

Ripon & Lower Dales Methodist Circuit

2021 Harvest Festival at Home



Psalm 63: 1-4

You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you;

I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water.

I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.

Welcome to the worship at home Harvest Festival. At this Harvest time we are going to focus our attention on our Methodist charity **All We Can**.

Today, we will get to know the community of Nkayi and you may feel prompted to find out more about All We Can, to pray for the charity's work or to sign up to make a regular gift and journey alongside the people we meet today. Let's step into worship together as we bring our Harvest gifts. Let's step into global community together as we meet the community from Nkayi in Zimbabwe. Let's step into fellowship as we worship, listen and respond to our loving God

StF N°123

¹ Come, you thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home!
Fruit and crops are gathered in
safe before the storms begin:
God our maker will provide
for our needs to be supplied;
come, with all his people, come,
raise the song of harvest home!

² All the world is God's own field,
harvests for his praise to yield;
wheat and weeds together sown
here for 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 bring his harvest home;
he himself on that great day,
worthless things shall take away,
give his angels charge at last
in the fire the weeds to cast,
but the fruitful ears to store
in his care for evermore.

⁴ Even so, Lord, quickly come –
bring your final harvest home!
Gather all your people in
free from sorrow, free from sin,
there together purified,
ever thankful at your side –
come, with all your angels, come,
bring that glorious harvest home!

Henry Alford (1810-1871) adapted by Compilers of Hymns for Today's Church

Let us pray.

Lord, You have always given bread for the coming day; *and though I am poor, today I believe.*

Lord, You have always given strength for the coming day; *and though I am weak, today I believe.*

Lord, You have always given peace for the coming day; *and though of anxious heart, today I believe.*

Lord, You have always kept me safe in trials; *and now, tired as I am, today I believe.*

Lord, You have always marked the road for the coming day; *and though it may be hidden, today I believe.*

Lord, You have always lightened this darkness of mine; *and though the night comes, today I believe.*

Lord, You have always spoken when time was ripe; *and though you be silent now, today I believe.*

Lord, You have always heard my cry and the cry of all people. You receive us and love each person, just the way we are and by Your Grace shape and lead our lives.

Though I might not always be prepared for hearing and following Your call, today I believe.

Today we take our next steps in following you, Our Godhead three in one. **Amen.**

All We Can works with one of its partners HEFO in Nkayi in Zimbabwe. Below is a glimpse into the situation and work in that place. Further information can be found by visiting the website of All We Can.

The southern part of Nkayi in particular faces challenges stemming from the climate crisis. Dry lands and limited access to water have a big impact on the lives of the community. Distances from 2km to 10km are walked to get to water supplies.

The land has suffered from poor farming practices but All We Can's local partner, HEFO, know that the words of Isaiah 61:11 are true: 'For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.' HEFO help communities like those in Nkayi by teaching climate-resilient sustainable farming practices and increasing access to clean and safe water as well as livestock production.

In a region where lengthy dry spells can make them susceptible to droughts, accessing clean water is vital for the health of the community, their livelihoods, and the animals they are rearing. The impact of Covid-19 on the community has made it difficult for farmers to travel and sell produce; community development projects have faced interruptions and delays.

Readings

Luke 17: 20-22 & Revelation 21: 1-5a

Harvest Reflection for All We Can by Revd Kate Coleman.

The approach to harvest is always characterised by waiting...

Farmers wait for full growth, maturity and yield. As much as they might like to plant seeds one day and reap the next, they know that reaping a harvest is a process of time. They must plant a seed and then be persistent and patient, fully expecting a harvest...in time!

But this kind of waiting can't afford to be a passive, twiddling of thumbs, kind of wait, this wait must be active. There are things to do, like weeding, and steps that must be taken to ensure a healthy harvest and then there are decisions to be made and opportunities to explore post-harvest.

Rev 21:1-5 is a reminder for us today of what we are waiting for, in kingdom terms. We read of 'a new heaven and a new earth'... 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

What a picture, what a hope, but what about now? What happens while we wait? Well Luke 17: 20-21 is a reminder that there is little time for passivity while we wait. Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is in your midst.'

There is little time for passivity or inactivity while we wait because the king who will be fully revealed in Rev 21 is already on His throne reigning, right now.

But just as Jesus informed the Pharisees of Luke 17, when they enquired or possibly even demanded that he provide them with proof of the kingdom he constantly spoke about and of which

he claimed to be king or Messiah, the kingdom of God was not about to arrive with the same trappings, paraphernalia, pomp, and ceremony as an earthly kingdom!

And by the same measure, neither would it be accompanied by the same constraints and limitations of an ordinary or even an extraordinary earthly kingdom! The Pharisees' question presumed that the kingdom of God was yet to come and that it would be visible (like an earthly kingdom). But God's kingdom is so much more than earthly kingdoms. The embodied king of the kingdom defies all earthly comparison and surprises us at every turn precisely because he is not the 'usual suspect'. And his kingdom would not be visibly 'here' or 'there' in the same way as other earthly kingdoms, regardless of the expectations of the Pharisees.

Somewhat like the seed and the harvest, the kingdom is now and not yet. It is a current reality but there is a fullness that is still to come. God reigns today but one day his reign will be globally visible.

Like the Pharisees and believers of old, we live in challenging times characterised by death, mourning, crying and pain, the very opposite of what is promised in Rev 21 and like them we hope that God will intervene and bring about a better world, one in which we are liberated from our very human struggles and fears. But instead of waiting until, 'all is revealed!' we can experience and express 'signs' of the kingdom now, today, because the kingdom of God is among or even possibly within them as it is for us.

While we wait for the full expression of the kingdom described in Rev 21, we are invited to participate in spreading and introducing the kingdom 'reign' of our king wherever we can through expressions of love, care and commitment. And precisely because the Kingdom of Heaven is among or indeed within us in a world where the kingdom seems far away and even absent at times, we become the means by which it opens up into the earth and we become an avenue through which God's

kingdom is manifested. As we live out of his rule it is manifest, as we pray it is manifest and as we follow the leading of the Spirit and engage in whatever God is doing it is made manifest.

When we listen to the news, we can easily feel overwhelmed, nothing seems to be peaceful or joyful, God's activity seems to have disappeared.

However, God's presence and his kingdom is still active. Every time somebody acts out of love, every time something is put right and justice is served no matter how small, God's kingdom is experienced and expressed; where there is beauty, God's kingdom is experienced and expressed. Where there is love God's kingdom is experienced and expressed.

Every now and again farmers have to adopt new approaches, design new tools and change their mindsets in order to work in environments that are fundamentally changing. Those who wrestle with the worst effects of climate change understand this. I believe we stand at the crossroads of such a moment today. For us our job description remains the same, i.e. to experience God's kingdom rule within us and to express God's kingdom intentions around us. The approach and the tools we use to do this may need to adapt to our new reality and to the demands of a changing environment. Thankfully, it's not all down to us, the Holy Spirit is already at work in the world around us, and our task is to simply find out what he's doing and to join in.

So, what are your next steps? What about mine?

In some ways, perhaps the most important step of all that we can take, is a step back rather than a step forward.

It's important that we take that step back because in the West we live life with our faces so focused on the future, so eager to see what lies ahead that we barely take a second glance at the past behind us. This means, that we hardly ever really learn from the past or ask ourselves strategic questions about how we can improve on the past.

I'm Black British and was born in Ghana, West Africa and in my cultural tradition we have the word, 'Sankofa' which is represented symbolically by a bird looking back with an egg in its mouth while it's flying forward. The idea behind this word is 'retrieval', it conveys the idea that positive progress is impossible until we bring critical knowledge from the past with us into the present.

The Hebrew Prophets understood this. Christians often think that they were obsessed with the future, but they were actually far more interested in squeezing every last bit of learning they could from the past.

In Hebrew thought the key to the future lay in the past. In other words, the past is ahead in full view, while the future (the unseen) lies behind us. It's a bit like sitting on a train facing the direction you've already come from.

The prophet was only able to speak to the issues of their day not because they had an eye to the future but because they had an eye to the past and the journey they'd already taken with God.

If you want to know what the Holy Spirit is up to today and where He may be tomorrow, you may be surprised to find the answers in the past. Many of us have not really looked back since Covid began, we have been waiting (mostly for it to pass), surviving or planning for the future. But God has been at work and there are steps we are being called to take next.

It is only as you look back that you discover the nature of the journey you have already taken with God as communities, churches, or organisations. And what about your family? What is the nature of the journey they have taken over this challenging season? And what about you as an individual? What have you learned from this past season that will enable you to sow more efficiently, invest more wisely so that you can nurture and support others beyond yourself more meaningfully?

I don't know about you but as I look back especially during lockdown, there was a lot to

learn about the human propensity to distract and divert ourselves from the real issues.

In spite of this, hopefully, we have learned that as believers we need to be more empowering, more collaborative, more inclusive and more diverse (ethnically, culturally, etc). And that we need to be oriented to addressing the kind of issues that were highlighted during Covid: such as the increasing gap between the world's richest and poorest, the climate crisis, the global nature of racism, domestic abuse and the dangers of celebrity cultures in churches and Christian organisations. I'm sure you could add your own observations.

We can't do it all at once, but we can do it together with each one of us playing a unique part.

So, if as believers we really want to know what to do next... pause, take a step back before you take a step forward.

Learn everything you can from where you've been, from what God did and said, to how He did it. Learn from what you observed but perhaps never really noticed about others, their needs and possibilities as well as your own needs and possibilities. And then prepare for your first step forward.

I believe we allow the reign of God to come into effect:

- When the church embraces the incredible opportunity to model a Christ-like approach to a watching world.
- When we reclaim territory around truth, integrity, justice and salvation.
- When we embrace the opportunity to speak in fresh ways to the full spectrum of human experience—tragedy, pain, loss, and despair, but also recovery, renewal, healing, and hope.
- When we also demonstrate the value of learning from those we have traditionally believed need to learn from us.

Let's stop reinventing the wheel because what is new for us isn't new for everyone. Uncertainty and instability have been normal life for many Christians the world over. I have found that the cry 'where is God in our suffering?' is a peculiarly Western preoccupation. Brothers and sisters living with great uncertainty, instability and under the shadow of aggression or the physical suffering of war and oppressive regimes, seldom ask such questions. Instead, they assume God's presence and seek out God's favour in the midst of it all. Surely, we can learn from their spirituality and tenacity.

Devising creative and innovative ways of staying connected even while being forced apart has been the challenge of our Christian brothers and sisters experiencing intense persecution. Surely, we can learn from their ingenuity, innovation, commitment to community and creative ability to find ways of honouring the call to community even when visible community becomes challenging.

As you consider partners overseas and at home, commit yourselves not just to give to them but also to learn from them. As we come alongside them and take steps toward recovery together in the face of the climate crisis, the dehumanising effects of material poverty and more, let's commit ourselves to experiencing and expressing the reign of God among and within us in ways that impacts injustices, resists darkness, adjusts circumstances and transforms lives.

Like farmers, the task for us remains the same today as it has ever been. However, we must step back to see the bigger picture by keeping an eye to the past even as we travel into our God-given future. We must deploy our new tools and approaches in creative ways for the sake of God's 'now and not yet' kingdom.

And, after all has been said and done, we must ready ourselves to take our next God-inspired steps!

Let's pray:

Gracious God, Guide the way as we take the next step in our walk with you. Lead us towards justice; Show us the path of abundant love; Set our feet on the road towards building your kingdom. May our next steps follow yours, And our hearts be turned outwards as we love by following your example. In Jesus' name, Amen.

StF N°407

¹Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

²Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.

*King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world.
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.*

³Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations put their trust in him.

chorus...

Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)
Words and Music © 2006 Thankyou Music.

Prayers for others

*The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; **though they may stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord upholds them with his hand.***

Loving God, We pray for ourselves, our loved ones and community. As we look ahead, we ask that you will light the way for us and continue to draw us closer to you. We thank you for the members of our community who continue to serve in frontline services; give them rest and encouragement. *The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; **though they may stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord upholds them with his hand.***

Merciful God, We lift up our leaders to you as they guide our nation. We pray that you will give them wisdom, compassion and willing ears to listen. We pray that they will be able to find the balance of championing our country whilst being a caring and generous global neighbour. *The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; **though they may stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord upholds them with his hand.***

Gracious God, We pray for All We Can's local partner, HEFO, and the community of Nkayi. We thank you for this fruitful partnership and pray that it will flourish as they walk together. We pray for the community projects that HEFO run and all the members who take part. We ask Lord that the gifts that have been given today will be an encouragement to the farmers like Vaiter and Shupikai as they work to grow their farms and livelihoods. *The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; **though they may stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord upholds them with his hand.***

Creator God, We are sorry for the times when we have not looked after and protected the beautiful world you have given us. We pray for the Climate Change Conference (COP26) taking place in Glasgow in November. We thank you for the commitment of the countries, organisations and campaigners coming together to inspire

meaningful action to combat the climate crisis. We pray that it will be a marker in the sand and a significant step towards tackling the devastation caused by climate change. *The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; **though they may stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord upholds them with his hand. Amen.***

StF N°130

¹We 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.*

²He 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.

³We 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,
and, what you most desire,
our humble, thankful hearts.

Matthias Claudius (1740-1815) translated by Jane Montgomery Campbell (1817-1878)

May the God of all,

Bless you and lead you as you take your next steps.

May you know the loving guidance of your saviour.

*Today, Tomorrow, And always. **Amen***