



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS – 4 October 2020



## Harvest

### Introduction

Dear all,

Welcome to our Sunday Reflections on this Harvest Festival. May the Lord bless you and keep you.

Can I again request, that you, if it is safe for you and others to do so, share these reflections with anyone who might enjoy them, either through the post or by leaving this document at the doorstep and that you remind your friends of our online and telephone services

Please join me now in our weekly reflection

The Bible says:

While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter and day and night Shall not cease.” (Ex 8.22)

## **Prayer**

Gracious God,

We come to you as one body of Christ, as your church united by faith in you and in your son Jesus Christ. We come to you with gratitude and trust because you bind us together with an unbreakable bond, you bind us to yourself, to your son and to each other. Help us to live in the unity of faith as brothers and sisters of Christ, we pray.

We give you thanks that we can again worship you together in your house, that we can pray together and hear your word together, experience not only your love but fellowship with each other and with all of Christianity, we thank you that during times of turmoil and tribulation you have bound us together with Christians from all over the world.

We give you thanks for your son Jesus Christ, who taught us to love you above all else and our neighbour as we love ourselves, who set his example of love and compassion in word and in action, who sat with tax collectors and sinners, who gave his life for us all, so we are redeemed from our sins.

We give you thanks for your holy spirit through which we are bound together with you and with each other in unity of faith, through which we find strength in unity to live through pain and turmoil in times like these.

Gracious Father,

So much has changed in our lives and sometimes it is difficult to find strength and hope and trust in you when our lives are full of uncertainty and fear, of pain and worry. Help us find certainty and hope in you, we pray.

So much has changed in our world and sometimes it is difficult to see our neighbour, to see those who are suffering because we are caught

up in our own troubles and strife. Help us see each other with compassion and love, we pray.

Gracious God,

We know we are imperfect in your eyes, but we also know that we do not need to be perfect, because your son carries our failures and our sins for us and in this knowledge we pray to you in our hearts. AMEN

Lord's Prayer

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 today 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 and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

## READINGS

### *Lesson 1: Psalm 105, 1-6*

Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. <sup>2</sup>Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. <sup>3</sup>Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. <sup>4</sup>Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. <sup>5</sup>Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, <sup>6</sup>you his servants, the descendants of Abraham, his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.

### *Lesson 2: Matthew 20, 1-16*

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup>He agreed to pay them a denarius<sup>[a]</sup> for the day and sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup>“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. <sup>4</sup>He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ <sup>5</sup>So they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup>About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’<sup>7</sup> “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’<sup>8</sup> “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ <sup>9</sup>“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup>So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup>When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. <sup>12</sup>‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

<sup>13</sup>“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? <sup>14</sup>Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. <sup>15</sup>Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

<sup>16</sup>“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

## *Reflection*

### *Harvest 2020*

Today we would have celebrated harvest, the communion table would have been decorated, we would have had our harvest meal in the hall and we would have been planning another special messy church, one of the most enjoyable of the year – or that is what I think, at any rate. Nothing of this is happening this year. The table is bare and we have to make do with what we have at home for a harvest festival, entertain the children as best we can. This year is different, not what we would have expected or anticipated at our last harvest festival a year ago. It sounds bleak and sad; it sounds a bit unfair. Why do we have to forego what we loved and were used to? Why do we have to change our life so drastically? There is no doubt that our lives have changed beyond recognition.

But does different really have to mean bleak, does different have to mean sad? We have found other ways to communicate, even to celebrate together these days. We meet up online and in our bubbles and the contact is all the more special because it is much rarer, the internet has many tips of how to celebrate harvest covid style and we have become creative in making the best of a life that has changed radically. There is much to be thankful for and that is after all the purpose of harvest: to give thanks for what we have.

I do not want to deny the challenges and difficulties that have come with a changed lifestyle, the sense of loss and regret, but I do feel there are chances and opportunities, as well, chances and opportunities for us as Christians. Change, after all should come naturally to us, Jesus life and teachings after all is all about changing our life, our lifestyle, Jesus teaching has turned the world as people knew it upside down. And that was not easy.

## *Harvest in the Vineyard*

Our New Testament reading is a prime example. The owner of a vineyard invites workers to bring in the harvest for him at different times of the day from early in the morning to the late afternoon. In the evening he calls all his labourers together and pays everyone the same – one denarius, or in the words of our reading “whatever is right”. So far so good. The wage is fair, maybe even generous, it is in any case what the workers had expected. What they have not expected is that everyone is paid the same, that those who came in the afternoon get exactly what everyone else gets. And the workers do not find that easy, find it unfair, and they grumble: <sup>12</sup> ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ And maybe we can understand them: It is not what we are used to either, that those who do the same work for fewer hours get paid the same. If it happened to us, maybe we would have felt undervalued as well as cheated out of our fair share of the profit.

And yet, the landowner points out that his decisions may be unusual, but they are not unfair and he asks: “Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

The workers are asked to change their perspective, their perception, and that is a challenge. Their idea of what is fair and what is right is radically questioned. Their attitude towards their co-workers is challenged. And that is the real difficulty: it is not that they got less than expected or were treated unfairly or cruelly, it is not that the owner of the vineyard was not within his rights to do with his money what he likes: but the workers are forced to see things differently, are asked to take on a perspective of generosity and grace instead of the perception of fairness and justice they are used to. They do not have to like it, but they have to accept it. There is nothing they can do about

it, but to grumble. And when all is said and done, what is the point of that? They may as well be grateful for what they have got: a day's work and a fair wage.

### *Harvest and Gratitude*

Today's reading is often used to illustrate God's grace and generosity towards the least of our brothers and sisters and that is true enough, this is what we believe. But today, right here and now, at harvest time 2020, maybe we need to hear something different: maybe this year we need to learn how to be grateful for what we have, despite our pain and sorrow, despite the challenges of isolation, despite the changes we have to accept, despite all that seems unfair to us: Maybe this year, this harvest we need to learn how to change our perspective, our perception from what we have lost, from what we missed out on to what we still have, from the food on our table to the love of our families and most importantly, to God's presence with us.

I believe that this perspective has helped God's people from the beginning of His time with us; has helped them survive in adversity and danger, in war and exile: gratitude for what God has given to His people, gratitude for what he has promised. God's people never had an easy life, and yet they could sing: "Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name. make known among the nations what he has done <sup>2</sup>Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts". They could do so, because this gratitude for what they had, this song of praise gave them strength and hope, gave them faith in their God, a God who would never leave them or forsake them and this strength, this hope, this faith was essential to their survival.

And maybe we can learn from that, learn from God's people who praised him, who sang to him in times of turmoil and danger, despite all that life has thrown at them. Because they knew that God was with them, because they knew what God has given to them. And that, I

believe is true for us, too: Whatever life has in store for us, whatever may happen to us: God is with us, God will not leave us, God has given us wonderful things, and that is a reason for worship, that is a reason for song and for praise, that is a reason for gratitude, even in times like ours and this is what harvest is all about. AMEN

## PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Gracious God,

We give you thanks for the hope and faith you have given to us, hope and faith that gives us strength to weather difficult and tumultuous times, hope and faith that helps us weather any storm and gives us certainty in uncertain times. And in offering our gratitude to you we remember in prayer those for whom hope is hard to find.

We will always remember in prayer those who live in war torn and unstable regions of this world, for all who grieve for friends and families, for all who lost everything they had, for all who have fled their country, their home to spend a desolate life in refugee camps or are desperate enough to dare the perilous journey across the sea into an uncertain future.

In your mercy, hear our prayers

We will continue to pray for all who are in the grip of a worldwide pandemic, for all who are at the mercy of the coronavirus, for those who battle the disease in hospitals and ICUs, for those who worry for relatives they cannot see and cannot comfort, for those who are vulnerable and live in fear, for all who are isolated and alone

In your mercy, hear our prayers

We pray for the young people in our towns and cities, deprived of the social contact they need, caught out in student halls and



universities, uncertain on how they can access the support of home and family, who have imagined their first year of independence quite differently, have been looking forward to a year of excitement and new experiences

In your mercy, hear our prayers

We will never cease to pray for all who suffer in our congregation and in our community, for all who are lonely and bereaved, for all who are ill and frail, at home, in care homes or in hospitals, for all who care for someone they love, for all who miss friends and family again under new lockdown rules

In your mercy, hear our prayer

For all this we pray in Jesus name, AMEN

## Benediction

And the God of justice guard you and guide you in this coming week. And the almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore.  
AMEN