

A service at home for 14th June 2020

Prepared by Rev'd Geoff Scarlett

Theme: The harvest is ready

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.

Jubilate version of STF 99

1 All creatures of our God and king,
lift up your voice and with us sing
Alleluia, alleluia!
Bright burning sun with golden beam,
soft shining moon with silver gleam,
*O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

2 Swift rushing wind so wild and strong,
white clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, alleluia!
New rising dawn in praise rejoice,
you lights of evening find a voice;
O praise him ...

3 Cool flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for your Lord to hear,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Fierce fire so masterful and bright
giving to us both warmth and light,
O praise him ...

4 Earth ever fertile, day by day
bring forth your blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia!
All fruit and crops that richly grow,
all trees and flowers God's glory show;
O praise him ...

5 People and nations, take your part,
love and forgive with all your heart;
Alleluia, alleluia!
All who long pain and sorrow bear,
trust God and cast on him your care;
O praise him ...

Let all things their Creator bless
And worship him in lowliness,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three-in-One,
O praise him ...

St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)

Jubilate version by David Peacock, Ralph Vaughan Williams,
and William Henry Draper

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Prayer

God, our Creator and Provider,

Thank you for the food, which we get from the shops or which is delivered to our door.

Thanks for the checkout staff and delivery people, and the services they provide.

Thank you for our phones, laptops and other means of keeping in touch, and bless all who work in the communications industry.

Thank you for gardens, parks and other open spaces we can enjoy and bless those who look after our natural environment.

Thank you for your spiritual gifts, especially the love and hope we find in Jesus. We praise your holy name for your gift to us of your Son and his living presence with us now.

Forgive us, when we have become impatient with the lockdown and turned inwards on ourselves.

Forgive us, when we have neglected to think of others and care for them.

Forgive us, if our faith has faltered.

Thank you, Father, that for the sake of Jesus you forgive us and by your Holy Spirit you cleanse and refresh us for further service. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Matthew 9,35 – 10 8

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^[a] drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Reflection

How do we view people? That can be an awkward question! In normal circumstances we meet many different people on any one day. What do we think of them? Do we love them or dislike them? Praise them or criticise them? Ignore them or value them? Jesus met many people in the course of his ministry as he ventured into city and countryside, went to synagogue and shared meals with others -- he met religious leaders and felt anger and sorrow at their stubbornness, tax-collectors whom he challenged, the sick whom he healed, and an adulteress whom he forgave. But behind any words he said, behind any actions he took, was a deep, underlying compassion, that he gives voice to here: ‘.. he had compassion on them.. harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd’. The crowds were betrayed by their religious leaders, oppressed by Roman invaders and worn down by the circumstances of their lives. Jesus understands how they feel. He has a deep, heartfelt and genuine compassion for them all. Do we see people around us as ‘lost sheep’? Here is Jesus’ challenge to look at our own lives and ask him to give us more of his compassion for those in need.

What do we pray for? Jesus feels compassion, but he doesn’t leave it there. He takes action and, first of all, he urges his followers to pray. They are to pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he would send out workers to gather his harvest in. It reminds me of a recent appeal by British farmers for workers to come to their fields and harvest their fruit and veg, before it goes to waste. Jesus sees so many in need. He can’t reach them all, so he enlists his disciples to pray for more recruits.

But is there also a broad hint, that this is work the disciples will soon be engaged in themselves? Sometimes we say, ‘Someone should do that. Why doesn’t someone say something?’. We say this in the presence of others, with the hope that they’ll take the hint! But veiled hints can be counter-productive and can rebound on us, so others in the room may say, ‘Why don’t you do something about it yourself?’. The disciples can’t say that to Jesus, because he’s already doing some harvesting.

As the disciples hear this and receive instructions from Jesus later, it might come as a shock to them. ‘Me, Lord? You want me to help you? Hey, fellow disciples, he trusts us, he’s relying on us!’. What a tremendous privilege that is. And that offer, that privilege is extended to us as his disciples today. If we think we’re not up to it, consider the twelve men Jesus initially chose for the task. Matthew lists them. Some are well-known to us, some obscure. A motley bunch -- rather like us! Why were they chosen? I suggest not for any gifts or skills they already had, but because Jesus sees the potential in them. And he sees the same potential in us, so he says, ‘Will you come and help me?’.

How to speak up? I love to look out in the countryside and see a farmer harvesting the grain in his fields. But he needs to find the right time for it. He needs to have the right weather for it. And he needs to get hold of a combine harvester for the job. In other words, he needs to see the opportunity to do the job and then get on with it. What about our opportunity to lead others to Jesus? If we jump in too soon, we may ruin things. If we jump in too late, the moment’s gone, perhaps never to come back. So we need to pray that God’s Spirit will show us when to speak out. We need to be alert for that opportunity.

When Jesus looked upon the crowds, he knew that they were ready and waiting for God to act in their lives. They just didn't know he was already at work for them in Jesus. They needed someone to tell them. Our contemporaries don't have such an expectation – quite the opposite -- so we start our harvesting way back. We may need to do a lot of sowing first, and again we need the Spirit's guidance for that. Be prepared, though, for surprises! Take our friend Zacchaeus...

He'd climbed a tree to see Jesus pass along that way and Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house. Can you imagine the conversation? 'Tell me', says Jesus, 'Why did you have to climb a tree to see me?'. 'What choice did I have? I'm only 4'10" with sandals on, and the crowd would have jostled me and pushed me to the back. I hate their guts -- oops, language, sorry!'. Jesus smiles. 'I understand', he says. 'How do you feel now?'. And then out it all comes -- all Zacchaeus' pain, loneliness, fear, longing for something different... The next thing we know, Zacchaeus isn't just saying a word of repentance. He's offering to repay and more all those he cheated. Quite a turn-around! What was it sparked this off? I suggest he knew in his heart that Jesus loved him and those prompting words 'Tell me... How do you feel...' enabled Zacchaeus to let go of the past and start afresh. Pray that God will give us that spirit and the prompting words we need to say.

So let's pray for our ministers, preachers and public speakers: we need and value your prayers, and let's pray for more such workers. But let's also pray for ourselves, that we may be enabled to speak up for Jesus ourselves. And don't worry if we have our failures. After all, Jesus had his failures as well, but he picks us up and enables us to start again.

How do we serve? Jesus goes on to commission his disciples to acts of service: to drive out demons and heal the sick. Later he expands this to include proclaiming the nearness of God's kingdom and raising the dead. That is a heavy responsibility. Most, if not all of us, would rightly shrink from performing exorcisms and reviving dead people, but that still leaves much work to be done. We too are called today both to witness and to service, though we may do so in different ways to Jesus' original disciples. And, of course, we are constrained on what we can do today, because of the coronavirus. We can still support our health workers, still offer prayers for healing, still say that word or take that action that brings comfort or leads to forgiveness or relieves stress and need and helps people fulfil their potential. Jesus limited his friends to going only to the lost sheep of Israel. He forbade them to go to any Gentile territory or any Samaritan towns. He felt it necessary at this stage to concentrate his efforts on his own people. Later on, and certainly after Pentecost, our Lord releases us to carry on his ministry anywhere we choose, although we too may need to prioritise where we go.

As he sends his friends out, he warns that it won't all be sweetness and light! Some people will not welcome them. Some people will positively persecute them. So they must be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves! But no doubt some will respond. Some **will** be drawn to Jesus and begin a wonderful new life. In all of this Jesus is with us as our Friend and Guide, and God's harvest will come in! But let's help make it happen, by praying for more harvest workers and being those workers ourselves!

Hymn: StF 663 I, the Lord of sea and sky

I, The Lord Of Sea And Sky,
I Have Heard My People Cry.
All Who Dwell In Dark And Sin,
My Hand Will Save.
I Who Made The Stars Of Night,
I Will Make Their Darkness Bright.
Who Will Bear My Light To Them?
Whom Shall I Send?

*Here I Am Lord, Is It I, Lord?
I Have Heard You Calling In The Night.
I Will Go Lord, If You Lead Me.
I Will Hold Your People In My Heart.*

I, The Lord Of Snow And Rain,
I Have Borne My People's Pain.
I Have Wept For Love Of Them, They Turn Away.
I Will Break Their Hearts Of Stone,
Give Them Hearts For Love Alone.
I Will Speak My Word To Them
Whom Shall I Send?

I, The Lord Of Wind And Flame
I Will Tend The Poor And Lame.
I Will Set A Feast For Them,
My Hand Will Save
Finest Bread I Will Provide,
Till Their Hearts Are Satisfied.
I Will Give My Life To Them,
Whom Shall I Send?

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

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Let us pray:

We pray for more workers to join in the job of harvesting,
for more preachers, teachers and missionaries, but also for
every church to play their part in reaching out to others and
claiming them for you.

Call and equip us too for this task, with compassion to see
the need, courage to seize the opportunity and constancy until
all are gathered into your kingdom.

Bless all NHS staff and key workers, many of whom put their
lives at risk for us each day...

Bless with success all working to prevent and contain the virus
and find an effective vaccine...

Bless all who feel the harsh economic effects of the virus, as
they struggle to find work, keep their businesses alive or,
quite simply, survive from day to day...

Bless all others, who fill our thoughts at this time, that,
whatever their need, they may find it met by your gracious
love, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn: StF 410 Lord, your Church on earth is seeking

1. Lord, your Church on Earth is Seeking your renewal from above;
Teach us all the art of speaking With the accent of your love.
We would heed your great commission; sending us to every place --
"Preach, baptize, fulfil My mission, Serve with love and share My
grace."

2. Freedom give to those in bondage, Lift the burdens caused by
sin;
Give new hope, new strength and courage, Grant release from
fears within.
Light for darkness, joy for sorrow; Love for hatred, peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow As the Spirit gives new life.

3. In the streets of every city Where the bruised and lonely dwell,
Let us show the Saviour's pity, Let us of His mercy tell.
In all lands and with all races let us serve and seek to bring
All the world to render praises, Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

Hugh Sherlock (1905-1998)

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Blessing: Go forth to sow, go forth to reap.
Be wary then, but also meek,
When danger comes, be strong, hold fast.
God's harvest will arrive at last!

The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and always. Amen.