

**Call to worship**      Psalm 96:11-13

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.  
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.

**Praise prayer:**

Creator God, we join in creation's song; jubilant because you are a God of justice. You reach out to all you have made in your love; and in your hands life flourishes. Your works are wonderful and your deeds are great. We praise your righteous name. Amen.

**Hymn** StF 123 Come you thankful people come.      Henry Alford

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.

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.

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.

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.

We sing this traditional harvest hymn because at this time of year we make special effort to celebrate God's goodness to us in the provision of food that we have.

We may not have been involved in the harvest as in times gone by when it was all hands on deck but we are thankful for the work of others, without whom we would not enjoy the vast variety of food available to us.

But lives across the world are being affected by climate change; something that they are not responsible for.....but we are.

Our thanks and praise to God for his provision at harvest need to go hand in hand with honest reflection on how our demands and choices affect others, and with actions that result in flourishing for all.

**Prayer of thanks**

God, we thank you for our vibrant world and marvel at its diversity.

Beauty comes from your hands.

God, we thank you for being present in our world and for revealing yourself to us.

The earth declares your glory.

God, we thank you for your justice, and the work you do to redeem our broken world.

Your love heals and restores us. In you there is life in all its fullness – our redeemer and our hope. Amen.

## **Readings:**

Isaiah 61: 1-4,11 NRSV

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For as the earth brings forth its shoots and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Luke 4: 14-21

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. <sup>15</sup> He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

### **The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth**

<sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

### **Reflection**

Isaiah's message points to a person who will bring liberation and healing to an oppressed and broken people. It's a message that would have brought joy and hope to the original audience.

The people of Judah had been in exile after their defeat by the Babylonian forces. Deported as prisoners, heartbroken by loss – loss of their land, their home, their loved ones, their way of life – and experiencing oppression under the hand of a harsh ruler, very little was under their control. This is not the life they wanted.

Imagine being in their situation and hearing Isaiah's words... How would it make you feel?

Their story is not dissimilar to the story of many people across our world today. Over 68 million people are displaced from their homes because of conflict and persecution. And climate disasters like droughts and floods create food scarcity causing people to leave their homes in the hope of finding a more habitable place to live. We only have to see the catastrophe in Pakistan that is unfolding before our very eyes to see what climate change is causing.

Millions of people in our world are uprooted.

We know from plants, that roots are needed for growth. Without secure roots and a nurturing environment, the potential for life is stifled. This is as true for people as it is for plants.

## A planting of the Lord

Isaiah is given a vision for Israel's future, beyond exile, which he describes as 'a planting of the Lord' (v3). The people who were exiled will be the ones instrumental in the restoration of their land. Wonderfully, they will be called 'oaks of righteousness', displaying God's glory..... rebuilding and repairing the damage caused. They will help to make things right.

With the help of King of Cyrus, Nehemiah & Ezra, prophets of the return from exile, God will use the people themselves to transform a broken and hostile environment into a place where life can flourish again.

By the end of the chapter, Isaiah likens God's work with his people, to soil causing plants to sprout up – a people who are rooted and well-nurtured because of what the Lord has done. Such transformed lives bring forth praise and righteousness as a witness to the nations. They will be like jubilant plants in the field.

Does God's work in our lives cause the same reaction in us? How can we help others to flourish and be fruitful in their lives?

**Fulfilled by Jesus** In Luke's gospel, when Jesus reads this passage from Isaiah, in a synagogue in Nazareth, he is taking up the mantle of the Lord's anointed one, the one who brings good news of release, healing and hope to those who are captive, by whatever means.

He says to the congregation, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v21), and as we observe his ministry, we are left in little doubt that Jesus' actions released people from all kinds of captivity, enabling them to lead more fruitful lives.

**Conclusion** So what does this mean for us today? How might we act differently in light of Isaiah's message? Well, we can respond to the same invitation that was given to the original audience –

We can acknowledge our contribution to climate change. We can become involved, in whatever way we are able, in repairing what is broken and to help rebuild places, changing our ways of living so that others can have good places to live, where people can take root and flourish. All the good and practical work that is done within our churches, communities and throughout the world needs to be rooted in prayer to God.

## Prayer of confession

Forgiving Lord, We are sorry that we have not looked after your world as we ought, that we have neglected others while investing in our own lives, and have hoarded resources rather than shared them generously.

Help us to treat your world with the same concern that you show, and to act in ways that help other people to flourish. For the sake of your kingdom we pray, Amen.

**Hymn** StF 125 Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer     Albert Frederick Bayly

1. Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer,  
For all things living, You have made good;  
Harvest of sown fields, Fruits of the orchard,  
Hay from the mown fields, blossom and wood.

Father, providing food for your children,  
Your wisdom guiding, teaches us share  
One with another, So that, rejoicing  
With us, our brother May know your care.

2. Lord, bless the labour we bring to serve you,  
That with our neighbour we may be fed.  
Sowing or tilling, we would work with you;  
Harvesting, milling, for daily bread.

Then will your blessing Reach every people;  
Each one confessing Your gracious hand.  
When you are reigning No one will hunger:  
Your love sustaining Fruitful the land.

## Prayers for Others

When we hear the gentle sound of the rain watering the earth,  
help us to remember the thirst of those whose land is dry and those whose land is flooded.

When we feel the warmth of the Sun on our faces,  
help us to remember the plight of those locked away in darkness.

When we buy the fruit of the world's harvest,  
help us to remember the hunger of those whose basket is empty.

When we enjoy the ease of communicating around the world,  
help us to remember those who are isolated from their friends.

When we relax in times of holiday,  
help us to remember those who have to work without ceasing.

When we celebrate our blessings at harvest time,  
help us remember those who experience disaster.

May our remembering reactivate our conscience  
and result in a renewed commitment to Christ in our neighbour. Amen

## The Lord's Prayer

**Hymn** StF 51 Great is Thy faithfulness

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be

*Great is Thy faithfulness*

*Great is Thy faithfulness*

*Morning by morning new mercies I see*

*All I have needed Thy hand hath provided*

*Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me*

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest  
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above  
Join with all nature in manifold witness  
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love  
*Great is Thy faithfulness...*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow  
Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside  
*Great is Thy faithfulness...*

## Blessing & sending

Help us to live as your children, jubilant because of your justice.

Help us to be ready to share our resources so that others might flourish.

Help us to know that your love nurtures us and gives us life.

And may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Life-Giver be with us always. **Amen**