you that we have them in our lives.

And most importantly we thank you for Jesus. For his giving his life that we might be able to have everlasting life with God all because of the price Jesus paid on the cross.

And we thank you for being you, God. For creating us in your image. For your love that can never, ever fade or disappear. We thank you on this Harvest Sunday. Amen.

**Song: Give thanks to the Lord our God and king (sung v1, v2, chorus, v3, chorus)***(the singers will sing a verse and chorus through first and then we will all join in)*

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| 1..Give thanks to the Lord, Our God and King,  His love endures for ever.  For He is good, He is above all things:  His love endures for ever  Sing praise, sing praise. | 2..With a mighty hand and outstretched arm:  His love endures forever  For the life that's been reborn:  His love endures forever.  Sing praise, sing praise.  Sing praise, sing praise. |
| Chorus: *Forever God is faithful,*  *forever God is strong.*  *Forever God is with us*  *for ever, for ever.* | 3.. From the rising to the setting sun:  His love endures forever.  By the grace of God we will carry on:  His love endures forever  Sing praise, sing praise.  Sing praise, sing praise. |
| Chorus: *Forever God is faithful,*  *forever God is strong.*  *Forever God is with us*  *for ever, for ever.* | Chris Tomlin  ©worshiphimtogether.com songs/sixsteps Music/Capitol CMG Publishing/Integritymusic.com  ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 |

Let us pray…Lord, as we hear your word read and preached, may all our hearts be opened to your words to us today and may you word be opened to hearts. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Bible Reading: Matthew 13:24-33 – The Parable of the Weeds and The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast**

***The parable of the weeds***

24 Jesus told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

27 ‘The owner’s servants came to him and said, “Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?” 28 ‘“An enemy did this,” he replied. ‘The servants asked him, “Do you want us to go and pull them up?”

29 ‘“No,” he answered, “because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”’

***The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast***

31 He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.’

33 He told them still another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.’

Thanks be to God for His Word

**Reflecting on God’s Word**

*I am not really green fingered! I am in no way a gardening expert. In our house Ruth plants and weeds and I cut the grass and occasionally jet wash the paths in the manse garden. I am not always good at telling a weed from a plant. To the point that one spring time I pulled up several little “weeds.” Ruth came home and said, “what have you done with those…” (whatever they were!) Ruth now tells me when she plants something, so I don’t pull it up!*

*And it is not just small things I struggle with…I sometimes (stress on the sometimes!) look at larger plants and think, “is that a weed or a plant?” In my defence some of them do look colourful!*

I thought about that as I read the Bible reading from Matthew 13 this morning. The farmer has scattered good seed (wheat) on his land and when everyone was sleeping the enemy came and scattered weeds among the good seed. For a time the servants probably didn’t notice it was only when the seedlings came through that they noticed something didn’t look right!

Commentators suggest that the weeds were “darnel” which looks very much like wheat the only way you can tell the difference is when the plants are fully grown and the head is on the corn…at that point you can tell:

\*the wheat from the weeds.

\*The good seed from the bad seed.

\*The nutritious from that which can only be discarded.

The servants asked if the master wanted them pulling up and the response was “no”. Not at that point because they may end up pulling up the wheat as it looked so like the weeds until it grew more mature and the distinction could easily be made. The roots of both entangle around each other and it is hard to pull up the bad without also affecting the good seed/plants.

Harvest is such an important time of year in the farming world. *I recall holidays we had as a family when growing up on working farms! I loved those holidays in Wales. My Mum and Dad hardly saw me some days as I was up early to help the farmer milk the cow by hand! I am just glad we weren’t depending on the milk I got from the cow whose milk was used for breakfast! I could never get the hang of milking a cow by hand!*

*I do recall however going along with them to bring in the straw bales from the fields so they could store them in huge barns for the winter months! I remember huge machines that would wrap the bales to keep them dry and another tractor that would come along and pick a bale up and put it on a trailer.*

It was/is so important that the storage was done properly else the straw would I presume rot and be of no use at all. It would only be useful for being thrown away.

Likewise, in the Bible reading today there is sense of “keeping” and “discarding”. What was/is kept is that which is planted and cared for by the farmer (and his servants) and that which appears that is not of the farmer (planted by the enemy) is gathered and burned.

In the Bible “Harvest” is often a metaphor for the final judgement (at the end of time). Understanding this reading is important…it is not about bad and good seed in the church…but bad and good seed in the world.

For in the world believers in Christ live alongside those who don’t believe in Christ.

People who do good live alongside those who do not do good.

And as difficult a concept as judgement might be….the Bible is clear that there will be judgement at the end of time. When the wheat of belief and trust in Jesus will be separated from the weeds of unbelief and trust in Jesus.

But I don’t think it is an accident that immediately after verses 24-30 (“The Parable of the Weeds”) comes “The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast”.

Which speaks to listeners so clearly about how faith as small as a mustard seed can grow into something that is larger and mature. The Mustard seed doesn’t grow into the largest of trees…but I think the point is that the mustard seed was, then, the smallest seed a farmer would scatter!

So, when it comes to faith and trust in Jesus, Jesus can bring about a huge change/transformation in us even though our faith can be as small as a mustard seed.

Or, for those, whose skill is in the kitchen not the garden Jesus uses another Parable about Yeast…and how, again, seeds that are so small have a huge affect on the dough as it allows the bread to rise and become a loaf!

So, when the presence of Jesus comes into our lives and we allow him to work in us and through us by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we can and will see a huge transformation in our lives.

But for that seed to take affect and to grow we need to ask Jesus to plant in us, we need to ask Jesus to come into our lives….it is only when that happens that we can and will see a transformation, it is then we will see the wheat grow…it is then that the mustard seed turns into a plant….and the yeast permeates the dough….each creating something bigger and stronger.

But it is vital we are rooted in Christ. That is why Church, Bible study and prayer are so important.

During lockdown we might feel as though we have been stored away in barns like the harvest. Wrapped up until we can return to Church and to life more generally. On the other hand some of us might have been back in churches across the Missional Partnership for a few weeks, others may be attending church for the first time today…others may not be returning to their church yet…others may be shielding because of frailty.

I hope and pray you will know and feel the comforting and strong arms of the one who plants and the one who harvests the crops. Whoever we are, wherever we are, as Christians we can, and must, make a difference in the world. At Harvest time we tend to give food to Foodbanks and other such organisations that help those who have little or nothing.

We can give financially to such organisations too in order that they can purchase food and other items for those who, for whatever reason, are struggling to feed themselves and their families.

So, friends, may we be bearers of the good seed…may we share our faith in practical ways and in sharing our stories so that others may come to faith in Jesus for in so doing we, with the power and presence of Jesus, can and will further the boundaries of God’s kingdom in this world.

Amen.

Let us take a few moments of quiet as we reflect on God’s Word to us today….and then I will lead us in prayer….

**Time of prayer**

Life giving God, we come before you in prayer. Quietening our hearts as we speak to you and listen to you. We pray that we would give more of our lives to you for in so doing we will be better placed to discern what is the wheat in our lives and our world and what are the weeds in our life and our world. In a moment of stillness ask God to reveal himself more powerfully in your life…..

Lord as we think in part about harvest today we give thanks for all that you give to us and do for us.

We give you thanks and pray for the NHS and all who are fighting the battle with Coronavirus. For medics treating people and scientists working on vaccines and medications to alleviate the suffering of Covid-19.

We pray for our politicians…often they get bad press but it is right that we lift them to you, Lord, and ask for your blessing on them and you wisdom to come into them. Give them wise advisors and may they all have the best interests of the country at heart in these difficult times of the pandemic and also the discussions on Brexit.

*In a moment of stillness we pray for our own MPs and Councillors….*

We give thanks and pray for those who work in the education sector. For all who work in schools who have never stopped working throughout lockdown. For the pressures they felt before the pandemic that have only been heightened since the pandemic.

*In a moment of stillness we think about local schools and those who we know working in schools…..*

We give thanks and pray for your Church, Lord, that seeks to be a light in the darkness of the pandemic. We pray that you, Lord, would bless churches and church leaders. May they continue to be places of refuge and strength.

*In a moment of stillness we think about our own church and those in our communities…..*

We pray for ourselves. For our needs and for our concerns. For those who we love and may be anxious about at this time.

*In a moment of stillness we pray for ourselves and our families and friends…..*

We offer all our prayers in and through the name of Jesus, Amen.

**Final Song: God whose love is everywhere**

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| 1.. God whose love is everywhere made our earth and all things fair, ever keeps them in His care; praise the God of love! He who hung the stars in space holds the spinning world in place;  praise the God of love! | 2.. Come with thankfulness to sing of the gifts the seasons bring, summer, winter, autumn, spring; praise the God of love!  He who gave us breath and birth gives us all the fruitful earth; praise the God of love! |
| 3.. Mark what love the Lord displayed, all our sins upon Him laid, by His blood our ransom paid; praise the God of love!  Circled by that scarlet band all the world is in His hand; praise the God of love! | 4.. See the sign of love appear, flame of glory, bright and clear, light for all the world is here; praise the God of love!  Gloom and darkness, get you gone! Christ the Light has shone; praise the God of love! |
| Timothy Dudley-Smith Oxford University Press ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 | |

**Blessing**

May God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be in us and with us this day and in the week that lies ahead. Amen.

Friends stay safe and May God go with you into the coming week.