

Psalm 145: 8 – 9

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Prayer of Praise and Prayer of Confession

God of the harvest, we offer you our worship. We adore you and thank you for the beauty and the bounty of the world which you have made. God of the harvest, accept our offering of praise. Father, Son and Spirit, you are One and we are one in you.

Forgive us, for we rarely achieve such unity. We belong to a world divided by power and want. We belong to communities fragmented by fear and superficial politeness. And we ourselves are broken and incomplete, not achieving what we want, and doing the wrong we try and avoid.

We are sorry and pray for forgiveness. Listen, everyone, and hear the good news: to all who receive him, Jesus gives the power to become the children of God, and from his fullness, we shall receive grace upon grace. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn StF125

Praise and thanksgiving,
Father, we offer,
for all things living
you have made good;
harvest in sown fields,
fruits of the orchard,
hay from the mown fields,
blossom and wood.

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.

Father, providing
food for you children,
your wisdom guiding
teaches us share
one with another,
so that, rejoicing,
sister and brother
may know your care.

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.

Albert Frederick Bayly

Matthew 20: 1 – 16

Jesus said: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.

When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went.

When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.

And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around, and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.'

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received a denarius.

Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'

But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Reflection Part 1

This time of year we celebrate harvest festivals, some in the countryside where we actually see the farmers', landowners', gardeners, and labourers' produce, some in towns and cities where we bring and celebrate harvest gifts from all over the world, fruits and vegetables and other food stuffs packaged and shipped, that become part of our staple diet. We may concentrate on what is local, what is fairly traded, what are necessary basics, depending on what we have, and on what we intend to gift. More and more these days we can find that our well-intentioned donations are not appropriate because of the recipients' circumstances. For example, a packet of pasta is a good basic, but if someone has no way of cooking because of where they live, or they cannot afford fuel, it doesn't help. But we continue to do our best, to be as generous as we can, and to be as gracious as possible if we are on the receiving end, as some of us will be at some point in our lives.

Our set Gospel reading from Matthew shows us how the world could be if the God celebrated in Psalm 145 reigned. Everyone would be treated fairly, not according to circumstance or ability. In fact, those who are normally the last would be brought to the top, and those who have entitlement are moved to the bottom. It's a theme reiterated 3 times in Matthew's Gospel and again in Mark's and is perhaps most amply demonstrated on the cross as the thief beside Jesus repented and Jesus told him, 'Today you will be with me in paradise' – he received the same reward as those who had led an exemplary life.

Hymn StF 340

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
and publish abroad his wonderful name;
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol;
his kingdom is glorious, and rules over all.

God ruleth on high, almighty to save;
and still he is nigh, his presence we have;
the great congregation his triumph shall sing,
ascribing salvation to Jesus our King.

'Salvation to God who sits on the throne!
Let all cry aloud and honour the Son;
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,
fall down on their faces, and worship the Lamb.

Then let us adore, and give him his right;
all glory and power, all wisdom and might,
all honour and blessing, with angels above,
and thanks never-ceasing, and infinite love.

Charles Wesley

Reflection Part 2

I think it is right that we celebrate different seasons as those seasons come about, but I also believe it is better if we can see the year as a whole, especially the Christian year. Our Christian Year starts with Advent, then we have Christmas, Epiphany and then Lent leading to Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity. After summer we have Harvest, then All Saints and All Souls before returning to Advent. We also, as Methodists, have Covenant Services, and many churches celebrate their anniversaries, and the nation commemorates Remembrance Sunday. And so the years turn and we come to each of these festivals in their place and it anchors us in the year as much as our own birthdays and anniversaries do. But if we only celebrate or commemorate them in isolation, then we do not recognise their importance in the bigger scheme of things.

So we cannot have Easter without Lent and Holy Week, we cannot have Christmas and Epiphany without Advent, and we cannot have Harvest unless we have sown seeds, nurtured the plants and found enough people to harvest the crops.

Whether we come to the realisation sooner or later, according to Jesus, doesn't matter as long as we do. We may be believers all our lives, cradle to grave, or we may only come to believe later in life, even a deathbed conversion, but if we are sincerely in our belief and repentance, we are accepted and welcomed.

It may be that we are fortunate enough to have been brought up in a Christian family – we are the first labourers, or it may have been a realisation at school/college/university – we are the second labourers. We may have come to a belief through a toddler group in a church, or by benefitting from other activities, events, or need – the third labourers. We may have found church and a Christian belief through a difficult time in our lives, an illness, a bereavement – the fourth labourers. We may have found Jesus in our last years, the final labourers. Each of us is welcomed and accepted, because of our confession of belief, because of our good works, our labour, for the kingdom of God, for the love of Jesus.

The world needs grace and mercy, steadfast love and compassion (as stated in Psalm 145) and, although God has it in abundance, and Christ demonstrated it on earth, it stays in the past, in the pages of our Scriptures unless we embrace the Holy Spirit and carry on the work, in Jesus' name, with and for all God's children, according to the template of the Gospels. So whether you are an early riser or a late comer, we are all needed, so let us go and bring in the harvest, together, as equals in God's sight.

Hymn StF 123

Come, you thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home!
Fruit and crops are gathered in
safe before the storms begin:
God our maker will provide
for our needs to be supplied;
come, with all his people, come,
raise the song of harvest home!

All the world is God's own field.
Harvests for his praise to yield;
wheat and weeds together sown
here for 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.

For the Lord our God shall come
and shall bring his harvest home;
he himself on that great day,
worthless things shall take away,
give his angels charge at last
in the fire the weeds to cast,
but the fruitful ears to store
in his care for evermore.

Even so, Lord, quickly come –
bring your final harvest home!
Gather all your people in
free from sorrow, free from sin,
there together purified,
ever thankful at your side –
come, with all your angels, come,
bring that glorious harvest home!

Henry Alford

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God, we bring before you in prayer today all who do not share our harvest, or any harvest.

Those consumed by earthquake, landslide, volcano and hurricane...
God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Those consumed by flood, famine and crop failure...
God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Those fleeing war and violence, and those who have to stay...
God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Those who have trouble at home, through unemployment or low wages, because of illness or disability, through emotional distress, through poor housing or family breakdown...

God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

And we pray for ourselves, our fellowship, our families, where we are in difficulty, and where we long for a harvest of joy and peace.

God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bless to each of us our harvest, through your loving mercy. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 73

Fill thou my life, O Lord my God,
in every part with praise,
that my whole being may proclaim
thy being and thy ways.

Not for the lip of praise alone
nor e'en the praising heart
I ask, but for a life made up
of praise in every part:

Praise in the common things of life,
its goings out and in;
praise in each duty and each deed,
however small and mean.

Blessing

May God our creator,
who clothes the lilies and feeds the birds of the air,
bestow on us your care
and increase the harvest of our righteousness;
and may the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Fill every part of me with praise;
let all my being speak
of thee and of thy love, O Lord,
poor though I be and weak.

So shalt thou, gracious Lord, from me
receive thy glory due;
and so shall I begin on earth
the song for ever new.

So shall no part if day or night
from sacredness be free;
but all my life, in every step,
be fellowship with thee.

Horatius N Bonar

