

Worship for Harvest Festival Sunday (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

We gather for Harvest festival today, so I reach out to you in the name of Christ.

Take this as a digital hug.

Now national news is selective and temporary, and it is usually bad. Whilst news of Christ is universal, everlasting and concerns the love of God which brings us joy.

Let us have silence to let that drop into our hearts – whatever pain & trouble has hit us this week.

My name is Nigel Saxton and I choose this moment to thank all those who have made contributions for today's service to happen. They are Rev Barbara Greenwood, Rev David Greenwood, Jill Lloyd, Tim and Kat Pearson, and Rev Richard Wilde. Also many thanks to Kate Tennyson our circuit administrator.

If you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on swc.katetennyson@gmail.com

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

O God whose glory the heavens show, You came to us in Jesus. We now come together to join in giving You thanksgiving and praise. Let the perfume of your love envelop us – now and forever.

Amen.

Hymn: StF 100 – All things bright and beautiful

***All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
the Lord God made them all.***

- 1. Each little flower that opens,
each little bird that sings,
he made their glowing colours,
he made their tiny wings:**

***All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
the Lord God made them all.***

- 2. The purple heathered mountain,
the river running by,
the sunset, and the morning
that brightens up the sky:**

***All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
the Lord God made them all.***

- 3. The cold wind in the winter,
the pleasant summer sun,
the ripe fruits in the garden,
he made them every one:**

***All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
the Lord God made them all.***

- 4. He gave us eyes to see them,
and lips that we might tell
how great is God Almighty,
who has made all things well:**

***All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
the Lord God made them all.***

Prayer of approach

Father God, let the stars proclaim your power, let the moon bring You glory. As the seasons change we experience variety and contrasts. We pray earnestly for all humanity to have a proper heart posture which is to be aware of You. Only then will all humanity fully appreciate and care

for your creation.

Amen.

Prayer of adoration Psalm 65:1,5-13

*Refrain: **Be joyful in God, all the earth.***

¹Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion;
to you that answer prayer shall vows be paid.

Be joyful in God, all the earth

⁵In your strength you set fast the mountains
and are girded about with might.

⁶You still the raging of the seas,
the roaring of their waves
and the clamour of the peoples.

⁷Those who dwell at the ends of the earth
tremble at your marvels;
the gates of the morning and evening sing your
praise.

Be joyful in God, all the earth

⁸You visit the earth and water it;
you make it very plenteous.

⁹The river of God is full of water;
you prepare grain for your people,
for so you provide for the earth.

Be joyful in God, all the earth

¹⁰You drench the furrows and smooth out the
ridges;
you soften the ground with showers and bless its
increase.

¹¹You crown the year with your goodness,
and your paths overflow with plenty.

¹²May the pastures of the wilderness flow with
goodness
and the hills be girded with joy.

¹³May the meadows be clothed with flocks of
sheep
and the valleys stand so thick with corn
that they shall laugh and sing.

Be joyful in God, all the earth.

Prayer of confession

Loving God, all around Your creation shows us
marvels of growth and change.

A caterpillar metamorphoses into a butterfly or
moth. An acorn becomes a massive tree.

Your word encourages us also to be 'transformed
by the renewing of our minds.'

We ask that we see ourselves and others as You
see us.

Forgive us the times when our 'old self' resists
the prompting of your Spirit, or when we choose
to block the possibilities of improvement.

We know that when we repent from our hearts –
we are forgiven.

Give us such a deep assurance of our forgiveness
that we can work with You to transform your
world.

Amen.

Hymn: Waymaker - Michael W Smith

**1. You are here, moving in our midst
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, working in this place
I worship You, I worship You**

**[Chorus] (You are)
Way maker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are
Way maker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are**

**2. You are here, touching every heart
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, turning lives around
I worship You, I worship You**

**[Chorus]
Way maker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are
Way maker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness**

**My God, that is who You are
That is who you are
(That is who you are)
That is who you are
That is who you are
That is who you are**

[Bridge]

**Even when I can't see that you're working
even when I don't feel that you're working
You never stop, never stop working
You never stop, you never stop working**

**Even when I can't see that you're working
even when I don't feel that you're working
You never stop, you never stop working
You never stop, you never stop working**

**Even when I can't see that you're working
even when I don't feel that you're working
You never stop, you never stop working
You never stop, you never stop.**

**Way maker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are
Way maker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are
That is who You are**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Genesis 8:15-22

(New International Version – UK)

¹⁵Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. ¹⁷Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you – the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground – so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.'

¹⁸So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds – everything that moves on land – came out of the ark, one kind after another.

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. ²¹The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: 'Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

²²As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.'

Epistle 1 Timothy 6:6-10

(New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised)

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Gospel Matthew 6:25-33

(New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised)

Do Not Worry

²⁵Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or

about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Sermon

Part 1

Welcome friends! – Welcome to Jezreel. Pull up a chair, I was about to have a drink, to drink a toast to my friend Naboth. It was seven days since his funeral, a good and Godly man. This is the last, the very finest of the wine I’ll ever get. It came from his vineyard, so join me in just a moment.

Oh troubled days they are indeed! The town’s up in arms, you come here at a very difficult time. You see Naboth was a good man, very well regarded and a Godly man. A man of integrity and a man of faith – highly regard and highly respected. Well his vineyard is right down by the palace – next to it – and then one day, just a couple of weeks ago, the king came down to him “Naboth, my man, come here a moment, I want a word..”

“Yes, your majesty”, he said.

“Now Naboth, I’ve been looking and thinking, and I want to buy your vineyard”.

“But it’s not for sale, majesty”.

“Oh but I want it; I want it to turn it into a vegetable garden, so we’ve got some good, fresh vegetables for the banquets – you know we like to entertain at the palace, and we’d like it. I can find you a vineyard somewhere else, I’m sure, or .. I’ll buy it from you at a fair and reasonable price you understand”.

And Naboth said, “But it’s not for sale, you see, I own this vineyard, but, well, I look after it – it was given to me by my ancestors. I don’t know how many generations have been here, your majesty, and it’s my responsibility to take care of it and pass it on to the next generation and the generations beyond that. I’m sorry, it just is not for sale, and I’m not going to move”.

Well with that the king went back to his palace, he went into his room and he shut himself away. It wasn’t till suppertime when the queen began to wonder where he was – that’s Queen Jezebel – that she went to his room, and said, “What’s the matter with you? Why haven’t you come down to supper?”

And he said, “I’m unhappy! I asked Naboth if I could have his vineyard, and he’s turned me down – refused to part with it”.

“Oh!” she said, “is that all? Let me sort it out. Get dressed, go down, have your supper”.

Now in case you don’t know, King Ahab, well he’s, he lives under the thumb of his wife, Jezebel, and she’s a foreigner. Now don’t get me wrong, I welcome foreigners, that’s not the point. The point is, that she brought into the palace, the idols and the religions of where she came from. And he’s fully bought into it all, so although he goes around saying he follows the Law, and he listens to the prophets, the truth is

far removed from that. You go round his palace and there you will find idols – idols made out of wood, idols made out of stone, even, closest to him, idols made out of bone. And the Lord has no time for bone idol worshippers.

So, she decided she'd sort it out for him, she sent out letters to the great and to the good, inviting them for a time of fasting followed by a celebration and feasting. And they were glad to respond and say they'd come. But she'd laid further plans. She invited two scoundrels, who she bribed to give false testimony against Naboth. But just at a critical moment in all the proceedings, when it was quiet, one of them called out, "But your majesty, this man here, he's a sinner, and he cursed you and he cursed the Lord your God". And the other witness said, "Yes, and I heard it too".

And according to our law, two witnesses are sufficient to find someone guilty. And so there he was, poor man, tried and found guilty and sentenced, dragged out straight away, outside the palace and down to his own vineyard, where as a blasphemer he was stoned to death.

He was a good man, and a Godly man, and he took care well of that vineyard.

May God rest his soul in peace and bring to justice his murderers. Good health.

Hymn: StF 258 – You are the Vine

***You are the Vine,
we are the branches,
keep us abiding in you.***

***You are the Vine,
we are the branches,
keep us abiding in you.***

**Then we'll grow in your love,
and we'll go in you name,
that the world will surely know
that you have power to heal and to save.**

***You are the Vine,
we are the branches,
keep us abiding in you.
You are the Vine,
we are the branches,
keep us abiding in you.***

Part 2

A lot has changed during my life. Growing up on a farm in the late 50's and into the 60's mechanisation, agro-chemicals, growth in population, changing diet and air-freighted fresh food. The sort of combine working in my childhood would take all day to harvest five or six acres, a modern combine will do that in an hour! My grandfather who died in 1962 would be amazed at the yields and pace of modern farming. My mother, Violet Walton was born on his farm in Tysoe parish 100 years ago today. In her childhood weather forecasting was a glance at the barometer, a look at the sky, observation of animal behaviour and a few moments pondering.

Much has changed in food production but the principles are constant: Cultivating, planting, tending, reaping, storing and marketing. The Bible has many stories and metaphors drawn particularly from sheep, grapes and wheat. We might have advanced scientifically and technologically but selfishness, laziness, thoughtlessness, greed and exploitation are timeless as are disputes over land and boundaries, poor governance, and insufficient thought for the impact of cultivation on the environment. That is why I began this message with the greed of Ahab and the injustice done to Naboth three millennia ago. (1 Kings 21) In the Northern hemisphere the disconnect between food producers and the majority population has widened. In recent years there has been more thought about the environment and those who might be exploited by mass food production so

an increasing number of consumers do pause and think about what they are buying and are willing to pay a little more if they believe it will make a difference. And make a difference we must! Our climate is changing and human activity including agriculture is a contributor.

What worries me and the farmers I listen to as I mingle among them at Stratford Market is that too many people think simple solutions will solve the problem when the reality is far more complex. Changes of diet, changes in production and distribution policies have unintended consequences and too often well-intentioned choices are based on inadequate information. As a Christian I believe God the Creator entrusted this planet to us to live on and pass on to future generations ideally better than we found it. There have been good initiatives in recent years which we welcome though many countries are a long way behind. However many have unintended consequences and some are based on questionable science. Some examples from this country:

Bees and flying insects. A worrying decline. Some say it's agrochemicals to blame.

I was directly involved arable farming in mid 1970's to early 80's. In those days we were growing wheat, barley and rape spraying fertiliser and weed killer in October. In March a contractor added nitrogen flying it on by plane. Late spring we added more fertiliser and sprayed weed killer, some years twice. Selling wheat for around £100 per tonne it justified the input costs. Wheat price today (40 years later) is around £130 per tonne. Consequently much lower amounts of fertiliser and chemicals are applied per hectare.

During that same period consumers (mostly for good reason but too often based on unverified 'On Line' info) have moved away from grass reared beef and lamb favouring cereal fed chicken and pork. (or gone vegetarian). There

has also been a big shift away from dairy beginning in 1970's. A recent fad is for "plant based diet" Result – huge reduction in traditional pasture in favour of oil crops (mainly rape) and cereals. That pasture was prime habitat for flying insects.

Another example of unintended consequences: In scientific trials it was found that large doses of nicotinoids were harmful to bees and banned by the EU in 2018 where it was used primarily as a seed dressing for oilseed rape. Note I said seed dressing buried underground. It made the sap toxic to insect larvae in young plants a favourite place for the flea beetle to lay her eggs. There is now no effective control for the flea beetle so oilseed rape yields have plummeted. The yellow fields we have got used to seeing were a huge source of pollen for bees and other insects will be drastically reduced in 2021. Our food oil imports will rise.

One last one. Some are suggesting that if only we all became vegans it would remove methane and nitrogen emissions from livestock farming. Apart from the questionable science that belief is based on, the advocates are not counting in the food miles sourcing alternative protein, non-dairy milk and nutritional supplements. A current TV advert for food supplements boasts that they go to the far ends of the earth for their pills!

I could go on! There are many more examples of unintended consequences for the environment of well intentioned actions. However this is a harvest sermon not a farming lecture. It's just that I believe Christ calls us to think through the consequences for nature of our choices and set an example to others. Question simple solutions to complex problems. Think about food miles, Fair trading, packaging and processing, and your use of water. Still people brush their teeth while the tap runs and leave the hose pipe on while they wash the car. - I think it was Christian Aid

who promoted the slogan “live simply that others might simple live”.

Pray for farmers in these uncertain times – on the front line because of climate change (this year’s cereal yields are well below average due to very wet autumn then driest spring on record). Unable to make investment decisions due to post EU referendum uncertainties. For years subsidies have favoured the environment and less intensive farming. Will that change? What trade terms will be agreed? (no deal would mean a hefty tariff on lamb meat exported to EU who buy most of our production; while pig farmers would love that same tariff on Danish and Dutch bacon!) Fruit and veg growers are struggling to get pruners and pickers. COVID impact - Dairy farmers contracted to supply hospitality industry saw 30% cut in price of milk while those supplying supermarkets had no change in price. Pray too for the whole food supply chain particularly the front line grocery and food staff who are low paid, many on minimum wage and zero or part time hours. They worked all through the crisis often facing abuse and confrontation about face coverings, rationing and shortages. Next time you shop, say a special thank you to the woman or man who serves you.

In all things, especially at harvest, give thanks to God our Provider. Please use our Prayer Handbook, this year titled “The Earth is the Lord’s”. Oh, just to finish the narrative about Naboth – King Ahab had an unwelcome visit from Elijah who didn’t mince his words! Ahab repented, at least for a while.....

Hymn: StF 123 – Come you thankful people come

- 1. Come, you thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home!
Fruit and crops are gathered in
safe before the storms begin:
God our maker will provide
for our needs to be supplied;**

**come, with all his people, come,
raise the song of harvest home!**

- 2. All the world is God’s own field,
harvests for his praise to yield;
wheat and weeds together sown
here for 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 may be.**
- 3. Lord our God shall come
and shall bring his harvest home;
he himself on that great day,
worthless things shall take away,
give his angels charge at last
in the fire the weeds to cast,
but the fruitful ears to store
in his care for evermore.**
- 4. Even so, Lord, quickly come –
bring your final harvest home!
Gather all your people in
free from sorrow, free from sin,
there together purified,
ever thankful at your side –
come, with all you angels, come
bring that glorious harvest home!**

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

Loving Lord
Eternal God

We thank you for all of your blessings,
For the wonders of this planet,
The joy of the turning seasons,
The bounty of the land, sea and air.

For all your gifts

We give you thanks and praise.

We thank you for grain, and fruit,
for livestock and game,
For farmer, labourer

Fisher and hunter.

For all your gifts

We give you thanks and praise.

We thank you for all of this
strange year's harvest.

A year when night following day
has sometimes seemed the only certainty.

For all your gifts

We give you thanks and praise.

We thank you for community
In the face of isolation,
For faith
In the face of fear.

For all your gifts

We give you thanks and praise.

Almighty God

We thank you for your eternal love and mercy,
Your boundless generosity,
Your infinite grace.

For all your gifts

We give you thanks and praise.

Amen

Prayers of intercession

Loving Lord
Eternal God

As we count our blessings,
Give thanks and praise for our abundance,
We remember those
whose crops have failed.

Bountiful God

Teach us to share.

We pray for those facing drought,
Victims of natural disaster,
Our changing climate,
Our damaged planet.

Bountiful God

Teach us to share.

We remember those whose land
Is torn and wrecked by war,
Fields sown with mines

Not seed.

Bountiful God

Teach us to share.

We pray for those whose land
Is devastated by greed.
Vegetation stripped,
Ecosystems laid waste.

Bountiful God

Teach us to share.

Fill us with your purpose Lord,
To share your bounty,
To fight for peace,
To protect your planet.

Bountiful God

Teach us to share.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

We say 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 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

The Offering & prayer

Almighty God

Accept the gifts we offer:

Our money,

Our time,

Our talents,

Our frailties.

Use them to your purpose

To build your kingdom.

We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 46 – Everlasting God

1. Everlasting God
the years go by but you're unchanging.
In this fragile world,
you are the only firm foundation.
Always loving, always true,
always merciful and good, so good.

Yesterday, today and forever,
you are the same, you never change.
Yesterday, today and forever,
you are faithful and we will trust in you.

2. Uncreated One,
you have no end and no beginning.
Earthly powers fade,
but there is no end to you kingdom.
Always loving, always true,
Always merciful and good, so good.

Yesterday, today and forever,
you are the same, you never change.
Yesterday, today and forever,
you are faithful and we will trust in you.

Yahweh, God unchanging.
Yahweh, firm foundation.
You are Yahweh, God unchanging.
Yahweh, firm foundation.

Yesterday, today and forever,
you are the same, you never change.
Yesterday, today and forever,
you are faithful and we will trust in you.

Prayer & blessing

²⁴May the Lord bless you
and protect you.

²⁵May the Lord smile on you
and be gracious to you.

²⁶May the Lord show you his favour
and give you his peace.'

We go into the world
To walk in God's light
To rejoice in God's love
And to reflect God's glory.

Amen