

Harvest Festival

Order of Service

Welcome

Welcome to our Harvest Service. Wherever you are, near or far, you are most welcome. My name is Mark Poole and I am the curate of this benefice of Rural East York, serving the villages and communities Holtby, Warthill, Stockton on the Forest and Dunnington.

May I just start by saying a huge thank you to those of you who sent video, audio and messages of congratulations and warmest wishes following my ordination a week last Friday in York Minster. It was a lovely surprise and I have cherished all that you said. It was the icing on the cake to a joyous weekend of celebrations!

So, let us pray as we enter into worship together.

In the fading of the summer sun,
the shortening of days, cooling breeze,
swallows' flight and moonlight rays.
We see the creator's hand and we praise you.

In the browning of leaves once green,
morning mists, autumn chill,
fruit that falls, frost's first kiss.
We see the creator's hand and we praise you.

For the promise of harvest contained within a seed,
For the oak tree within an acorn.
The bread within a grain.
The apple within a pip.
The mystery of nature, gift wrapped for us to sow,
We see the creator's hand and we praise you.

Creator God, forgive our moments of ingratitude,
the spiritual blindness that prevents us
from appreciating the wonder that is this world,
the endless cycle of nature,
of life and death and rebirth.
Forgive us for taking without giving,
reaping without sowing.
Open our eyes to see you,
our lips to praise,
our hands to share.
May our feet tread lightly on the path we tread
and our footsteps be worthy of following,
for they lead to you.
Amen.

Hymn: We plough the fields

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 wind and waves obey him,
by him the birds are fed;
much more to us, his children,
he gives our daily bread.

We thank thee, 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 thy love imparts,
and, what thou most desirest,
our humble, thankful hearts.

Prayers of preparation

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land,
a land with flowing streams,
with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills,
a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates,
a land of olive trees and honey,
a land where you may eat bread without scarcity,
where you will lack nothing,
a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper.
You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you.

What is harvest festival for us?

Churches filled with offerings of vegetables and fruit;
meals together, baked potatoes, apple pie;
evenings of entertainment;
a celebration of all the earth has given, before she settles into her winter's sleep.

This year, we give thanks, but our exile is not entirely over and our celebrations are at a distance.
This year, we are grateful for all we daily receive, and mindful of all that is lost.
This year, any illusion of self-reliance is blown away with the falling leaves.

Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.'
But remember the Lord your God,
for it is he who gives you power to get wealth,
so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

We still our minds: we turn to the Lord, in whose hands our future and our past rest secure.
In our lamentation and our joy, woven together, God's love is seen.
In our unity and separation, we are one, brothers and sisters in the risen Christ.

We turn to God, who calls us and waits for us, who runs to us and welcomes us.

Where we have despaired, and lost sight of your love.
Lord, have mercy.

Where we have given way to anger, and not loved our neighbour as ourselves.
Christ, have mercy.

Where we have been wasteful, and forgotten your care for your whole creation.
Lord, have mercy.

Collect

Eternal God,
you crown the year with your goodness
and you give us the fruits of the earth in their season:
grant that we may use them to your glory,
for the relief of those in need and for our own well-being;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

Gospel reading

Luke 12:16-30

Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."

But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!

And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them.

Homily

Hello. I'm Nicky, a worshipper in the benefice and project leader at Carecent. As almost everyone will know, Carecent is a breakfast centre for people in need in York: those experiencing homeless or general social exclusion of any kind.

Every year, the benefice is really generous in its support of Carecent, and we're grateful to you for that. Obviously, this year has been different for everyone, and very different for us here at Carecent.

We haven't been able to run our usual café service six mornings a week and we had to decide what to do to carry on reaching people in need. So what we have done is we've been delivering packed lunches: first of all, to people in hotels who were housed and kept off the streets during the first lockdown. As time has gone by those people have reduced, although they have been cared for and no-one has gone straight back on the streets.

But we've had a growing number of people coming to the gate each day to collect a packed lunch and now, that's what we're doing.

A Carecent packed lunch is exactly what you would expect if you were going on a school trip. It's a filled roll, a carton of juice, some fruit, a packet of crisps and a chocolate biscuit, all in a lovely brown paper bag.

Obviously, this new way of doing things is not the same. We've lost a lot of the community that is so important at Carecent. We don't gather to cook together any more, we don't gather to play games, and giving out lunches at the church steps doesn't give us the same opportunity to spend time with people and to talk to them.

But all is not lost. Several of the customers have said that they appreciate that we've kept the community going and if they feel the community is still going then we have achieved something. It's frustrating, but just as with everything else in life, we have faith that we will get through it and in the meantime, we just need to keep going as best we can.

This harvest time, we're not asking for our usual requests of cans, and cereal, and all of the list which is so traditional from Carecent at this time of year. In order to work flexibly, we have decided to ask this year for donations of money. That's a tricky thing to ask for at harvest time: I've found it quite awkward. But it is what we need and we believe that it's the best way of getting support for Carecent this harvest time.

These past few months at Carecent have been really frustrating. Before lockdown happened, we had established two social afternoons per week and were about to launch a third. These were a brilliant way of

working with people, alongside them. Not just doing things for them, but really doing things with them and being with them. We were establishing a real sense of community.

And then it all stopped.

A hymn that I have really come to love is “Brother, sister, let me serve you.” The first two lines are pretty straightforward. “Brother, sister, let me serve you... let me be as Christ to you.” That’s not so hard, is it? It’s nice to do things for people and lovely to be needed. But the hymn carries on: “Pray that I may have the strength to let you be my servant too.” That’s certainly somewhere where I struggle. That’s not always so easy to relinquish control, to say that you’re going to learn from someone else.

In a way, it was as if we’d sown the seeds for one harvest, but got something completely different as a result. It was, and is, months of giving out sandwiches. Instead of feeling like we’re making progress, it’s been months of wondering if we’re doing the right thing, if we’re keeping people safe, if we’re doing enough.

So where’s God in that? Where is God when you long for one thing, but the reality is very different?

What I’m learning at the moment is that things are as they are, and that if the things we were expecting don’t happen – if we don’t get the harvest that we’re expecting – then God is in what we get instead.

And that’s true of Carecent at the moment. God is in the volunteers, those who are still able to help out and those who have had to stay away but who have sent messages of support and donations, and have prayed. God is in the new volunteers who have come forward to help us at a time of crisis.

God is in all the people who have sent donations and messages of goodwill.

And of course, God is in the customers, who are blessed with more optimism and resilience than I will ever have, and whose gratitude and encouragement have made, and continue to make, all the frustration and uncertainty worthwhile.

Today’s Gospel reading reminds us that we cannot be certain of what the future holds, and it tells us not to worry.

That’s all very well, but worrying things happen, and worrying is a very human thing to do. The important thing is not to let our worries consume us, not to let go of our hope. And hope isn’t just a blind optimism that everything will be alright in the end. Hope is the ability to see things how they are and to bear them in the knowledge that God knows us and knows what we need and that we can trust in that. And safe in that knowledge, we are given a bit of breathing space.

So my prayer for us all this week is that we will find that breathing space amongst our busyness and our uncertainties and our worries. Space to see the things – maybe only tiny things – that are beautiful and joyful and life-giving. Space to consider the lilies.

Amen.

Prayers

Let us pray

O God of our salvation,
O hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.

In your strength you set fast the mountains
and are girded about with might.
You still the raging of the seas,
the roaring of their waves
and the clamour of the peoples.

Those who dwell at the ends of the earth
tremble at your marvels;
the gates of the morning and evening sing your praise.

Lord God, you send your blessings upon us.
You visit the earth and water it; you make it very plenteous.
And yet, like a grief, the pandemic dominates our lives.

We pray for those who are most affected:
those who are sick and those mourn,
those struggling to recover,
the lonely, isolated and scared,
those whose livelihoods are at risk;
those whose physical and mental health has been damaged over these months.

May they know that you are with all who suffer,
that you walk beside them, to strengthen them,
and to give them hope and peace.

Grant wisdom, strength and patience to all who are working
to find a path through our predicament.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

The river of God is full of water;
you prepare grain for your people,
for so you provide for the earth.

You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges;
you soften the ground with showers and bless its increase.

This year has shown us that the people society rewards,
are not the same as the people society needs.
But you Lord, love all, equally and infinitely.

Help us, your redeemed children, to greet all as our brother and sister,
to serve and be served in our turn. To give, and to receive.
To see Christ in the outcast, the poor, the refugee;
those separated from us by distance or politics,
those who are too close, and those who are too far.

Open our eyes, Lord, and quicken us to strive for a fairer world.
May the pastures of the wilderness flow with goodness
and the hills be girded with joy.
May the meadows be clothed with flocks of sheep
and the valleys stand so thick with corn
that they shall laugh and sing.

We pray for those who are denied the blessings of a fruitful earth,
for those who suffer in themselves, for the greed and wastefulness of us all.
The shrinking rivers, the empty lakes; the burning trees;
the fertile soil replaced with dust;
as these affect first the poorest and most vulnerable,
and then the affluent and those who thought themselves secure;
grant us a vision of a new future.

A future that values every person, every creature, every plant.
A future where fairness is the air we breathe,
where honesty is the grass beneath our feet,
and love for all, the sun which warms and gives us light.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, as we seek to bring about your kingdom, to renew your creation,
grant that our path be guided by our eternal home,
where the saints have gone before:
that new heaven and new earth,
where mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
where they have no need of sun or moon,
for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen

And so we say together:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen

Hymn: You shall go out with joy

You shall go out with joy
and be led forth with peace,
and the mountains and the hills

shall break forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy
and the trees of the field
shall clap, shall clap their hands.

And the trees of the fields shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the fields shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the fields shall clap their hands,
and you'll go out with joy.

Blessing

Thank you to all of you who have worked so hard to bring this service together today, and for your generosity in supporting our harvest charity, Carecent. Also, thank you for all your harvest and autumn pictures. You've been so generous, that we'll be using more of them in future services.

Next week, our service's theme will be "God's kingdom is like a banquet." If you have any photos of yourselves enjoying food, we would love to receive them.

Let's ask for God's blessing.

May the Lord bless you and keep you,
may he make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,
may the broad expanse of God's love,
and the abundance of his riches in glory,
shape your perspective on your own life and needs,
including the things which disappoint you.
May the eyes of your heart be open to all the blessings which surround you,
may this awareness produce a harvest of generosity in your spirit.
May thankfulness rise up within you,
not just during this short harvest season, but day after day,
from the early morning until you retire for the night.
May your prayers reflect gratitude,
whilst also acknowledging the needs of others
whose situations are so drastically different.
May thoughts of Jesus fill your mind
and hunger for God drive your soul,
and love for the Lord guide your speech and your actions,
and finally, may grace, peace and the love of the triune God,
protect, defend and empower you,
for all that awaits you in his service.

Amen.