

LANGBANK PARISH CHURCH



HARVEST THANKSGIVING SERVICE

4 October 2020

**Gather the First fruits of the early harvest.
Then, put the basket down in the Lord's presence
and worship there.
Be grateful for the good things
that the Lord your God has given you and your family;
and let the ministers and the foreigners who live among you
join in the celebration.”**

Let us pray,

Gracious God,
We praise you for all you give us
in every season of the year
but today we praise you for Autumn
for the vibrancy of its colours
the freshness of its air
- for harvest safely gathered in.

Loving Father,
In generous love, you created a world
which is truly bright and beautiful...
abundant in life and rich in diversity.
Help us to learn before it is too late
that we are not the owners,
but merely the stewards of creation

It is YOU, who feeds the ravens,
YOU who marks the fall of a sparrow
for your fatherly care
is over all things.

Forgive us for the times when we are tempted
to think that we are somehow
above and beyond your created world,
disconnected from the ground beneath our feet
and others who walk this earth with us.

Help us to care for the lives all your creatures,
Open our eyes to the riches
you have so freely given,
and help us to look after them
for future generations to enjoy.

Lord, as we give thanks this Harvest
for the fruit of our lives,
we also remember where we have fallen short
of the ideals of your kingdom....
where weeds have grown up
amongst the good you have planted in us.
Forgive us for taking your love for granted
in so many ways,
for, even in this time of uncertainty,
we are greatly blessed.

Help us to live fairly, and treat the earth gently,
that the whole world might thrive
and cry GLORY to your Name.

*We ask these things in Jesus name
who taught us to pray together, saying,*

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory, for ever. Amen

We praise God now in the words of our great Harvest hymn.....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWHMZsf-Ano&t=39s>

We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the ground
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.

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.

READING – Ruth Chapter 2 [abridged]

Our Harvest Reading is taken again this week from the Book of Ruth, which is, at first glance, a Love Story, set in Old Testament times. Last week, at the end of Ch 1, we left Ruth, a young Moabite widow and her mother-in-law, Naomi, walking the road from Moab to Judea having left their old life behind. Today they have arrived in Naomi's home town of Bethlehem, where they hope to settle, among Naomi's relatives.



Now, Naomi had a relative by marriage, a man both prominent and rich. His name was Boaz. One day Ruth, said to Naomi,

“Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind some harvester who will treat me kindly”

Naomi said, “Go, my daughter.”

So, she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. And it happened that she came to the part of the field owned by Boaz. Just then, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and greeted his harvesters,

“THE LORD be with you!”

They answered, “The LORD bless you!”

Boaz asked his foreman, “Who is this young woman?”

The foreman said,

“Why, that's the Moabite girl, the one who came with Naomi from the country of Moab. She's been on her feet from early morning, until now.”

Then Boaz said to Ruth:

“Listen, my daughter. Stay in my field to glean. Watch where my young women are harvesting and follow behind them. The young men will not bother you - and if you get thirsty, go and drink from my vessels.”

Ruth dropped to her knees, then bowed her face to the ground.

“Why should pick me out and treat me so kindly—me, a foreigner?”

But Boaz answered her,

“All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know.

GOD reward you well for what you have done—and may you have a full reward from the Lord under whose wings you seek protection.”

She said, “May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me like one of your own and spoken to me with kindness.”

At lunchtime, Boaz said to Ruth,

“Come over here; eat some bread. Dip it in the wine.”

So, she joined the harvesters. Boaz passed the roasted grain to her. She ate her fill and even had some left over.

When she went back to work, Boaz ordered his servants:

“Let her glean where there is plenty on the ground—make it easy for her. Better still, pull some of the best Barley out of the sheaves and leave it for her to glean.”

Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. When she threshed out what she had gathered, she had nearly a full sack of Barley!

When she got back, Naomi was astonished

“Whose field did you glean today? GOD bless he who took such good care of you!”

And Ruth answered, “His name is Boaz.”

Naomi cried,

“God bless his name, for the Lord has taken care of us.

And Boaz is one of our nearest kin!”

And she said to Ruth

“It is better that you stay with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field.”

So Ruth stayed close to the other young women, gleaning in Boaz’ field by day, until the Barley and the Wheat were gathered in.

REFLECTION

Christmas Holidays 1962. I was 14 and a half. My friend, who still had links with Glasgow, proposed we joined a Dancing Class in Byres Road and our mums said, 'OK'.

So, off we went, and as we stumbled through the Slow Foxtrot and the Quickstep I was smitten by a boy with the bluest eyes, the blondest hair and the whitest teeth I'd ever seen.

Now, my big brother and I were having a New Year party and, as my parents put us through the usual investigations, I slipped in that I wanted to ask a boy from the Dancing Class. Mum said, "Oh yes, dear, who's that?"

Well, I gave his name and, without missing a beat, my Dad said, "that must be Bill and Mary's boy".

SILENCE

....It did indeed turn out to be Bill and Mary's boy - no longer my handsome stranger, but my second cousin! I wondered ruefully, if there was anyone in the West of Scotland that my parents DIDN'T know!

Extended families have always been the backbone of Judaism too. Nothing was more important than 'Family', so - for Naomi to hear that Ruth had been so graciously received by Boaz was beyond good!!

First, it affirmed their status in the community as 'family' of the richest landowner in the area..... And, second..... well... Harvest was always a time for Boys & Girls to meet – and you never know what more might become of it!

Boaz had certainly noticed Ruth.... but he wasn't just chatting her up. He'd been genuinely impressed by the way she had sacrificed her own interests to stand by his elderly relative. He also understood that, as a young widow, and as a foreigner, she was vulnerable to abuse and went out of his way to help her. A really sensitive touch was the way he quietly told his foreman to ensure she left the field with extra Barley.

If the theme of chapter 1 was Ruth's Faithfulness, this week focusses on the Kindness and Generosity of the Lord of the Harvest.

In Boaz' every thought and action there is an abundance of goodness.

And, after lunch, when Ruth has eaten her fill of roasted grain, and there is still some left over.....

it surely reminds us of Jesus, feeding the 5000 out Five small Barley Loaves and Two Fishes and still having much left over.

Thirteen hundred years separate the two scenes – yet it is the same LORD, who provides for everyone, and always has more to spare.

Many Old Testament stories, are set in hungry times, where famine was the main reason for migration. It was, for instance, a Famine in Bethlehem which had driven Naomi and her husband to Moab in the first place. People have always moved from places of poverty to places of plenty and they have always struggled to live with dignity as foreigners in a strange land.

The journeys of God's people, were never easy and it was their faith in God's providing - and their adherence to the Law that helped them develop into a civilised society long before their neighbours.....
a Society that (at least officially) welcomed strangers, administered justice, and protected the poor.

Yet, as their writers knew, and as we know too, civilisation is only ever skin deep. We constantly struggle in our morality here – in our time as much as in any!

There are more people than ever in this country who cannot feed themselves.... and this week's bizarre suggestions as to what to do with Asylum Seekers suggests that parts of our society are in danger of forgetting the dignity due to every human being.

Because of the precariousness of life, and of the tendency for people to concentrate on their own best interests, the Harvest Liturgy was enshrined in the Law, as detailed in Deuteronomy. God's People were never to forget where they came from. They were never to forget who sustained their lives, and who had the right to depend on them.

Each year at their Harvest Service, they were to bring to the Lord the First Fruits of the Harvest. Then they were to all recite together:

'My ancestor was a wandering Aramean,
who took his family to Egypt to live.

They were few in number when they went there,

but they became a large and powerful nation.
The Egyptians treated us harshly
and forced us to work as slaves.
Then we cried out for help to the LORD,
and He heard us and saw our suffering,
And by his great power and strength, he rescued us from Egypt.”

At Harvest we're asked to remember that 'We're a' Jock Tamson's bairns' – all God's children. At Harvest, we're asked to remember that all we have in this world is a Gift from God – and those of us who have much must share with those who have little.

The Foreigners, the Fatherless and the Widows are NOT to be left out.....
for, according to the Law a tenth of the crop must go to them, that the poor in the towns should not starve. The lesson is clear.

Today, in our own way, we honour this ancient commitment to share the Harvest by bringing our Harvest Gifts for those who have very little. Later, Graham will take them all up to the Glasgow City Mission – where they will probably not stay on the shelves for long.

Poverty and Xenophobia are two challenges which are seemingly always with us. But there is also now a NEW vulnerability – one we have been blind to for far too long.... and that is the sustainability of the Earth itself.

Boaz left the edges of fields uncut, so the poor could glean. In our lifetime even hedgerows have been removed from the edges of fields - and with them the Birds and the Bees. And, in the extinction of our Pollinators lie the seeds of our own future starvation!

Harvest, above all, reminds us of our place in the wider scheme of God's Creation and of our interdependence with all life. This is a day to rejoice, and also a day to be humbly and truly thankful.

Amen, thanks be to God.

PRAYERS OF DEDICATION & INTERCESSION

Lord, we bring to you this Harvest

Food for Nurture

and money to be used for the good of your world.

Give us generous hearts always...

For, by sharing ALL our gifts

the hungry can be fed

the homeless given shelter

and your Kingdom built, in our time and place.

And now, we offer our prayers for others

Lord of the Harvest,

We pray for everyone whose daily existence

is dependent on the land or on the sea.

We bring before you

- those who struggle to make a meagre living
from a famished and drought-ridden earth;

- those who are made Refugees
through the scorching of Earth
the felling of Forests

and the damming of Rivers

and forced to live as strangers in foreign lands.

We bring before you

all those who produce the food that we eat
sometimes at great personal cost,
and we pledge ourselves to Fair Trade.

We pray, too, for Farmers and Fishermen here in Britain,

concerned about what the outcome of Brexit
will do their Industries.

Give us compassion and understanding

which moves beyond our own dismay
whenever prices rise in our shops.

**We pray for the Glasgow City Mission
for those who give of their time
and those who receive the help they offer.
We remember people in our own locality too,
who struggle to make ends meet.
and fear for the future.**

Father,

We pray too, for peace of heart
for those in our own congregation
who are unable to be with us this morning
because of frailty of mind or body.

Be with them in their vulnerability
and strengthen all who help them.

We ask your blessing on Rona
as she undergoes surgery in Inverclyde Royal
and on Margaret, as she recuperates at home.

**We bring them before you, quietly, now...
together with any that we know and love,
who need your blessing in their lives just now...**

**Lord, hear our prayers
and let our cry come unto you, *Amen***

INTIMATIONS

- 1) The General Assembly, which was cancelled in May took place online over this Friday afternoon and Saturday. It was one of the best kept secrets of the Church's year, and I was unable to catch much of it. However, the Church of Scotland website has the Reports of the Committees posted, and no doubt the result of voting.
- 2) The Church Recipe Book, 'Stir Crazy' will be on sale again after the service, price £7.50 each, or 2 for £14. If you do want to buy one, please remain seated until the majority have left the church. At that point, Mary will move towards the Main Door and you can approach her one at a time on your way out.

Likewise, anyone wishing to speak to me – please wait in your seat until the church has emptied and then we will then find a space to speak safely.

**We end our Harvest Service by remembering
that it is God alone who sustains our lives...**

For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbBUFSOkbdM>

For the fruits of all creation
Thanks be to God
For these gifts to every nation
Thanks be to God
For the ploughing, sowing, reaping
Silent growth while we are sleeping
Future needs in earth's safe-keeping
Thanks be to God.
In the just reward of labour
God's will is done
In the help we give our neighbour
God's will is done
In our world-wide task of caring
For the hungry and despairing
In the harvest we are sharing
God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit
Thanks be to God
For the good we all inherit
Thanks be to God
For the wonders that astound us
For the truths that still confound us
Most of all that love has found us
Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTION

**May the Lord of the Harvest
gift you with Generosity.**

May your hands and hearts be always open.

**And the blessing of God Almighty
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you and all whom you love
now and evermore.**

Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xR9M8lu97o8>

May the god of peace go with us
As we travel from this place
May the love of Jesus keep us
Firm in hope and full of grace.