

Prelude: Prelude in F by Adolf Hesse

Words of welcome:

Today in our virtual service we are going to celebrate Harvest. The annual act of thanks for our harvest which feeds us is a very healthy reminder of the fact that God provides for our needs. This year, of course, we have not been able to bring our gifts of food to show our thankfulness, but later in the service I will share a way in which we can give so that our gratitude will help others who may find food and feeding difficult just now.

But first let's praise and thank God for his gifts in the harvest hymn

Hymn: We plough the fields and scatter

Prayer:

Lord God of the harvest, who made the world and set us in it, a world which reflects your bounty and beauty and care; we thank you today for your gift of harvest. We thank you for the harvest of our gardens: fruit and vegetables; we thank you for the harvest of our farms: in grain and vegetables and in the beasts that are the main crop in these parts; we thank you for the harvest of people far away who labour to grow crops which would be exotic here, and which make our meals so much more varied.

God of all creation, as we thank you for your goodness and generosity, so we pray that we would always value all your gifts; the gift of our daily bread, the gift of the world we live in, the gift of your love poured out in Jesus, your Son. May we walk in gratitude all our days, never taking your giving for granted.

And hear us as we pray as Jesus taught us, saying:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

In the course of this service we are going to read the whole of Psalm 104 in several segments. Our readers are Ron Gutteridge and Mary Ellen Thomson.

First reading: Psalm 104:1-13

This Psalm which we are going to use to frame our thanksgiving, is one which celebrates the created world, and God, its creator. This first section invites us to look out of our windows, and see the world around us as if for the first time.

Look at the light. In one way you can't look at light, but there again you can't look at anything without it, and we know that the quality of light is not the same from day to day, or in different periods of our days. You know the difference between morning light and evening light, between sunrise and sunset, and you would rarely confuse the two, even if you couldn't express how you know. You know what late afternoon light is compared with the light of late morning. Look at the light, enjoy its quality, and, says the Psalmist, think of the light as God's garment. God is in it, however it comes.

And then look at the sky. Look at it, from horizon to horizon. See how it stretches over us, changeable, but always there: stretched out like the roof of a tent. And think of the waters, restless, flowing, tidal, stormy: and remember that the liquidity of water is as a solid

foundation to God, who made them. Look at the world with God's eyes, is what we are being urged – at the winds – which you can only see by their effect, but which you can feel – at the solid boundaries of land and sea, and wonder why does the one stop and the other start just where they do. This first section of the Psalm is about God's act of creation and is a celebration of both the wildness and the order of the world. Wildness and order which shows us our God.

Second reading: Psalm 104:14-15

And now we come to the bit about harvest and God's provision for his people. And what a short section it is! Just the one sentence which tells of God giving grass for the beasts – and the word here is to do with farmed animals: God is being thanked for providing food for the animals that also feed us – with their by-products, such as milk and cheese and eggs – and with their very flesh. And then that one sentence mentions plants that we use, the food that is essential to us – and also wine and oil to bring joy and variety to our days. God is being thanked not only for necessities – the “give us this day our daily bread” food – but also for luxuries and the colour and joy that they give. Since God has made us with the need to eat and sustain our lives by putting food into our mouths, surely we should also thank God for making so many foods taste good, so that eating is not a chore but a delight. (Of course this can also lead us to abusing God's gift in greed, but just because the joy of eating can be abused does not mean that we shouldn't give thanks for it.)

And this brings me to our harvest giving. In Laggan and Newtonmore for the past three years we have taken our gifts of harvest produce to Inverness to the initiative run by Ness Bank Church known as Inverness Foodstuffs. This project, run from the church kitchen, feeds homeless and vulnerable people three times a week usually feeding 30 – 35 people at each time. These are people who are very grateful to get their daily bread and even more grateful when they can have something that is not just basic food to eat. The Minister of the church, Fiona Smith, tells me:

With the economic impact of Covid still to fully hit plus the increase in food prices (which are set to rise even more) we know we are sadly going to remain in demand and we suspect that donations from the supermarkets may well reduce over the winter which means we will then need to buy food. So anything – however little folk can give will be needed and so appreciated.

So as we give thanks for our harvest and our food, this year can we give financially to help our neighbours? I have asked our website managers to put a link for direct giving to Inverness Foodstuffs on the sites, and they will stay there for a few weeks. If you would rather send a cheque than give over the internet, then please contact me and I can give you the details for that.

In this time of trial, we know that we have much to thank God for: so let us show our gratitude in ways that help others.

Hymn: Great is Thy Faithfulness

I know that we can't have our usual harvest thanksgiving this year, but if you are missing coming to church to worship God – even though in a different way than we have been used to - then don't forget that as well as the two weekly services in St. Brides on Mondays at 6.30 and Thursdays at 7.30, we have fortnightly services in Kingussie and, starting this week, in Laggan. These services are at 2.30 p.m. on a Wednesday. Laggan will be this week, the 14th

and then the 28th, and Kingussie will be next week the 21st and then the 4th of November. If possible, let me know if you are coming, but don't hesitate to come if you have forgotten to do that. And remember all of our services are for people from any of our communities.

Third reading: Psalm 104:16-23

The harvest of the earth for the sustenance of people is just a small part of the wonder of the world that God made. The Psalm moves swiftly on to considering the way that God orders life; how the rain waters the trees, and the trees provide perches for the birds. How the high mountains give the goats an appropriate home, while the rocks are a refuge for coney. So much order and pattern and purpose, of which we are but a small part. And then we are shown the night scenes, when the moon shines and, unseen by sleeping humanity, the animals of the forest come creeping out. The lions roar, some of the forest animals may meet their end to feed them. And then the sun rises, and people get up and go out to their work, as though the different world of night had never been. God has provided such an ordered world. We can't thank him for his provision of our needs without thinking of the entire creation of which we are only a part.

Fourth reading: Psalm 104:24-30

And now we are taken down to the sea. The Israelite people were not great sea-farers, and so they tended to fear the sea, with its storms and mythical creatures. But the Psalmist is having none of such fear. This is part of God's creation and filled with creatures he has made, and for which he also provides.

All of creation looks to God. That is the point of this Psalm: to tell us that we cannot pride ourselves in our own work and cleverness, because without God's ordering of the world we would never be able to work the soil and fish the seas, we would never be able to depend on the patterns of day and night and of times and seasons which guide and prosper our work. God gives the breath of life to all creatures, and we are at one with the rest of the created world in being dependant on God for life and life's sustenance. When God opens his hand we are filled with good things – and when there is an abundance of good things, the God-like, and so liked-by-God thing to do is to share with others. This is true whether it means giving away bushels of plums or apples, giving to friends and neighbours or putting them available for the taking on the street; or whether it means giving from our plenty to buy what is needed by those who do not know what plenty is. God gives to us, abundantly and joyfully, and so it is our calling to give to others in the same way: this is the best way there is of thanking God. And God loves a cheerful giver!

Hymn: For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God

Prayer

Lord God, you give us so generously, so fully, so freely out of your heart of creative love. We praise and thank you for your giving.

You give us a home that is full of beauty and variety: you give us weather which is never two days the same and which in its changefulness brings fertility to the earth and causes harvests of food and the wonders of nature to grow and flourish.

We praise and thank you for your giving.

You give us good food, tasty food, abundant food, and the joy of eating it. You give us luxury and well as basic staple foods, and you give us far more than we need. We praise and thank you for your giving.

In our gratitude, may we be like you. Giving and sharing, and creative in how we give and share. In our gratitude may we be humbled by your generosity and moved to live in your image as those who are part of your provision. We praise and thank you for your giving.

As you made the world with order and pattern and purpose, so may we live in harmony with your intentions and not seek to wrench the world to do our will rather than yours. Forgive us when we are greedy – for food, for power, for pleasure. Halt us in our tracks and teach us again that we live best when we live the way you planned, for us and for all your creation. We praise and thank you for your giving.

And hear our prayers for those who are in need of any kind. We pray for the people who rely on the Inverness Foodstuffs programme to meet their needs. We pray for those who need your peace in their hearts because they fear the future and wonder if they will have work which can provide for their household. We pray for those who grieve in these days, who mourn the lives of those who have been loved and have died, and who mourn the loss of a way of life that may never return. In this time of fear and sadness and loss we ask that you will help us to live remembering your presence, your goodness, your loving provision. We praise and thank you for your giving, every day and in every way. And we pray in the name of Jesus, whom you also gave to bring us close to your heart. Amen.

Fifth reading: Psalm 104:31-35

Bless the Lord, O my soul, praise the Lord.

It may seem odd that this Psalm which celebrates the real wonder of creation should end with the desire that sinners be consumed from the earth. Surely that is lowering the tone? But if you think about it, it is not. The Psalmist has shown us the wonderful harmony of creation, with all the parts working together not only for human good, but for the good of the whole, and sinners, those who are intent on not working with God in his purposes for his world spoil things. Only people can be sinners, that is our doubtful distinction. The rest of creation goes about its ordained ways: every cow playing her part just by being a cow, and every bird or cat or frog: just by being they serve the purposes of God. But people were made in God's image with choices to make, and when we choose not to live as God intended we spoil that wonderful intricacy of the created order.

So if we want to give God thanks and praise for his giving to us, if we want to celebrate harvest today and every day, then day by day and hour by hour we should be laying our lives before God to ask that we may live in ways that please him. Then we can indeed be a part of the glory of the Lord, and looking at us, as at all he has made, God can rejoice in his works.

Our closing hymn is one based on Psalm 104

Hymn: O worship the King all glorious above

Benediction:

Grace and peace be yours in fullest measure,
From God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Now and forever. Amen.

Postlude: The Shepherdesses, by Susato, played by Alan Buchan on the organ of Tombae chapel.