

LAIRG CHURCH OF SCOTLAND & ROGART (ST CALLANS) CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
SCO20871 and SCO10035

Harvest Thanksgiving

As autumn is creeping up on us, with the leaves turning on the trees and the first hard frost experienced this past week (at least for those of us in the Highlands, which I know isn't all of you reading/hearing this today), I thought we would celebrate Harvest Thanksgiving virtually. As I mentioned to those on Zoom last week and as I referred to in my email I hope that you have got with you today something that you would like to focus on as we offer our thanks to God today for all his goodness to us, not only harvest produce in the traditional sense. I hope that later in our service those of you on Zoom will be willing to share a few words about the item you have brought today as we focus of your own personal thanksgiving.

Call to worship

Father, Son and Spirit, Holy Trinity, present wherever hearts are open and souls laid bare, bless those gathered here today for worship, fellowship thanksgiving and prayer.

Bind our hearts as one as you are one - Father, Son and Spirit, Holy Trinity. Amen.

I have with me today a bottle of water, perhaps not the usual item to bring for Harvest but to me it speaks of the beginning, the essential requirement for all growth. Without water none of the plants we eat would grow we and all the animals on our planet would not have anything to drink. Without water we would not exist. And without living water we do not exist in the way God wants us to. So today I want to give thanks for good old H₂O, so essential for life but also to give thanks to God for Jesus the life giving water to whom we can come to drink and be truly satisfied.

Hymn: As the deer pants for the water <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peZudXt9faU>

As the deer pants for the water
So my soul longs after You.
You alone are my hearts desire
and I long to worship You.

I want You more than gold and silver
Only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy giver
And on You I can rely

Chorus

You alone are my strength, my shield
To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my hearts desire
And I long to worship You.

You're my friend and You are my brother
Even though You are the King
I love You more than any other
So much more than any thing.

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Readings: Exodus 17:1-7 Water from the Rock

17 From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Meditation

Can you remember a time you've been thirsty? Really, really thirsty? Parched.
Desperate for water.
How does it feel?
It's not pleasant, is it?
In the desert, we are thirsty, Lord.

Can you remember a time when you've really appreciated a drink? Perhaps after a long day, perhaps in the hot sun, perhaps after going for a run or doing some exercise.

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How does it feel?

The cool, refreshing feeling of water on a dry, parched tongue. The way a long drink gives you energy and renews your strength.

In the desert, we are thirsty, Lord.

Imagine a rock. A large, hard, dry rock.

It's not really the place we'd expect water to come from, is it? It doesn't look much like a tap.

Then, in this story from Exodus, the rock becomes the place where thirst is quenched, where water flows, where refreshment reaches the people of Israel.

In the desert, Lord, you provide water.

Has this happened for you?

Have you ever found something you needed in an unexpected place?

Have you, in the midst of a really difficult time, found someone being extra-especially kind to you?

In the hard times, God is still with us, God is looking out for us.

In the desert, Lord, you provide water.

May your refreshing, cooling, inspiring water flow through me today, Lord God. Amen.

A prayer of praise

Living God, you are the most high,

We praise you in the desert places of life,

And we praise you when we are richly fed and all our needs are met.

We praise you for the abundance of fruits, vegetables, meat and fish, foods to satisfy our physical bodies.

We praise you for Jesus Christ the Bread of Life.

We continue to praise you even in this storm of Corona Virus when our lives are being rocked by fear and uncertainty,

and we will go on praising you when all is calm around us once again.

Living God, most high, we praise you. Amen.

A prayer of confession

Here I am, most high God.

Here I am, present to you, open to you,

Knowing that there is much I wish I had done,

And much I wish I hadn't.

This day, in this moment, I am sorry.

And even as I say the words, O God,

I know I am already forgiven, loved, set free.

To you be all the thanks and praise,

Most high God.

Amen.

Readings: John 4 : 4 - 15

⁴ Now Jesus had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

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Reflections on the readings:

Our two readings today speak of the provision of water to thirsty people. In Exodus we have the Israelites in the wilderness, travelling in the heat, the dry, energy sapping conditions of the desert. Unless you've spent time in desert conditions it's hard to imagine what these people must have been feeling. They were tired and oh so thirsty. You can imagine them searching the horizon for any sign of an oasis where they and their thirsty animals might quench that thirst. But they see nothing, nothing but sand and rocks. It's hardly surprising they start complaining to Moses who has led them here. You have to feel sorry for Moses. And yet in this seemingly impossible situation Moses doesn't despair he does the only thing that might help him out of the predicament he's in. In desperation he calls out to God. He is told by God to do something seemingly ridiculous, hitting a large rock with a stick. If he felt sorry for himself before I wonder how he feels now when God, in front of the elders, tells him to do this stupid thing. He already felt foolish having led the people into the desert and now this. Is he going to make an even bigger fool of himself? Despite what he might be thinking Moses obeys God and the miraculous happens. Water pours forth from a rock to satisfy the thirst of men and animals.

From the most unlikely source God provides.

In the familiar passage from St John, the Samaritan woman at the well, we have a similar urgent need for water. Jesus is tired and thirsty and finds himself at the well with no apparent means of obtaining water as he has no bucket. What he finds is a Samaritan woman. Now of course the Jews and Samaritans would normally have nothing whatsoever to do with one another, and added to that, this is a Samaritan woman who normally would not associate with a man, let alone a Jewish one. So in a way the position Jesus finds himself is rather akin to Moses. Getting water from a Samaritan woman is about as likely as getting water out of a rock. But in this New Testament story although it is Jesus, God's son who is physically in need of water it is the woman who is truly thirsty, spiritually thirsty for something that can truly satisfy. So God, in the form of his Son becomes the rock out of which living water flows to quench the insatiable thirst of the woman, a thirst that no number of long tiring trips to the well would ever be able to quench.

In both the Old and the New Testament passage we have life giving water flowing from unlikely sources. When we find ourselves in difficult places in our lives, maybe even desperate places let us not forget that if we are to find our way out then we might need to start looking in the most unlikely places for direction. God can and does use what might, to us, appear strange, ridiculous ways of lifting us out of difficult, desperate or dark places. So perhaps the message for us today is to open our eyes and our minds to what initially looks or sounds strange or unpromising because that might just be what God wants to use to support and encourage us and lift us up out of the difficult, dark places that we sometimes find ourselves in. AMEN.

Our personal thanksgiving

An opportunity to share what you have brought today as a symbol of your thankfulness

Intercessions

We pray O Father, for those who work to provide our food: for farmers and gardeners, the lorry drivers and shopkeepers, for the skills you have given them and the expertise we can use to grow our food.

We pray O Father for those who have no food: for the hungry of the world, and for those who, for lack of water or good soil, cannot grow enough to live on. We pray for those who use their power to help others in need, for aid agencies and for each individual who gives to help another person.

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We pray, O father for the leaders of the world: that they will use their power for the good of all; that they will be just and even-handed in making decisions.

We pray for ourselves that, as people rich in comparison with many, we may learn to reject selfishness, and live in love as your Son showed us.

Once more we have celebrated harvest, we have given thanks for your generous provision to us and we have remembered that you are the creator of all things.

Every time we eat a meal, remind us of your presence.

Every time we drink, remind us of your blessings.

Every time we see need, give us a sense of sharing.

Every time we enjoy your creation, fill us with thanks and praise, so that when we gather again next harvest-time we shall know that you have sustained us and we have lived and given ourselves for you.

Be with us now as go from our gathering today to serve you in our homes and communities. May each one of us know your presence with us in this coming week in all that we do. In Christ name we pray AMEN.

HYMN Come ye thankful people come <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ari-MjWsT2U>

1 Come, ye thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home;
all is safely gathered in,
ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide
for our wants to be supplied;
come to God's own temple, come,
raise the song of harvest home.

2 All the world is God's own field,
fruit as praise to God we yield;
wheat and tares together sown
are to joy or sorrow grown;
first the blade and then the ear,
then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we
wholesome grain and pure may be.

3 For the Lord our God shall come,
and shall take the harvest home;
from the field shall in that day
all offenses purge away,
giving angels charge at last
in the fire the tares to cast;
but the fruitful ears to store
in the garner evermore.

4 Even so, Lord, quickly come,
bring thy final harvest home;
gather thou thy people in,
free from sorrow, free from sin,
there, forever purified,
in thy presence to abide;
come, with all thine angels, come,
raise the glorious harvest home.

Henry Alford (1810-1871)
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Blessing

We bless you, God of Seed and Harvest,
And we bless each other,
That the beauty of this world,
And the love that created it,
Might be expressed though our lives
And be a blessing to others,
Now and always. Amen.