

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH**  
**Service Handout for Sunday 18<sup>th</sup>. October, 2020; Harvest Thanksgiving**

**Introduction:**

In the present circumstances of the Coronavirus pandemic, when we are unable to hold our Church services, we think of other Christian people here, and all over the world, and especially family and friends who are separated from us. I invite you to use this service in whatever way is best for you. You may like to look up the hymns and read – or sing - them. If you know of anyone who would like to receive these services and is not on the list, please pass email address to Nicol or Kathryn, and please feel free to pass on hard copies to people who don't have internet access. God bless you all.

**Gathering Words and Prayer**

Today we think about harvest, as we know it, and in its widest sense.

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.

God of harvest time,

In our various places 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**

Gathered in our separate places, yet united in our Christian fellowship, we join our voices with the whole church, across the world and across time.

**Hymn (1): 233** Come, you thankful people, come

**Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

**Collect** (from *Book of Common Order*):

Almighty God,  
we offer you hearty thanks for your goodness and care  
in giving to us the fruits of the earth in their seasons.  
Give us grace to use them rightly,  
to your glory, for the relief of those in need,  
and our own well-being:  
through Jesus Christ, the living Bread,  
who came down from heaven and gives life to the world,  
and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.

God of all creation,  
we bring praise and thanksgiving for all that you have given to us in our lives.  
We thank you for the beauty of these islands, and for the landscape around us;  
for hills, moors, and fields,  
for the restless, ever-changing sea,  
and the wide Orkney sky.  
We thank you for fine grazing pastures  
and for soil rich for cultivation.

We thank you for all those who work the land and the sea  
to provide food to feed us;

for farmers who grow crops, and produce livestock with love and care;  
and for those fishing the wide oceans.

We thank you, loving God, for the rich variety of food that comes from all across the world.

We ask your blessing upon all those who grow, prepare and distribute the food we eat,  
and we thank you for the enjoyment and the pleasure we find  
in sharing food in celebration and in fellowship.

We offer our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,  
in whose words we pray, saying:

*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in 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, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

**Hymn (2): 230** Praise God for the harvest

**Readings:**

**Exodus 16: 2-15; NRSVA: *Bread from Heaven***

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?' And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.'

Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.'

**Hymn (3): 137** All things bright and beautiful

**Gospel Reading:**

**Luke 12:13-30; NRSVA: *The Parable of the Rich Fool***

Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.' But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

### **Do Not Worry**

He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them.'

### **Message**

There is, or there was, something special about harvest time. Before we had supermarkets, folk were more aware of the seasonality of our food, so they gathered up the produce and stored it to get them through times when food was scarce. It was a natural instinct to make a special occasion to give thanks to God. In addition to crops, people were aware of the harvest of the sea, and of animals that provide milk and meat. Where I grew up, in a mining area, there was always a big lump of coal among all the other produce at the harvest festival.

The harvest thanksgiving service has always been one of the most popular in the church year, especially in rural communities, where churches can see the farming year unrolling on their doorstep. Many of us can remember how it used to be: the amount and variety of the produce brought by people in the congregation, produce that after the service was distributed to people in need in the community and beyond. Maybe it is a sign of the times that in some churches this tradition has fallen by the wayside, and people have lost sight of how precious a gift the harvest can be to those who are in need.

In these strange and alarming times when we are all struggling to cope with restrictions, and when we see businesses that have close, and people losing their income, and many families struggling to make ends meet, the message of helping one another is even more important. Even with our churches closed or seriously restricted, we still need to keep in mind not only the needs of other people, but also the need to continue to try to keep one another safe in everyday life, not least from Coronavirus infection. In our gospel reading today, Luke helps us to remember how precious life is, and how, when we turn towards God, and place our trust in Him, then he will provide for our needs, whatever they may be. Jesus said, *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing"*.

Things may be a bit different for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We now buy most of our produce in supermarkets, and we no longer need to ask if there has been a good harvest, because

whatever we need, is on a shelf ready for us to buy. Perhaps the majority of people nowadays don't feel the need to give thanks for a good harvest, though I'm sure our farmers and fishermen do, but our emphasis is on remembering and reaffirming the Christian virtue of thankfulness and generosity through the symbolism of the harvest.

In our reading from Luke we find Jesus was to two types of people: those who had much, and those who had little. When we reflect on the place of material possessions in our lives, we find that, for some people, the main priority in life seems to be to accumulate wealth and have a good life, with little or no thought of God, or scripture, or of people much worse off. We also find a problem that still exists in farming today; disputes over land, with one brother falling out with another over land and inheritance. Of course these kind of disputes are not restricted to farming; they can happen within a family in any context. But the passage also gives us hope and reassurance – the promise of God's love and care.

As we look more deeply at our reading, we touch on issues such as worry, trust, faith, and the Kingdom of God, and maybe we begin to question the priorities in our lives.

Do we find that the more we have, the more we want? Has Covid-19 caused people to take stock of their lives and reconsider what is important in life? Has it helped people to be content with what they already have? Do we listen to what God says, and then apply it to our own lives? If we view our possessions, or our success in life, as coming as the result of our own talents and efforts alone, will we think of ourselves as the owner of these things, whereas in reality we are only stewards of all that God has provided?

What, and how much, do we really need to live on? Our reading from Exodus shows us the Israelites in the desert after their escape from Egypt. Much as they had moaned and complained about the harsh conditions of their captivity in Egypt, here they are complaining again to Moses and Aaron about not having enough to eat or drink. In response, the Lord promises to provide bread from heaven, but there are strict conditions attached. People were instructed to gather exactly as much as they needed every day, and never to try to save it, otherwise the precious food would spoil. Later in the chapter we find that it was called Manna. It is not certain exactly what it was: it may have been the sap of the Tamarisk tree, or a sugar-laden product of insects, known as honeydew. It would appear six days a week, and on Friday they were instructed to gather twice as much—since there would be no manna coming down on Saturday, the day of rest. The Israelites were promised that the extra portion for Shabbat would not spoil.

One of several lesson in the Exodus reading is that God provided food for the Israelites – *but only as much as they needed, and no more*. If they tried to hoard it, it went bad.

According to The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the average minimum daily energy requirement is about 1,800 kilocalories per person. In the UK, average daily dietary energy consumption per head of population is 3,450 kilocalories: much more than we actually need. Compare that with Eritrea, at the bottom of the scale, where average daily consumption is 1,590 kilocalories, well under the minimum daily energy requirement, and less than half of ours.

A few minutes on the Internet tells me that global food production is incredibly efficient. At the present time, worldwide food production exceeds 2,750 kilocalories per person per day, well over the 1,800 kilocalories per person required to feed the global population.

To put it more simply, the world's farmers produce enough food to feed one-and-a-half times the global population. That's enough to feed 10 billion (and at currently we are at 7.6 billion). Yet Today, 795 million people are hungry, and another 2 billion are expected to join them by 2050.

It gets worse. Our inability to feed the entirety of the world's population is mostly because of food waste. World-wide, *30–40% of all food* is wasted. In less developed countries, this waste is largely because of lack of knowledge and means to keep food fresh. In more developed countries, where people are rarely faced with shortages, they buy more and more, and, as portion size grows, more and more food gets thrown out and wasted. Climate change will make all of this worse.

Meanwhile, worldwide obesity has nearly tripled since 1975. In 2016, 39% of adults aged 18 and over across the world were overweight, and 13% were obese. The Scottish Health Survey in 2018 showed that two thirds (65%) of adults were overweight, including 28% who were obese, with both these trends remaining stable since 2008.

At the present time the United Nations is setting out what must be done to tackle the world's biggest issues, from COVID-19 to poverty, including inequality, gender discrimination, climate change, justice and human rights.

This year the Covid restrictions have given us time to pause from our 24/7 fast-moving life, and to think how fortunate we are in so many ways. Today – and every day - we need to take time to say, *'Thank you! Thank you for all those good things, including those unexpected surprises that have come our way this year!'*

Let us thank God for life; thank God for food; thank God for family and friends; thank God for the opportunity of living our lives in this rich and beautiful place, a land that could be said to be 'flowing with milk and honey'.

However, just as we have the opportunity, and the freedom, to give thanks for so many of the things we take for granted, things like wholesome food and water, decent housing, health care and all the rest, we also need to stop and think of all those people who are not, and never will be, as fortunate as we are. For people in many countries where the failure of a crop means that a whole community may go hungry, or even worse, where they cannot even afford to buy the seed to plant a new crop.

We need to think about the people for whom the Covid pandemic comes on top of war and oppression, on top of drought and famine, or floods and storms and other natural disasters.

So what? Do we leave all these problems to the United Nations and others to help the poor and underprivileged in our world? In our place and our time, is there anything we can do?

We can continue to support the movements such as Fairtrade, which helps 1.66 million farmers and workers across 73 countries. Fair trade is an arrangement designed to help producers in developing countries achieve sustainable and equitable trade relationships. Fairtrade products range from ice cream, to gold, to flowers, to beauty products. It is estimated that, at this time, 93% of the UK public recognise the Fairtrade mark, and that 1 in 4 cups of coffee in the UK is Fairtrade.

In 'normal' times, we would be gathering in our churches to celebrate our harvest festivals. Wherever we are today, let us thank God that we are able to gather as the church in body and spirit to express our gratitude in acts of love, and sharing, and giving. Wherever we are, we come before God to offer our thanksgiving for his love, his care, his protection, and for all that he provides to us.

Amen. SDG.

**(Offering) Hymn (4) 722** Spirit of God

**Dedication of Offering**

Loving God,  
we bring our gifts as tokens of our thanks to you  
for your continued provision for us,  
and for the ways in which you guide and care for our community.  
Let us never forget that all good things come, not from ourselves,  
but from you.  
Help us to care for those who do not have enough of the good things of life,  
and to work to make your world a fairer place.  
In the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

We think today of all the people associated with harvest in its widest sense.

We pray today for farmers and farm-workers,  
especially those we know, in our own parishes, throughout the Islands, and beyond.  
We think of them in the heat of summer when things go well,  
and also when there is need for rain,  
and in the dreich dark winter days of wet and wind and cold,  
with the daily round of managing livestock and cultivating the land.

We pray for safe working practices for all those involved in what is a hazardous industry,  
for encouragement in what is often a solitary occupation,  
and a fair price for their products, especially in these times when restrictions bring additional  
difficulties.

We pray for our fishermen, and for all who go down to the sea in ships, and do business in  
great waters, that they may be kept safe.

We pray for health and happiness in the home life of all,  
and for families to work together with love, respect and harmony,  
for the welfare of families and communities.

In these uncertain times we pray for good management and financial planning,  
and for understanding and good communication between country and city.  
We pray that our country may increase its self-sufficiency in food,  
that people and supermarket-buyers will support local growers.

We pray for all those who provide seasonal labour at harvest time,  
for the people who work in food processing factories;  
for those who transport, inspect and sell our food,  
and for all who cook it for us,  
remembering especially those who cater for young children and for the infirm and vulnerable.

We pray for those who work in administration and government, in Unions and benevolent  
institutions;  
for all who seek to support our farming and fishing communities.

Generous God,  
as we celebrate your goodness to us in Scotland,  
we think of those in other countries who face difficulties that we can scarcely imagine:  
those whose harvests have failed;  
those whose land or crops have been affected by floods, drought, or fire, or war,  
by pests and disease;  
for those who have no seed or livestock for the future;

for all whose families are hungry.

We pray also for those in this country and abroad  
who are dependent on food banks or on the benevolence of others.

Help us, as your Christian disciples in this place,  
that we may be generous givers of our money, food and time,  
and show us how to play our part as stewards of the resources of your world,  
for the benefit of all people.

Now, in quietness, or in the privacy of our own places,  
we bring to you all those for whom we have special concerns.

*Pause*

Loving God,  
We bring these and all our prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Closing thought:**

Mahatma Gandhi said:

***"The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed."***

**Closing Hymn(5) 229:** We plough the fields

**Closing Words and Benediction**

May God who clothes the lilies and feeds the birds of the air,  
who leads the lambs to their pasture and the deer to still waters,  
who multiplied the loaves and fishes and changed water into wine,  
lead us, feed us, multiply us, and change us to reflect the glory of our Creator,  
now and through all eternity.

And may the blessing of almighty God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
rest upon you and remain with you  
now and for ever. Amen.

**Doxology:**

May God's blessing surround you each day, As you trust Him and walk in his way,  
May his presence within guard and keep you from sin, Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.