

11 October 2020

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: Psalm 69

Hymn: CH4 229 We plough the fields and scatter

PRAYER

For food, glorious food and those who provide it

Let us praise God

For potatoes and pasta, crumbly cheese and juicy tomatoes

Let us praise God

For the smell of freshly baked bread, for butter and honey, jam and cream

Let us praise God

For colourful carrots and bendy bananas, peppers and peanuts and pears

Let us praise God

For sizzling sausages and bacon butties, for crunchy apples and seedless grapes

Let us praise God

For milk and for juice, for fish and for chips

Let us praise God

For chocolate and for biscuits, for cornflakes and toast

Let us praise God

For food, glorious food and those who provide it

Let us praise God. Amen

READING

Psalm 65

¹God, you will be praised in Jerusalem.

We will keep our promises to you.

²You hear our prayers.

All people will come to you.

³Our guilt overwhelms us.

But you forgive our sins.

⁴Happy are the people you choose.

You have them stay in your courtyards.

We are filled with good things in your house,
your holy Temple.

⁵You answer us in amazing ways,

God our Saviour.

People everywhere on the earth

and beyond the sea trust you.

⁶You made the mountains by your strength.

You have great power.

⁷You stopped the roaring seas,

the roaring waves and the uproar of the nations.

⁸Even those people at the ends of the earth fear your miracles.

You are praised from where the sun rises to where it sets.

⁹You take care of the land and water it.

You make it very fertile.

The rivers of God are full of water.

Grain grows because you make it grow.

¹⁰You cause rain to fall on the ploughed fields.

You soak them with water.

You soften the ground with rain.

And then you bless it.

¹¹ You give the year a good harvest.

You load the wagons with many crops.

¹² The desert is covered with grass.

The hills are covered with happiness.

¹³ The pastures are full of sheep.

The valleys are covered with grain.

¹⁴ Everything shouts and sings for joy.

MESSAGE

Harvest Thanksgiving. A day we set aside to say thank you to God – for the food we have to eat, for the farmers who work really hard to produce this food, for the people who work in the factories and shops where the food is packaged and distributed and eventually sold to us.

I think years and years ago, when absolutely everybody lived close to the land, it was very easy to understand why a Harvest Thanksgiving Service is so important. Because then not only the farmers, but *everybody* knew how much was involved in the whole process from seeding to harvesting, and how this is one of the ways in which God provides in our needs.

But today so many of us just go to the shops, buy what we need to eat, and then eat it without even thinking about where the food came from.

So, in order to help us understand all this, it's important for us to think out of the box!

Quite literally! (Open box and take doughnut out.)

Look at this doughnut, for example. My boys – all 3 of them – love doughnuts!

Even though I bought this doughnut in a shop, it didn't just miraculously appear on the shelves... Oh no, it came a long long way – from some seeds of grain that were planted on a farm somewhere, that grew, were harvested, milled into flour... And then yeast and sugar and milk and eggs and butter – that also all started off on farms somewhere – were added to make the batter, and then the batter was fried in oil, that also came from a farm somewhere – and finally a variety of layers of sweetness were added to the top or even inside the doughnut – and all the ingredients for *this* also originated on farms somewhere... And so on and so on. I'm sure you get the picture! And all of this of course originally started with God, who created the seeds in the first place.

So, if it wasn't for harvest time – we wouldn't have any doughnuts! Or any food, for that matter.

And that's why I've called today our "hol(e)y" harvest service" – not only because it's a WHOLE lot of fun to deliver this service with the help of all the awesome boys and girls in our congregations, but also because God, the creator of all the earth, is HOLY and he deserves all our praise and thanksgiving.

And ALSO because a doughnut has a HOLE in the middle!

Because Harvest time makes us think about holes...

That hole you sometimes have in your tummy, when you are really hungry, can be filled by the food that was harvested!

The harvest also fills the holes in the economy – we can import and export all kinds of harvested produce to keep our country going.

But the hole I would like to focus on today, is the HOLE people can sometimes have in their lives.

Do you know what I am talking about? When you feel empty, as if something is missing in your life... Now THAT hole, can only be filled by God.

Long ago, through the cross of Jesus, God made us all, and the whole broken world, hole again.

And then, after Jesus was resurrected and went back to God in heaven, God sent us the HOLY Spirit to make sure that there is no longer a gap between us and him.

So although all this means that we shouldn't ever feel as if there is a hole in our lives, our circumstances can still sometimes get the better of us and make us feel as if we are broken – but in times like that we need to remember where we came from.

Just like a yummy doughnut started off as a tiny seed from the hand of God, God made all of us too, with his own hands, and he will never let go of us.

And the more we are aware of that, the smaller the holes in our lives will become. Because then we will understand that our lives don't have to be perfect in order to be good.

In Psalm 69 we are reminded how wonderful God is. The author says:

⁹ You take care of the land and water it.

You make it very fertile.

The rivers of God are full of water.

Grain grows because you make it grow.

¹⁰ You cause rain to fall on the ploughed fields.

You soak them with water.

You soften the ground with rain.

And then you bless it.

¹¹ You give the year a good harvest.

You load the wagons with many crops.

¹² The desert is covered with grass.

The hills are covered with happiness.

¹³ The pastures are full of sheep.

The valleys are covered with grain.

Harvest Thanksgiving is about standing in the presence of God, like the author of this Psalm did, hearing how all of creation is shouting out with joy!

My favourite line in this Psalm is: The hills are covered with happiness!

Just like the fields are covered with crops, the hills are covered with happiness.

In Old Testament times the people believed that they were closer to God when they were on a hill. And to me this line means that the closer I am to God, the happier I will be.

So if you have any kind of hole in your life – if anything is missing, if anything is wrong, if anything makes you sad and upset; if you are longing for more than you have – just go to God, and he will fill this hole with his love. And this will naturally lead to happiness.

So let us praise God today for taking such good care of us – for food on our plates and love in our hearts, and let's do this ALWAYS, because God's love for us is sweeter than the sweetest thing we can find on earth.

Amen

HYMN

CH4 229:1-3

We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand;
he sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine
and soft refreshing rain.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above,
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord*

for all his love.

He only is the maker
of all things near and far;
he paints the wayside flower,
he lights the evening star;
the winds and waves obey him,
by him the birds are fed;
much more to us his children,
he gives our daily bread.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above,
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for all his love.*

We thank you, then, O Father,
for all things bright and good,
the seed-time and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food:
accept the gifts we offer
for all your love imparts;
with what we know you long for:
our humble, thankful hearts.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above,
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for all his love.*