

Readings for Harvest Thanksgiving

4th October 2026

First Reading: Joel 2:21-27

Do not fear, O soil;
 be glad and rejoice,
 for the Lord has done great things!

Do not fear, you animals of the field,
 for the pastures of the wilderness are green;
 the tree bears its fruit;
 the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

O children of Zion, be glad,
 and rejoice in the Lord your God,
for he has given the early rain for your vindication;
 he has poured down for you abundant rain,
 the early and the later rain, as before.

The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
 the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

I will repay you for the years
 that the swarming locust has eaten,
 the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
 my great army that I sent against you.

You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied
 and praise the name of the Lord your God,
 who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel
 and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about

these things. As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.

Gospel: St John 6:25-35

When they found Jesus on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

A Reflection for Harvest

We are all conscious of how drought has affected much of England and the rest of Europe this past summer. A couple of months ago, our news bulletins showed farmers speaking of an early harvest and barns that contained only a quarter of the usual quantities of grain and other products. The accompanying pictures of the dried-out earth were like those we more often associate with other parts of the world - the Horn of Africa springs to mind. And then there were the devastating wildfires that tore through the tinder-dry undergrowth in so many places.

Whilst I am only too aware that things have been very different in this corner of Scotland, according to the Met Office, it has been the hottest summer in the UK as a whole since records began in 1884, which I find a very sobering thought. And scientists warn us that, on average, these will be the least extreme weather conditions we will experience in the rest of our lifetimes.

The pictures of drought-stricken Europe and sparsely filled barns are a stark reminder of the interconnectedness of weather, land, environment and people across the globe. This reality has been part of the experience of other nations for many years – most of us are old enough to remember Michael Buerk’s shocking pictures of Ethiopia in 1984 and Band Aid. In that pre-internet era, we were suddenly confronted with the reality of extreme famine, and people took action – not enough perhaps, with hindsight, but they did something. Now, such pictures are commonplace, easily accessible via our phones, computers and TV, and we seem to be less easily shocked until the reality comes calling at our own door. But the reality of drought for us comes with a major difference compared to people in many other lands. Even when conditions are like this, we don’t expect our supermarket shelves to be empty, we don’t expect to go hungry. The supermarkets will buy in from elsewhere for us.

But, of course, it's not quite that simple. Food prices will go up – quite a bit probably. There will be food on our supermarket shelves, but the increased cost will stretch our budgets. For some people in this country and similar countries, that will bring real hardship, people whose budgets are already stretched to breaking point. In other parts of the world, not only will budgets be stretched but the supermarket shelves won't be full, and lean harvests will herald real hunger.

Yet even in years of drought and hardship, we celebrate Harvest Festival, as peoples all over the world have done for millennia. Thanks have been given in years of abundance and in years of scarcity, grateful that there is something rather than nothing, grateful that there is hope for tomorrow, even when the situation looks dire.

Harvest Festival is the culmination of the Season of Creation. As you may be aware, the theme of this year's Season of Creation has been 'Let the living water flow'. It is a theme with both spiritual and practical implications. The practical significance of water has really been brought home to us recently, and not only in the droughts this year. Droughts are only one aspect of our changing weather as a result of climate change. We were shocked and horrified by the devastating flash floods in Nepal and Tibet in August, and there have been similar devastating floods in Europe and elsewhere in recent years. The flood in Nepal and Tibet was caused by a massive glacier collapse, as a result of long-term global warming.

Three weeks ago, Anne wrote about the passage from Ezekiel 47 which is the key text for this year's Season of Creation, explaining how, at the time of Ezekiel, water was seen as not only essential to life but also as an image of God's blessing pouring out on all creation. We have a similar image of water as God's blessing in today's reading from the prophet Joel. Joel is one of the minor prophets and not a great deal is known about him other than his name. Like many of the prophets, his short book speaks of God's coming judgment and calls the people to repentance. Then, in the passage we have today, Joel speaks of the blessing that God will pour out on the people when they do repent, using the imagery of water:

...he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before.

And this abundant blessing leads us to harvest:

The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. ... You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God.

As a human race, we have much to repent of for the damage that we have, both wittingly and unwittingly, inflicted, and continue to inflict on God's creation. But Joel offers us a vision of hope. The living water that Jesus Christ offered in his earthly ministry will flow when we live as Christ showed us, when we share his love, when we live with his generosity and care towards our human and non-human brothers and sisters. And the harvest will be abundant for all.

The spiritual vision of living water flowing and the abundant harvest brings us right back round to the practical application of the vision - how we help to allow God's blessings to flow out upon the world.

In last week's reflection for the fourth Sunday in the Season of Creation, I mentioned that I have recently been re-reading Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and I explained then a bit more of what the book is about.

One of the chapters is entitled *The Honorable Harvest*, and part of the Indigenous American principles for such a harvest she describes like this:

Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them. ... Be accountable as one who comes asking for life. ... Never take the first. Never take the last. Take only what you need. ... Never take more than half; leave some for others. Harvest in a way that minimises harm. Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken. Share. Give thanks for what you have been given. ... Sustain the one who sustains you and the earth will last for ever.

These principles come from a different culture, but there is so much in them that we can relate to as we consider how we give thanks for God's provision in Creation, and it is easy to see how following these principles more closely would be good for us, good for our brothers and sisters across the globe and good for the whole of Creation.

We rightly celebrate harvest today, even if it may not be as abundant as it sometimes is. We give thanks to God for his provision for us and for those who enable that provision. We pray for the farmers and growers who have had a tough year, here and elsewhere, and for those who fish, going out in ever more unpredictable and extreme weather conditions for the harvest of the sea. We pray for those whose contribution to our tables is often overlooked, among them the traders, hauliers and shop staff.

We can express our gratitude through supporting producers in this country by buying local produce. This year, the harvest celebrations in all of our congregations fall in Fairtrade Fortnight. Supporting Fairtrade is another way in which we can celebrate harvest and express our thanks to God. And we express our gratitude by sharing our blessing with others who are less fortunate, by bringing our offerings for the Food Bank – thank you for your generosity. Last year, The Highland Foodbank provided more than 5000 emergency food parcels to individuals and families in crisis – that is approximately 14 every day of the year, just in the Highlands. And in addition to that, there is the provision of our local community initiatives that support our neighbours who are struggling.

As we give thanks to God for his blessings on us this harvest, let us recommit ourselves to sharing those blessings with others through the choices we make in our daily lives, not just today but in the months and years to come. In doing so, we will play our part in letting Christ's living water flow throughout the whole Earth, and hold out the hope of the vision of God's creation restored that Joel showed us.