

Written Service Sunday September 22nd 2024

A service of worship for use at home

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Charity number 1134226

Call to worship

The heavens proclaim your glory
through creation's glorious song,
and all that live upon the earth
are moved to sing along,
praising your gracious provision
and glorious kingdom
established for your children,

revealed through your Son,
where we gain a foretaste
of the life that is to come.
Creator, Redeemer, Lord and King,
the heavens proclaim your glory
and we join them in their song.

Hymn - Come ye thankful people come

1 Come, ye thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home;
all is safely gathered in,
ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide
for our wants to be supplied;
come to God's own temple, come,
raise the song of harvest home.

3 For the Lord our God shall come,
and shall take the harvest home;
from the field shall in that day
all offenses purge away,
giving angels charge at last
in the fire the tares to cast;
but the fruitful ears to store
in the garner evermore.

2 All the world is God's own field,
fruit as praise to God we yield;
wheat and tares together sown
are to 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.

4 Even so, Lord, quickly come,
bring thy final harvest home;
gather thou thy people in,
free from sorrow, free from sin,
there, forever purified,
in thy presence to abide;
come, with all thine angels, come,
raise the glorious harvest home.

Prayers

Creator God,
from the moment your spirit
hovered over the waters of this earth
we were part of a vision
held lovingly within your heart.
From the moment you spoke
and separated darkness from light
you created space
where we might one day walk.
From the moment your joy

spilled out into green and living things
your beauty was revealed
for us to taste and see.
Creator God,
for this world,
beauty and majesty,
passion and artistry,
a green and pleasant place,
we praise your mighty name and give you
thanks. Amen

Prayer of confession

For the times that we behaved irresponsibly towards your gifts of creation:

**Lord, in your mercy,
forgive us and help us.**

For the times that we have ignored the spiritual and material needs
of those who are not so fortunate as ourselves:

**Lord, in your mercy,
forgive us and help us.**

For our lack of cooperation with you to support and steward your creation.

**Lord in your mercy
Forgive us and help us.**

We thank you that as we turn to you in repentance so you forgive us. You stand us again on solid rock that we might move forward as those who are forgiven.

Amen

Hymn - To thee O Lord

1 To thee, O Lord, our hearts we raise
in hymns of adoration,
to thee bring sacrifice of praise
with shouts of exultation:
bright robes of gold the fields adorn,
the hills with joy are ringing,
the valleys stand so thick with corn
that even they are singing.

2 And now, on this our festal day,
thy bounteous hand confessing,
upon thine altar, Lord, we lay
the first-fruits of thy blessing:
by thee the hungry soul is fed
with gifts of grace supernal;
thou who dost give us earthly bread,
give us the bread eternal.

3 We bear the burden of the day,
and often toil seems dreary;
but labour ends with sunset ray,
and rest comes for the weary:
may we, the angel-reaping o'er,
stand at the last accepted,
Christ's golden sheaves for evermore
to garner bright elected.

4 O blessèd is that land of God,
where saints abide for ever;
where golden fields spread far and broad,
where flows the crystal river:
the strains of all its holy throng
with ours today are blending;
thrice blessèd is that harvest-song
which never hath an ending

Reading Exodus 3v 11-19 & Ch 4 v 1-5

3 ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹² And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you^[a] will worship God on this mountain.”

¹³ Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.^[a] This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD,^[a] the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’

“This is my name forever,
the name you shall call me
from generation to generation.

¹⁶ “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷ And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’

¹⁸ “The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.’ ¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him.

4 Moses answered, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you’?”

2 Then the Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?”

“A staff,” he replied.

3 The Lord said, “Throw it on the ground.”

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. **4** Then the Lord said to him, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.” So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. **5** “This,” said the Lord, “is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you.”

A short reflection on this passage

‘What is that in your hand?’

If you have a tendency to despair over lost opportunities or if you worry about the future, ask yourself this question: “What is right in front of me?” In other words, what circumstances and relationships are currently available to you? This question can get your focus off a past regret or a scary future and back to what God can do in your life.

It’s similar to the question God asked Moses at the burning bush. Moses was troubled. Aware of his own weaknesses, he expressed fear about the Lord’s call for him to lead Israel out of bondage. So God simply asked Moses, “What is that in your hand?” (Ex. 4:2). The Lord shifted Moses’ attention away from his anxiety about the future and suggested he notice what was right in front of him—a shepherd’s rod. God showed Moses that He could use this ordinary staff to perform miracles as a sign for unbelieving people. As Moses’ trust in God grew, so did the magnitude of miracles God worked through His servant

Reading John 6 v 1-15

Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), **2** and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. **3** Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. **4** The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” **6** He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages^[a] to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, **9** “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). **11** Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” **13** So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

14 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” **15** Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Hymn - Praise and Thanksgiving

1 Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer,
for all things living thou madest good:
harvest of sown fields, fruits of the orchard,
hay from the mown fields, blossom and wood.

2 God thou the labour we bring to serve thee,
that with our neighbour we may be fed.
Sowing or tilling, we would work with thee;
harvesting, milling for daily bread.

3 Father, providing food for thy children,
thy wisdom guiding teaches us share
one with another, so that rejoicing
with us, our brother may know thy care.

4 Then will thy blessing reach every people;
freely confessing thy gracious hand.
Where thy will reigneth no one will hunger;
thy love sustaineth; fruitful the land.

Sermon

‘What is in your hands?’

Perhaps you have heard the phrase ‘use what you have in your hands.’ It implies, use what you already have available to you. My Dad was a great believer in that! What was in your hands, or what was in your shed or toolbox! Don’t go getting new things, just use what you have! My Dad was a great recycler and re-user, long before it was fashionable! The game you can play as an individual called ‘Solitaire’ set he made for my youngest daughter – cut a square of wood from an old cupboard door, drilled holes in it and cut strips of the metal cross pieces from an old clothes drier to make small pegs to go in the holes! We still have it and at 27 my daughter still loves it!

When we hear that phrase ‘what have you in your hands?’ perhaps it first requires us to ask ourselves: what do I have in my hands? What do I have available to me? As with many idioms we use today, as we’ve already referenced, this originates in the Bible - in Exodus in that story of Moses. What seemed insignificant to Moses, a staff, a tool of his trade, when used in God’s strength, was powerful. So, God asks us to look at what we have in our hands.

Moses’ story is not the only time that we are taught about using what we have in our hands in God’s strength.

In the gospels, we also have the example of feeding the five thousand. The passage in John, and indeed in 2 other gospels where the story is recorded, describes a situation where there was a great need: There was a spiritual hunger – people were following Jesus, seeking his teaching. There was material hunger – people were hungry for physical healing and hungry for food. Jesus is not only concerned with the spiritual side of their lives but also their physical needs as well. He demonstrates clearly that God is concerned about every aspect of a person’s life and wants to meet all their & our needs.

The other gospel writers mention that Jesus and his disciples needed to rest. John doesn’t give us that, but John is the one concerned with us knowing that a small boy is involved in this story. What does he have in his hands? A picnic! This was a favourite story in the toddler Bible when my daughters were young. It was called ‘My little lunch!’ and that is exactly what the boy had. A little lunch! As the day drew on, the tired and probably hungry disciples are challenged as to how they are going to meet the physical needs of all these people! Philip the pragmatist says that they will need more money than they have to buy enough food for all these people! What the disciples failed to recognise, and we often overlook as well, is that the answer to this problem was already in their hands. It just needed Jesus to reveal and multiply it. Therefore, to deal with the dilemma, Jesus challenged the disciples to take action with him asking, ‘What do you have in your hands?’ and Andrew points out the loaves and fishes in the boy’s lunch if Jesus can do something with that! It was almost laughable. A few fish and just five loaves – very little to feed over five thousand people. And then we see something amazing happen: Jesus took the five loaves and two fishes and performed this extraordinary miracle! In their hands, in Jesus hands, was the answer to their dilemma!

Whatever the national statistics are, the church is growing rapidly across large parts of the world. But across the world, many people are living in extreme poverty, on less than £1.57 a day. The feeding of the 5,000 is one of the Bible studies used in Tearfund's Transforming Communities training - training that equips local churches across the world, to lead their communities out of extreme poverty and create lasting change in their communities. It starts by studying God's word, in this example asking those participating, 'What do you have in your hands?' This may seem like a strange question to ask someone living in extreme poverty. But let me tell you about Isaac. Isaac lives in South Sudan. In 2016, when conflict broke out, Isaac and his family had no choice but to leave their home and seek refuge in Uganda. When they eventually returned to South Sudan, all that they had built up there as a livelihood had been destroyed. Isaac experienced the support of his local church. Through training and Bible study, he learnt about the God-given resources he had in his hand. This story wonderfully illustrates how Tearfund works. At the heart of Tearfund's Transforming Communities work, the local church helps people see their situations differently and focus not on what they don't have, but on what they do have and what they can do by working together. This brings about a change of mindset, which results in extraordinary transformation. This is what happened to Isaac! Isaac learned to see what resources God had given him, just as Moses used the staff in his hand and the disciples used the offering of five loaves and two fish. Using these resources, Isaac can feed his family and pay for his children to go to school, giving them hope of a secure future.

Can we follow Jesus' instruction to his disciples and focus on what is in our hands, rather than thinking about what we don't have? Is it time to act and see how God multiplies and uses what he has given us?

We are reminded in the Parable of The Mustard Seed that what we have might be very small, our faith perhaps, our sense of inadequacies when it comes to prayer, our offering here at the harvest, but Jesus reminds us in that parable that in the hands of God, what seems small and inadequate can be multiplied and used extensively by him.

Nyarai lives in the Mutoko district in Northeast Zimbabwe. The climate there is becoming increasingly variable with frequent droughts and dry spells punctuated by torrential storms. The unpredictable weather is leading to declining productivity and food insecurity. Like most people in the region, Nyarai and her family are farmers. They always made their living by farming and selling chickens, until the climate crisis began to threaten their harvests and their hope. Low rainfall meant that yields were barely enough to feed the family, while hyperinflation undermined the value of the produce they could take to market. When the family tried planting small grains because of the climate change issues, the birds would destroy most of the crop. But Nyarai looked to see what was 'in her hand.' Christian Aid were offering agriculture training nearby. This was 'in her hands' – something she could take hold of, attend and maybe it would turn things around for her family.

Nyarai learnt how to sustainably harvest many of the wild plants that grow in the hills and forests surrounding her home. She's now using some of these to improve her family's nutrition, including making tea from zumbani and rosella. Other plants are prepared for market using a dryer, constructed with support from a Christian Aid partner agency. With the profits, the family have been able to buy goats for their farm, as well as groceries, crockery and blankets. Nyarai also learnt about climate smart agriculture, helping her family to grow a wider range of grains and other produce.

What is in your hand? A small gift? A large gift? A gift out of your plenty? Or a gift out of your poverty? God isn't interested in whether it's large or small, what he is interested in is whether or not we are looking to see what is already in our hands and how we go about using what is there. We cannot solve the world's problems of climate crisis and poverty, but we can offer to God what is in our hands – what he has given us and pray and seek Him as to how we can best use what is

in our hands, to bring support, comfort and challenge to those in our own communities and those across the world.

Hymn - God in his love

God in his love for us lent us this planet,
gave it a purpose in time and in space:
small as a spark from the fire of creation,
cradle of life and the home of our race.

Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,
life that sustains us in body and mind:
plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,
riches undreamed of to fathom and find.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
long have we wasted what others have need
of,
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
ours, as his stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
good Lord, deliver us, world without end.

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Prayers

Let us pray for those who hold political and economic power that they would act to tackle food insecurity and the causes of the climate crisis. Pray for those excluded from power, that they will no longer be marginalised.

Lord of the harvest

Hear our prayer

Let us pray for those working to repair and heal the harm we have done to the natural world. Pray for projects sharing environmentally sustainable farming techniques across the world and those who put that learning into practice. Pray for Isaac in South Sudan and Nayarai in Zimbabwe that they will be blessed as they put their learning into practice and so be able to provide for their families and communities. Pray for environmental causes close to us. The work of A Rocha and other Christian organisations bringing the climate crisis to the fore for the church. Pray for the development of more churches becoming eco-churches so that Christians can be seen by society as being those who care for the planet. Help us to do that, because we recognise our responsibility to care for the world as stewards of all creation.

Lord of the harvest

Hear our prayer

Remembering our calling to love our neighbours as ourselves, pray for our global neighbours across the world in places like Zimbabwe. Pray for those who are enduring the greatest impacts of the climate crisis. Pray for organisations such as Tearfund, Christian Aid and All We Can, the Methodist church overseas development partner, each of them seeking to raise the profile of those most affected by the climate crisis and pray for them as they work with people to support the most needy across the world.

Lord of the harvest

Hear our prayer

Pray for causes close to home, such as your local foodbank and people experiencing poverty in our own communities. Pray for yourself, your family and friends, that God may guide you as you take action for a more just world.

Lord of the harvest

Hear our prayer

God of hope,

With you nothing is impossible. Your promises endure, Your Spirit sustains us. Establish in us hope for your world; Hope that moves us, like fire in our bones, like a shoot springing up from the soil, like an ever-flowing stream. Nurture in us a vision for change. Stir in us a desire for justice, that our hope may become action, That your will may be done. Amen

Hymn - For the fruits

For the fruits of his creation
thanks be to God;
for his gifts to every nation
thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe keeping,
thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour,
God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbour,
God's will is done;
in our worldwide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing,
God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit,
thanks be to God;
for the good we all inherit,
thanks be to God;
for the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,
most of all, that love has found us,
thanks be to God.

Blessing

May God our Creator bless us and make our days fruitful as we use what has been placed in our hands.

May God our Saviour guide us and make our ways just.

May God our Comforter strengthen us, and make our hearts hopeful for a better, fairer world.

Amen.