

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH,  
Sunday 30.10.22; Harvest  
Service Transcript**

**Welcome and Intimations: Session clerk**

**Introduction and Prayer**

Good morning. It's good to see you again. Welcome to our worship. Wherever you come from today, whether you come regularly or occasionally, your presence enriches us all in this time of fellowship and celebration together. Today we give thanks for harvest, and reflect on what harvest may mean for us all.

First, in a moment of quietness, let us turn our thoughts to God; to know his presence, and to remember all that God has given us; all that God has done for us, and to give thanks.

*Pause*

Prayer:

God of harvest time,  
we come today as part of the worldwide church and people of God, to celebrate and to give thanks for the harvest we have been fortunate enough to share. May we be fruitful in our worship, and bring praise with joyful hearts. Amen.

**Call to Worship:**

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,  
summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. (Gen. 8:22)

*Let us worship and give thanks:*

**Hymn 229** We plough the fields and scatter the good seed

**First Prayer + Lord's Prayer**

Creator God,  
your people bring you thanksgiving gifts this harvest day: produce of farm, field, garden and ocean. Direct our worship, eternal God, lest we who come with full hands leave with empty hearts. Let your creative power, self-evident in harvest plenty, re-create also our faith in Christ to yield a harvest which is eternal.

Loving God,  
all good gifts come from you. You send the sunshine and the rain, and it is through your love and care that we can enjoy harvest time. Thank you for providing so richly for our needs, and help us to share the good things we have with those who have little or nothing.

Lord, we pray for your blessing on every kind of harvest of the land and sea, of factory, mine, and workshop. Bless the harvest of research and of creative art. May we work together with you in every area of life to produce what is worthwhile, good and fruitful. May you be glorified in it all.

Loving God,  
Your harvest is the harvest of love, love sown in the hearts of people;  
love that spreads out like the branches of a great tree, covering all who seek its shelter;  
love that inspires and recreates; love that is planted in the weak and weary,  
the sick and the dying.

The harvest of your love is the life that reaches through the weeds of sin and death  
to the sunlight of resurrection.

Lord, nurture our days with your love, water our souls with the dew of forgiveness

that the harvest of our lives may be your joy.

We ask in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying

Our Father which 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.

*(Prayer from Frank Topping; edited from The Lion Prayer Collection)*

**Readings: Peter will read for us today:**

**2 Cor. 9: 6b-15**

The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written,

'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.'

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

*Amen.*

**Matt. 13: 1-9 and 18-23 The Sower; NRSV**

***The Parable of the Sower***

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'

*and at verse 18:*

***The Parable of the Sower Explained***

'Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

*Amen. Thanks be to God.*

**2<sup>nd</sup>. Hymn 153** Great is thy faithfulness

**Message**

I have spoken to you several times about harvest and our harvest thanksgiving. Maybe there is nothing to say about harvest that has not been said many times already, but there are things worth saying again. At its simplest, the harvest service is an opportunity to offer to God everything, and everybody, that helps in bringing food to our tables.

My own impression, confirmed by information gleaned from some at the sharp end – ‘gleaned’, a good harvest word – is that, overall, this year, our harvest has been bountiful: the silage and grass growth exceptional, a good crop of barley; animals all looking well after a good summer of plentiful grass, garden vegetables good. A good harvest, despite problems harvesting the straw as the weather broke. Thanks be to God.

I’ve spoken before about the astonishing differences in the methods of harvesting today as compared with times past, and about the contrast between our highly-mechanised systems that can clear a field in a matter of hours, and the labour-intensive methods in poorer countries. I’ve encouraged you to think of the contrasts between the surpluses of the wealthier nations and the poverty in so many other places throughout the world. A few moments on the Internet gave me alarming details about food insecurity in many communities around the world. A report published in 2021 says:

*‘With today’s technology and agricultural growth, we are capable of adequately feeding up to 10 billion people, yet 690 million people are undernourished and food insecure.’*

Oxfam tells me that the world stands on the brink of unprecedented famines. with severe shortages in many places - Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen. Our partners in Malawi live with alternating drought and flooding as they struggle to feed their families. So do people in many other places. Millions of people do not have enough food to feed their families.

We all know that the world situation is complicated by all sorts of practical and political factors, and by ongoing war in many places, but we could, and we should, think very hard about famine, and about what we, as individuals, as a church, and as a nation, might be able to do to help.

Google tells me that the Bible mentions harvest on 80 separate occasions – I didn’t check! We all know many familiar passages from the Bible, some about practical and social aspects of harvest:

Leviticus 19:9-10, (NRSVA):

*When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.*

And in Deuteronomy 24:19

*When you .... forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings.*

Psalms 126: 5-6 can be taken in both a literal and figurative sense:

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. (NRSVA)

Jesus himself uses the picture of harvest figuratively on a number of occasions:

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:37-38)

And:

Look 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? (Matthew 6:26)

And again:

'I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.' (John 4: 35-38)

We know the parable about the wheat and the weeds, with the words, "Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn." (Matt. 13:24-30)

Paul reminds us:

"... the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully". (2 Cor. 9:6)

Harvest in a *figurative sense* is the subject of today's Gospel reading: the parable of the sower. It's one of Jesus' most well-known parables, and for good reason: it has implications that are just as powerful today as the first time Jesus told it.

The immediate meaning is clear - because Jesus tells us what it means. The seed is the word of God, and we are the ground. The seed is good, but its productivity depends on where it lands. A lot of the seed produces no crop at all, and seed that does take root and grow produces a mixed harvest. There are different ways of accepting the Word of God, and the fruit which the Word produces depends on the attitudes of the hearers. Those who hear the word must receive it, and allow it to bear fruit in their lives.

That's the main explanation, but this is a wonderful story and I feel sure that Jesus intended us to ponder on some of its other implications for us. We can see ourselves as the hearers, and also as the ground; as the seed, and even as the sower.

What kind of ground are we? Good soil, ready to receive the seed, ready to hear and accept the word, and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold? Open-minded people, prepared to hear, able to understand, ready to put the message into action? Or like the path, the hard ground, the shut minds; duggit, not prepared to discuss or to consider any other view but their own?

We are faced with big changes in the church in Orkney, and in Orphir/Stenness, and, like it or not, we have to look to a new kind of future.

Could we be the rocky, shallow ground, with no depth to receive the roots, where the shoots spring up with good intentions, but quickly wither when the going gets tough? We need a firm and intelligent faith, and courage to speak up for it, and we need staying power.

Might we be the thorns that crowd out the seed, losing it ourselves, and - worse - discouraging other people as well?

What kind of *seed* are we? Is the quality there in the first place? Do we read our Bibles, and think about what we read? Do we pray about it? *Do we have the resources to pass on the message?*

How are we as a crop?

Do we produce a hundredfold, or sixtyfold, or thirtyfold? Or nothing?

Sure -we're not all the same. We don't all have the same ability, the same training, or the same health, or fitness, but we are all part of the great scheme of things.  
We may not all be equal in abilities, but we need to be equal in effort.

How do we measure up as the sower - those who preach the word of God, or speak up for their faith in everyday life, who spread the seed, the Word of God?

Remember the Great Commission that Jesus lays on the disciples, and through them. on us: *"Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."* (Mark 16:15)

We need to remind the people out there that the Christian Way is relevant to their lives.

This parable asks us to take a good look at ourselves as individuals, and as a congregation, and to ask ourselves some hard questions about our own motives, and the courage we have – or don't have – of our convictions!

We are Christ's witnesses in the world today.

How do we go about passing on the Word? Do we play safe and speak about our faith only to folk who will happily listen and not question? Or do we keep quiet?

What about helping others? Do we save what we have for the proverbial rainy day, or, in our own generosity, should we imitate the sower as he 'broadcasts' the seed? We are the ground, and the seed, good or bad. We are all sowers.

Through Jesus's Great Commission to his disciples, passed down to us, we are charged with spreading the Word. We are the voice and the hands of Jesus in this place.

In this parable there's challenge, and a lot of encouragement too: encouragement for the disciples, and for us. Don't give up! The results may be slow to appear, but the harvest is sure! When we sow the seed of the word of God, we do not know what the effect or the outcome will be.

Let us go out there and sow the seed in faith, and leave the rest to God.  
Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

*During the next hymn could we please have the offering brought to the chancel:*

**3 Hymn 137** All things bright and beautiful

### **Dedication of Offering :**

We give thee but thine own,  
whate'er the gift may be;  
all that we have is thine alone,  
a trust, O God, from thee.

Together with all these other gifts, we bring these tokens of our prosperity asking that they may be blessed in the service of God. In Jesus name, Amen

### **Prayers of Intercession**

*Our prayer for others begins with a poem by Lilian Cox, written before inclusive language, and later I invite you to join in the **responses:***

**L:** As God has richly blessed us,

**All: May we learn to remember others.**

### **Let us pray:**

We dare not ask you bless our harvest feast  
Till it is spread for poorest and for least.  
We dare not bring our harvest gifts to you  
Unless our hungry brothers share them too.

Not only at this time, Lord; every day  
 Those whom you love are dying while we pray.  
 Teach us to do with less, and so to share  
 From our abundance more than we can spare.

Now with this harvest plenty round us piled,  
 show us the Christ in every starving child;  
 Speak, as you spoke of old in Galilee,  
 'You feed, or you refuse, not them but me!'  
*Lilian Cox – from The Lion Prayer Collection*

As we come before God in gratitude for our harvest we remember those who do not celebrate.  
 We pray for people who have a poor harvest, or none at all; those whose crops have failed,  
 or whose harvest has been destroyed by natural disaster or in the chaos of war.  
 Especially at this time we remember the people of Ukraine;  
 and all those peoples of the Horn of Africa, Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan,  
 facing famine.

**L:** As God has richly blessed us,

**All: May we learn to remember others.**

We pray for people with insufficient resources to tend their land,  
 for all who are denied a just reward for their labours.  
 As we celebrate our abundance, let us remember those in our world  
 who have so much less –  
 the poor, the hungry, the homeless,  
 the oppressed, those overwhelmed by disasters of many kinds.  
 May we find means to respond with love and concern, and to offer whatever help we can.

**L:** As God has richly blessed us,

**All: May we learn to remember others.**

May our hearts be stirred and our consciences quickened to turn from the selfish indulgence  
 that seeks our own comforts and ignores the needy,  
 so that, from our plenty, we may share with all who cry out for help.  
 May the time come when we all have enough and no one too much.

**L:** As God has richly blessed us,

**All: May we learn to remember others.**

At this time we remember also all who are known to us who are in any kind of need:  
 those who are ill, those who are sad, or worried, or lonely.  
 We remember those for whom we have special concerns.

*Pause*

**L:** As God has richly blessed us,

**All: May we learn to remember others.**

In the name of Christ, Amen.

**Choir: Hymn 226** God whose hand is all creation.

**Tailpiece:**

**A Harvest Poem by John Masefield:**

O Christ, who holds the open gate,  
 O Christ who drives the furrow straight,  
 O Christ, the plough, O Christ, the laughter  
 Of holy white birds flying after.

Lo, all my heart's field red and torn,  
 And thou wilt bring the young green corn,  
 The young green corn divinely springing,  
 The young green corn for ever singing.

And when the field is fresh and fair  
 Thy blessèd feet shall glitter there,  
 And we will walk the weeded field,  
 And tell the golden harvest's yield.

The corn that makes the holy bread  
 By which the soul of man is fed,  
 The holy bread, the food unpriced,  
 Thy everlasting mercy, Christ.

**4<sup>th</sup>. Hymn 233** Come ye thankful people, come

**Closing Words and Benediction:**

All the world is God's own field:

May the Lord of Harvest grant that we  
 wholesome grain and pure may be.

Go now in the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfil your calling as servants of Christ.  
 And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit  
 be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

**Doxology: Hy 786:** May the God of Peace go with you