

Circuit Service 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021 prepared by David Shaw

Welcome to this Circuit Service. We are still in the season of Creation-tide, which includes harvest. This is a time to celebrate the incredible creation which is God's work, to give thanks for God's provision and generosity, and to commit ourselves to the God given task of caring for the planet and sharing its riches with justice. Let us sing our opening hymn.

Hymn H&P 355 & StF 123 'Come ye thankful people come'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PozS2FZs5xE>

<p>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 !</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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 !</p> <p>Henry Alford (1810–1871) <i>adapted by Compilers of Hymns for Today's Church</i></p>
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Prayer

Before we share in the prayer below you are invited to picture in your mind's eye your favourite place. As you picture it recall other sense associated with it – smell, sound, touch, and taste. How does the place make you feel? Revisit that feeling and give thanks to God. Stay with that for as long as you want before reading the prayer written below:

Creator God, thank you

for hills and trees, for streams and rivers,  
for seas and gardens, for art galleries and music concerts,  
for films and gatherings of family and friends.

Saving God, we praise you that in Christ

all things were created  
all things are held together  
you have reconciled all things to yourself.

Life-giving God, we thank you for

your equipping to tackle injustice in your created order  
your work in the world bringing peace and nurturing relationships  
your enlivening of your Church.

In the wonderful name of Jesus, we pray.

Amen

Hymn H&P 333 & StF 102 'For the beauty of the earth'

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

<p>1 For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies, for the love which from our birth over and around us lies : <i>Gracious God, to you we raise this our sacrifice of praise.</i></p> <p>2 For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night, hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light :</p> <p>3 For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's delight, for the mystic harmony linking sense to sound and sight :</p>	<p>4 For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child, friends on earth, and friends above, pleasures pure and undefiled :</p> <p>5 For each perfect gift and sign of your love so freely given, graces human and divine, flowers of earth and buds of heaven :</p> <p>Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835–1917)</p>
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Readings

Ps 65 – this is the set psalm for Harvest Festivals. Take your time reading this psalm. What stands out for you as you read it?

Isaiah 61 v 1 – 4 This passage is reflected upon in the sermon and reference is also made to Luke 4 v 14 – 21.

Sermon

Andy Moffoot earlier in the year started a recorded Circuit service by saying 'I love trees!'. I share that love. If you were to come to our house you find saplings of oak, sweet chestnut, holly, and beech. The recording of this sermon has a backdrop of a painting called 'trees dancing'.

The Bible is riddled with trees from start to finish. They are around in the major stories which make up the narrative of God's involvement with the world and people in particular.

Genesis chapter 2 describes the Garden of Eden as having 2 trees in the middle – 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' and 'the tree of life'. What happens around those trees sets the scene for the whole divine story. The very last chapter in the Bible, Revelation 22, speaks again of 'the tree of life', whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. At the heart of the Christian faith is the cross of Christ. The cross is sometimes described as the 'cursed tree' which references Deut 21 v 23. In the prophets there is regularly an account of what things look like when things are well, when God is honoured, and the chosen people are behaving in ways fitting of their calling. The account has a flourishing of the natural world. They usually refer to trees and, in some cases, major on trees (Isaiah 41 v 19). Psalm 1 refers to people who delight in God's word as like 'A tree planted by streams of water'. You begin to get the picture!!

In Luke chapter 4, we read that Jesus went to the synagogue as was his custom. He was invited to read the scroll of scripture. It was from Isaiah 61, the passage we read earlier. Jesus ends his reading of the text by saying 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'.

Isaiah is looking forward in our passage from chapter 61 to a time when the things mentioned in verses 1 & 2 will be accomplished. Jesus is declaring in Luke 4 that time has arrived. In Isaiah 61, the prophet anticipates 'They will be called oaks of righteousness'. That title given from God now belongs to those who are recipients of God's grace, mercy, and salvation. That's us. We are 'oaks of righteousness'.

At Wesley recently we received 7 new members by confirmation with another 2 to come who couldn't make the last service. We rejoiced that God has entitled them 'oaks of righteousness'. To mark the occasion a tree has been planted for each of them. How appropriate we thought.

Isaiah was a Jew. He could though have been prophesying to a British audience. He could have chosen a variety of trees – cedar, pine, cypress or olive. But he didn't he chose an oak. We know oaks in Britain. Our ships have been built with them, our glorious cathedrals and other significant buildings have used oak beams. They stand in our fields and woods. They are seen so positively in our language. They stand for solidity, reliability, durability, dependability. These are strong words, sometimes described as hard qualities. But oaks have a softer side too. Last year when the temperature was 10 degrees hotter than I can bear we spent an afternoon under a number of oak trees by a stream. The trees sheltered us from the draining heat and sun. Birds find branches and trunks in which to nest. Squirrels and other animals depend on the acorns. I remember reading an information board in a wooded area which stated that some adult oaks host over 200 species of plants and animals.

These are the qualities, both hard and soft, that God by God's grace has given to us.

Notice though we're not just called 'oaks'. We're entitled 'oaks of righteousness'. This reminds us that this title is a gift won for us by God. It reminds of the relationship God has restored for us by the work of Jesus. The word 'righteousness' also reminds us of what the calling 'as 'oaks of righteousness' entails. It is a calling to justice, to right living by us and to enable it for others.

The quote doesn't end with 'oaks of righteousness' it goes on to state 'a planting of the Lord, for the display of his splendour'.

Wow! Our lives as 'oaks of righteousness' should be so that people see not us, but the glory of God!!

So, as we live our lives as places of shelter from the storms of life. As people come and rest in the peace and cool from the heat which they are facing, they experience the splendour of God. So as people cling to us as ones who are dependable and reliable they experience the splendour of God.

We are not solitary trees. We are part of a world-wide forest, whose roots are in touch with each other. So, not only when we act alone, but when we act together then the world will experience the glory of God.

You are oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord, for the display of God's splendour. Awesome!

Hymn H&P 342 & StF 124 'For the fruits of his creation.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3TGM4RAZhU>

<p>1 For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God ; for the 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.</p> <p>2 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 harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.</p>	<p>3 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.</p> <p>Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)</p>
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## Prayers

Loving creator God, as we give you thanks for trees and for their life-giving qualities we come with sadness and anger too. We are sad and angry about the wildfires which have devastated woodlands across the

western USA, in Greece and in other countries too. We are sad and angry about the deforestation in the rain forests around the world. We are sad and angry about the factors which have led to such destruction. We pray for those seeking to tackle these factors and prevent further devastation. Particularly we pray for world leaders meeting in Glasgow in November for COP 26 that they might wake up to the emergency that is facing your beautiful creation.

*Silence to reflect in God's presence.*

Loving creator God, we pray for your church. We pray with sadness and desire. We pray with sadness, Lord, because we have not been the body of Christ as you intended. We have not lived as oaks of righteousness, a display for your splendour. Please forgive us for we do desire to be yours individually and collectively. Help us to be hospitable, generous, forgiving, and courageous.

*Silence to reflect in God's presence*

Loving creator God, we pray for our nation. We pray for our political leaders especially in this party conference season. We give you thanks for their desire to serve the common good. Help them to keep the common good as a higher priority than personal or party gain in their decision making. Grant to them wisdom and open ears willing to listen to you and to the needs of society and the world.

*Silence to reflect in God's presence.*

Lord's Prayer

Hymn H&P 343 & StF 727 'God in his love for us' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ST00F4zVQE4>

<p>1 God in his love for us lent us this planet, gave it a purpose in time and in space : small as a spark from the fire of creation, cradle of life and the home of our race.</p> <p>2 Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty, life that sustains us in body and mind : plenty for all, if we learn how to share it, riches undreamed-of to fathom and find.</p>	<p>3 Long have our human wars ruined its harvest ; long has earth bowed to the terror of force ; long have we wasted what others have needed, poisoned the fountain of life at its source.</p> <p>4 Earth is the Lord's : it is ours to enjoy it, ours, as God's stewards, to farm and defend. From its pollution, misuse, and destruction, good Lord, deliver us, world without end !</p> <p>Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)</p>
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Blessing

O God:

Be to us the soil in which we grow;

Be to us the air we breathe;

Be to us the water we drink;

Be to us the sun that gives us light and warmth and draws us heavenward;

Be to us our God, in whom we find life.

Amen