

Harvest 2020 – Online Circuit Service, Oct 4, 2020

All things bright and beautiful – StF 100

For the fruits of all creation – StF 124ii

God in his love for us – StF 727 (tune: WAS LEBET -- StF 34)

Lost Words Blessing

Genesis 2:4b-7, 15

==ORDER OF SERVICE==

Pre-service: **Photos of previous Harvest services around the circuit...**

Welcome – BBP

**All things bright and beautiful – StF 100**

**Invocation – PH 35 – Richard Andrew, Darlington district**

Gardening meditation -- BBP

**Genesis 2:4b-7, 15**

**Garden prayer – PH69 – Marjorie Wilson, Heald Green MC,**

Sharing meditation -- BBP

**Foodbank collection photos...**

**For the fruits of all creation – StF 124ii**

Confessions meditation -- BBP

**Psalm 8 – PH 21 – Paul Martin, Bolton and Rochdale District**

**(PH 6) Hilary Jefferies, worship leader, Stockland Green MC, Bham**

**(PH 3) Skye, pupil, Lorenden Prep School, Faversham**

**(PH 57) Thomas McKnight, Pres, MC in Ireland**

Action meditation -- BBP

**Climate change cartoon – COVID-19 was just a first wave of the tsunami!**

**God in his love for us – StF 727 (tune: WAS LEBET -- StF 34)**

*Intercessions -- Ways we intend to 'intercede' for the earth with our actions...*

Chief Seattle – all things are connected

**Lost words blessing**

Welcome – Circuit Harvest – celebrating the gifts God has given us –  
Recognizing our role, not just in ‘bringing in the harvest’  
But in ensuring that the harvest can continue –  
For us and all God’s creatures

*Psalm 24:1 -- The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.*

### All things bright and beautiful – StF 100

Photos of previous Harvest services around the circuit...

### Invocation – PH 35 – Richard Andrew, Darlington district

Come, Creator Spirit, breathe on us now.  
As we ponder the deep mysteries of existence  
and the delicate ecology of our planet,  
Help us to delight in all that you have made.  
As we remember the fragility of all life,  
Disturb us in our complacency  
And open the doors of our hearts  
to a deep desire for the integrity of your creation.  
As we seek the new heavens and the new earth  
help us to place ourselves, body, mind and soul, in your hands  
that with all our strength we may serve you and seek the renewal of creation.  
Come, Creator Spirit, breathe on us now. Amen.

### Gardening intro –

For many years I’ve pondered on the fact  
that though very few of us are actually farmworkers,  
Harvest is still an important celebration in our church calendar –  
Gradually we had lost the direct relationship with the soil  
As even most of the fruits and vegs gathered for our church displays  
Were purchased at the supermarket!  
There were a few notable exceptions – but they were the exceptions...

Some of that has changed a bit during lockdown –  
When we found, back in early spring, that we had extra time on our hands  
And it wasn’t as easy to get to the supermarket  
And when we wandered out to our gardens,  
We realized it really was a place of solace,  
Of reconnecting – body, mind, spirit – with the natural world –  
Some of us rediscovered it was easier to pray in our gardens ...  
And those of us who didn’t have gardens, still found ourselves planting things indoors  
Just to see what would happen...  
What we have re-discovered is the joy of co-creating,  
Of cooperating with God and nature,  
Of feeling the power of creation close up,  
Of watching growth take place in the midst of dirt and water...  
And it has given us a sense of hope in the midst of our own messy lives...

We hear a well-known reading from the second chapter of Genesis  
That reminds us that growing and planting and harvesting  
is an integral part of who we are as God's creation...

Genesis 2:4b-7, 15

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,  
when no plant of the field was yet in the earth  
and no herb of the field had yet sprung up –  
for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth,  
and there was no one to till the ground;  
But a stream would rise from the earth,  
and water the whole face of the ground –  
Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,  
And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life  
and the man became a living being....  
The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden  
to till it and keep it.

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Our job: to till and 'keep' the land so that the harvest can come...

**Garden prayer – PH69 – Marjorie Wilson, Heald Green MC,**  
Bramhall and Wythenshawe Circuit, Nottingham and Derby

Living Lord, bless all gardeners,  
those who make havens for birds, insects and animals outside their own door;  
Those who create colourful and inclusive places in cities  
where young, old and lonely people can meet together;  
Those who work with differently abled people  
giving them skills and confidence  
through growing flowers, fruit and vegetables;  
Those who plant gardens in refugee camps  
to bring life and food to people with little hope.  
We give thanks that you created us in a garden  
And gave us senses to glory in it. Amen.

To till and to 'keep' the land –  
And to harvest it and share it with all God's children.

Gandhi: "There's enough for everyone's need but not enough for anyone's greed"

Nearly every year during Harvest, we take up collections of tins and non-perishable goods  
To pass on to foodbanks and homeless shelters.

This year we're aware that the need is greater than ever!

But how to do our collections if we can't meet in person?

Several of our churches have found ways to do that...

We've collected a few photos of the collection efforts –

Perhaps your church has done this as well—

Or maybe you're planning to do it soon.

**Foodbank collection photos...**

For the fruits of all creation – StF 124ii

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Sadly, along with our power to till and keep and harvest and share –  
    To co-create good along with God,  
We also have the power to destroy, to neglect, to exploit,  
    – and that is what we're rapidly doing.  
As the prophet voices of our times are crying out –  
    David Attenborough and Greta Thonberg among them –  
We are destroying our planet's ability to sustain life –  
    Animal and insect species are becoming extinct in alarming numbers  
    Ice caps are melting, forest fires are raging,  
    Locusts and floods and droughts becoming rampant  
    Food sources – including the oceans – becoming depleted...  
As farmers have cleared more and more remote lands and forests,  
    We have come in contact with more wild animals –  
And we're learning that this contact is the most probable source  
    Of the pandemic disease we're all facing.  
    And that even when and if we get COVID-19 under control,  
    We can expect an average of 5 new diseases to appear each year --

It won't be our grandchildren who suffer after we're gone  
    We may all be gone – along with our grandchildren – very soon

If you're wondering why I'm bringing all this up during a Harvest service –  
    When we should all be happily singing and rejoicing about God's goodness  
The hard truth is that we may very well be coming to the end of Harvest celebrations –  
    Even an end of our planet being able to sustain humanity –  
That sounds rather over-dramatic! A truth we'd rather avoid –  
    But we avoid it at our own peril.  
Caring for the earth – as well as caring for each other --  
    Is part of the covenant that we have with God:  
    That God's care for us is contingent on our willingness to follow God's way.

In preparation for this service, I've 'harvested' several prayers and meditations  
    From this year's Prayer Handbook –  
    The prayers of Methodists around the UK,  
    who are recognizing that we've been as guilty as everyone else  
    in forgetting our responsibilities to care for God's earth.  
Rather than read these out myself, I've asked several of them to make recordings,  
    So you can hear their prayers yourself.  
    The writers of these prayers range from a District Chair to a Local Preacher  
    To a schoolgirl from Kent College to the President of the MC in Ireland.  
Perhaps listening to their voices can help us make our own prayers of confession...

We begin with a paraphrase of Psalm 8 as written by Rev Paul Martin,  
    Chair of the Bolton and Rochdale District,  
And continue with others who share their prayers with us:

Psalm 8 – PH 21 – Paul Martin, Bolton and Rochdale District

O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens  
But we have sullied your handiwork.  
Out of the mouths of the young come dire warnings.  
When we look at the heavens, the work of your fingers,  
We ignore our reckless conduct.  
What are human beings that you are mindful of them?  
We have made ourselves a little higher than the angels,  
Lauding it over creation with scant forethought.  
You have given us dominion over the works of your hands,  
which we have trampled underfoot.  
O Lord, our Sovereign, invite us back to Eden,  
To be proper stewards,  
so that we might be better with that which you called good. Amen.

**(PH 6) Hilary Jefferies, worship leader, Stockland Green MC, Bham**

Lord, I'm sorry for the things I have done  
And shouldn't have done,  
For the things I have said  
And now wish I hadn't,  
The things I thought and now regret.  
The damage has been done, the time has passed,  
And it's too late now to apologise.  
Thank you that I can turn to you and say, "Sorry",  
Knowing that you'll forgive me  
And I can start again  
In a new relationship with you. Amen.

**(PH 3) Skye, pupil, Lorenden Prep School, Faversham**

Dear Lord, we aren't caring for the world you've created,  
The world you've given us.  
Help us to realise we need to change.  
Help us to use the gifts you've blessed us with for good.  
Help us to stop damaging your world through our thoughtless actions.  
Bless those who open our eyes to the problems we've created:  
Pollution in our atmosphere,  
Plastic scattered in the ocean  
And animals on the verge of extinction.  
Please, Lord, give us the strength to change and to make good choice. Amen.

**(PH 57) Thomas McKnight, Pres, MC in Ireland**

Lord, your earth is changing – and we've learned it's our fault.  
Stewardship can be such a burden.  
Help us to grasp the responsibility you have given us,  
Help us to respect the resources with which you have blessed us,  
Help us to be the stewards you intend us to be.  
Help us the *think* change,  
Help us to *do* change,  
Before it's too late. Amen.

So, what can we do – what MUST we do – as co-gardeners with God?

The first part of any act of reconciliation is to recognise the situation and our part in it --  
And hopefully we have been doing that –

Even if only by listening to the prayers we have just heard

But listening is nothing if it's not followed up by actions –

“Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only!” is a verse I memorized as a child –

The Word in this case is that we must care for the earth!

**Climate change cartoon – COVID-19 was just a first wave of the tsunami!**

What we must DO is respond to climate change and the threat of mass extinction

With the same urgency as we responded to the pandemic...

Last autumn, I was also preaching on our need to recognise the situation at hand.

One of the hymns I chose is ‘God in his love for us lent us this planet’

Which we will be singing later in this service.

One of the young women at Larkfield came up to me afterwards with wide-eyed amazement:

“I was born in 1974, and this hymn about the urgent need to care for the earth

was written before I was born –

How long will it take us to wake up?!?”

How fast we are hurtling towards disaster,

And how slow we are to respond.

We've demonstrated what we can do when we understand the threat:

Vast amounts of the world's society and ‘production’ was closed down immediately

Those who haven't responded immediately have suffered more

Why aren't we responding in the same way to climate change?

With complete shutdown of much of the world's activities,

We reduced our consumption by 60% --

But much more than that is needed in order to stave off climate change

And now we seem to have collectively decided that the ‘economy’ is more ‘important’

Than our survival?!?!

Those jobs which really weren't *helping* the earth

Might need to die out themselves...

What about retraining the redundant labour force for environmentally friendly jobs?

The planet will survive.

At the rate we're going, humanity and ‘intelligent’ life will not –

What is so ‘intelligent’ about that?

Hildegard of Bingen:

“The high, the low, all of creation

God gives to humankind to use.

If this privilege is misused

God's justice permits creation to punish humanity.”

So, what must we do?

On a personal level, many of us have been conscientiously reviewing our daily life  
As I noted before, many of us are gardening more –

Not just flowers but food – good for us, good for the earth

No need to transport!

Many of us have reduced our use of plastics, especially single-use plastics

We've gone back to using bars of soap instead of gels in plastic bottles

To sourcing environmentally friendly paper goods, such as toilet rolls,

To walking and cycling instead of driving

To working at home and meeting by zoom instead of driving to our destinations...

In that way, the pandemic crisis has forced us to find alternate ways

Of doing our daily business in a more environmentally-friendly way...

Individual actions are important – never under-estimate the good your own actions can make

As Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop, has said:

“If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito.”

But even more impact can be made if we do this together –

Small groups of people can make an even bigger difference than individuals:

I read some geologists were examining satellite images of the earth

And realised that there was actually some significant green growth occurring

On the face of the earth – especially in India and China –

places which have not had favourable reputations for ecological concerns.

When the scientists looked more closely,

They realised they were seeing the results of community tree-planting

Done by small private grass-roots groups some 20 years ago.

Now coming to fruition.

A few weeks ago, I met up with the Circuit Property Stewards –

And we discussed our circuit's growing interest in Eco-Church/Eco-Circuit.

At first, we told ourselves there wasn't much we could do during the lock-down,

But then the ideas started flowing:

Banishing single-use plastic from our church kitchens

Better insulation in our buildings...

Bicycle racks instead of car parks....

Could our church lawns be allowed to go 'wild' or used for community gardens?

Then someone asked about putting solar panels on all church roofs...

Could that be a circuit project?

Someone else suggested wind turbines...

Of course, it was also mentioned that there was a big initial cost to this...

But the question is really: *is our reluctance to change actually costing the earth?*

Changing our churches can be an impetus to changing our individual lifestyles

What about solar panels on our individual houses?

Plastic-free bathrooms?

Continuing to leave our cars in the drive whenever possible –

Not getting back to 'normal'

This can be a most effective form of evangelism!

MWoL – looking and listening for God in scripture and in the world...

Caring for ourselves and those around us – including the ‘not harvest’

Caring for creation and all God’s gifts, challenging injustice

Speaking of God’s love and sharing our faith with others

Being a blessing within and beyond God’s Church for the transformation of the world.

**God in his love for us – StF 727 (tune: WAS LEBET -- StF 34)**

*Intercessions? Ways we intend to ‘intercede’ for the earth with our actions...*

Chief Seattle – all things are connected

Teach your children what we have taught our children:

that the earth is our mother.

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.

If men spit upon the ground they spit upon themselves.

This we know.

The earth does not belong to use; we belong to the earth.

This we know.

All things are connected like the blood which unites one family.

All things are connected.

We did not weave the web of life.

We are merely a strand in it.

Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves.

Lost words blessing

Enter the world with care, my love

And speak the things you see

Let new names take and root and thrive and grow

And even as you travel far from heather, crag and river

May you, like the little fisher, set the stream alight with glitter

May you enter now as otter without falter into water.

Look to the sky with care my love

And speak the things you see

Let new names take and root and thrive and grow

And even as you journey on past dying stars exploding

Like the gilded one in flight, leave your little gifts of light

And in the dead of night my darling, find the gleaming eye of starling

Like the little aviator, sign your heart to all dark matter

Walk through the world with care, my love,

And sing the things you see

Let new names take and root and thrive and grow

And even as you stumble through machair sands eroding

Let the fern unfurl your grieving, let the heron still your breathing

Let the selkie swim you deeper, oh my little silver-seeker,

Even as the hour grows bleaker, be the singer and the speaker

And in the city and in forest, let the larks become your chorus

And when every hope is gone, let the raven [spirit] call you home.

*Karine Polwart*