

Call to Worship

Gathered in the name of Jesus Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and blessed by God, we come to worship the one, holy God.

O God, how wonderful is your name in all the earth.

Your majesty is the music of the starry skies - even children of dust can sing your praises.

In the name of the Healer, the Provider and the Enabler let your gratitude and joy be made known.

O God, our God, how wonderful is your name in all the earth!

Hymn For the beauty of the earth R&S 41

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies.

*Christ, our Lord, to you we raise
this, our hymn of grateful praise.*

For the wonder of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light:

For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony

linking sense to sound and sight:

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild:

For each perfect gift of thine
to our race so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

For thy people, evermore
lifting holy hands above,
offering up on every shore
their pure sacrifice of love:

F. S. Pierpoint

Children's Time

As well as us celebrating Harvest, today is also Promotion Sunday and Sandy has some books to present to the children. **Prayer for Sunday Club**

Offering – incl. gifts for Hopeworx

God of creation, we come to you this Harvest Festival grateful for all your wonders.

As the fields produce their harvest, may your love grow within us,
that we may care for all your creation, especially the weak and marginalised,
the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lonely and sad. And all those affected by the heatwaves, fires,
storms and floods caused by climate change and our lack of care of your creation.

Take our gifts and multiply them that we too may produce a harvest of love, hope, and joy. Amen.

Hymn We plough the fields and scatter R&S 124

We 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.*

He only is the maker
of all things near and far;

he paints the wayside flower,
he lights the evening star;
the wind and waves obey him,
by him the birds are fed;
much more to us his children,
he gives our daily bread.

We 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 that which you most welcome,
our humble, thankful hearts.

Matthias Claudius

Opening Prayer

God of honey and harvest, of grain and grape, of ocean and orchard:
at this harvest time may we both praise and pray; we praise you for abundance
and pray that this harvest is not just shared with others but shared justly.

God of beehives and breadbaskets, of living webs and the weaving of life
of ecosystems and economy:
This harvest time may we both praise and pray - praise you for the wealth of the harvest
and pray that this harvest is not just a promise but is full of promise for all.

God of bumble bees and blue whales, evolution and environment
This harvest time may we both praise and pray - praise you for the sheer wonder of the world
and pray that this harvest is not about our wealth, but the wealth of our generosity.

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 through our lives and be a blessing to others. **Amen**

Say the Grace as children leave for Sunday Club during the hymn

Hymn Come, ye thankful people, come R&S 40

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.

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;
grant, O harvest Lord, that we
wholesome grain and pure may be.

Even so, Lord, quickly come,
bring thy final harvest home;
from thy field upon that day
all offences purge away:
gather thou thy people in,
free from sorrow, free from sin,
there forever purified,
in thy glory to abide.

Introduction and Prayer of Confession:

Throughout history, many human activities have contributed to the destruction of Creation. Yet today, more than ever, some human activities take the form of a war against Creation. Some hold greater responsibility for this crisis - elite consumption, exploitative business models, and economic theories prioritizing profit over sustainability. Pollution, health crises, deforestation, and mining in conflict zones worsen the situation.

Yet there is hope for a peaceful Earth. Isaiah 32:14-18, the Bible text for this year's Season of Creation, envisions a peaceful Creation where God's people live only when justice is achieved. "The Lord's justice will dwell in the desert; God's righteousness lives in the fertile field". In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "Hope is being able to see that there is light - despite all the darkness." Our worship today marks the end of the ecumenical Season of Creation, a season of prayer and action for our common home that takes place annually. The theme for the Season this year is "Peace with Creation".

All Creation is full of God's praise, and we are called to join in with joy, righteousness and peacefulness. Yet as we look around us, we see conflict and destruction. We acknowledge that we ourselves cause conflict and destruction, and often fail to walk the path of peace. Everywhere on the planet, humans cause great harm, even as we know that the scope of destruction varies, and that everywhere human beings are among the victims of our deep

conflict with Creation. All too often, we fail to live as we are called to live. We fail to be ambassadors of peace, righteousness and reconciliation. So, let us confess our sins:

Creator God, God of the oceans,
God of the land and all that is within it:
You created this world with the power of your word.
You formed humankind with your own hands and breathed your own breath into us.
You gave us these lands as a gift—a source of our identity and sustenance.
You empowered us to be the guardians of what you have made.
Loving God, we have failed you and abused the gift you have given us.
We have offended you and defiled what you have made.

Forgive us for betraying your trust.
Forgive us for our greed and arrogance.
Forgive us for what we have done to your Earth.
Forgive us for what we have done to your oceans.
Forgive us for what we have done to your creatures
on the land, in the sky, and in the depths.

Hear, O God of Compassion:
The cries of the land - now a desert,
laid barren through corrupt agricultural practices, pollution, mining, and deforestation.
The cries of the islands - drowning in rising seas, oceans swelling with melting ice.
The cries of distress from Mother Earth - storm and drought.

God of Life, heal your wounded Earth.
Empower us to choose the road that leads to life.
Guide us in the paths of righteousness, for your name's sake,
so that we may experience once again your peace in the land and in the sea.
This we ask in the name of the one who came that we may have life in abundance
your Son, our Saviour, Jesus the Christ. Amen

May our God have mercy on us, forgive us our trespasses and give us new life.
Indeed, God has promised grace and forgiveness to us.
Let us rejoice and trust in our calling and live as we are called to live,
reconciled with the Father, ambassadors for Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit. Amen

Bible readings: **Psalm 148:1-13 read responsively**
 Isaiah 32:14-18
 John 14:15-17

As I mentioned at the beginning of September, all of September, up to today is the Season of Creation – an annual, ecumenical celebration of prayer and action for creation, so it seems right that today when we celebrate Harvest, we also celebrate God's wonderful creation in general and lament the destruction of the planet that humanity has caused, resulting in climate change. The theme of the Season this year is Peace with Creation. There doesn't seem to be much peace in the world – the destruction of Gaza and the Palestinian people continue unabated, and despite the UN declaring that Israel has

committed genocide, and many countries, including the UK, formerly recognising the state of Palestine, nothing seems to change. (Since I started writing this sermon, President Trump has come up with a peace plan, but **we are still waiting to hear** if Hamas will accept it.) The war in Ukraine continues more than 3.5 years after Russia invaded. There continues to be intense internal violence in Sudan, Myanmar, and Haiti and there are at least 56 armed conflicts going on around the world at the moment. Not only does war destroy people and people's lives, it destroys nature. The journalist and environmental activist George Monbiot wrote last weekend that in Gaza "alongside the crime of genocide, another great horror unfolds: ecocide. While the destruction of buildings and infrastructure in Gaza is visible in every video we see, less visible is the parallel destruction of ecosystems and the means of subsistence. Before the 7 October atrocity that triggered the current assault on Gaza, about 40% of its land was farmed. Despite its extreme population density, Gaza was mostly self-sufficient in vegetables and poultry, and met much of the population's demand for olives, fruit and milk. But last month the UN reported that just 1.5% of its agricultural land now remains both accessible and undamaged. That's roughly 200 hectares – the only remaining area directly available to feed more than 2 million people."

Ukraine used to be described as the breadbasket of Europe because so much wheat and sunflowers for oil were grown there. This of course has been affected by the war. And these war-related destructions of agriculture are only a drop in the ocean compared to the destruction caused by logging, mining, cattle grazing, agriculture and our general lack of care for natural resources.

Isaiah 32 describes how failed harvests will turn to fruitfulness with the coming of a righteous king. There will be a transformation of the natural and moral environment through a spirit from on high. This description of salvation, with the coming Spirit of God, is to be seen in conjunction with the preceding prophecy of warning. The writer of these verses wanted to encourage his community to look beyond the current distress and troubling times to a time of salvation which will follow when God transforms the earth into a paradise and teaches us to live in righteousness and peace. But as I said at the beginning of September, we cannot expect God to simply swoop in and save us from the destruction we've caused to the environment, we have to do the work in partnership with God.

On Monday, I read a devotion from the United Church of Christ about verses from the book of Esther. It was about living in difficult times and whether to speak out or not. We certainly live in challenging times, not only with climate change and wars, but with the rise of the far-right and populism in many countries, including our own.

Perhaps you feel daunted by the complexity of the issues facing us at the moment. Perhaps you wonder how you, one person, can make a difference. Perhaps you feel constrained by personal or professional circumstances that seem to make it impossible for you to speak up or act out. Perhaps you are frightened, or weary, or despairing. Esther was one of the king's wives, but the law forbade her from speaking to him. Raising her voice against the oppression of her people should have been dangerous. But her uncle Mordecai challenged and encouraged her to speak out. Perhaps you are who you are and where you are for such a time as this, he said. Perhaps we, like Esther, are exactly where and when we need to be. We do not choose the times into which we are born. But, like Esther, we can choose what we do with them.

We are an Eco Church, and recently the Faith in Action group have been looking at whether a Silver Award might be attainable. The forms and application to achieve an Eco Church Award have changed, and there are many aspects we wouldn't be able to achieve mainly because we barely have any land. But a big part of being an Eco Church is speaking out – is making the facts of climate change and environmental damage known, regularly in worship, in our prayers, in the way we live our lives as both individuals and as a community of Christians. It is about encouraging people, within and outside the church, to do what we can – to recycle, to make do with less, to keep our cars, our phones, our TVs and our gadgets for longer. These are things we can do. And is there more we can do here at church? I seem to remember that at some point we discussed having recycling boxes here for items that can't be easily recycled at home, in particular medicine packaging, and the idea was dismissed because of cost and where to put them. If we are really serious about being an Eco Church and caring for God's creation, shouldn't this be the kind of thing we are doing regardless of the cost or the inconvenience of having some cardboard boxes somewhere in the building? As part of the building works, the strip of space outside the Primary Room is now clear – is that not another area where we could have drought resistant plants on the wall, or some other eco-friendly thing? (*Reform* at back has some ideas.)

In 32:14-18 the prophet Isaiah pictured a desolate Creation without peace because of the lack of justice and the broken relationship between God and humankind. This description of devastated cities and wastelands eloquently stresses the fact that human destructive behaviours have a negative impact on the Earth. Our hope, and the hope of the Season of Creation, is that Creation will find peace when justice is restored. There is still hope and the expectation for a peaceful Earth. To hope in a biblical context does not mean to stand still

and quiet, but to act, pray, change, and reconcile with Creation and the Creator in unity and solidarity.

John 14:15-17 explains that love for Jesus is shown through obedience to his commands, which in turn leads to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of Truth" and the "Advocate". The Spirit of God, as mentioned in Isaiah. This Spirit serves as a perpetual source of comfort and guidance. In this brief but powerful passage, Jesus reiterates his favourite theme – love, and emphasizes the intimate unity of Jesus, God, the Spirit, and the believer. In John's Gospel, Jesus insists that the intimate relationship that exists between him, God, and the Spirit also includes believers. The believer does not stand close by admiring the majesty of the Trinity or the beauty of Creation; rather, he or she is an equal part of it. Believers don't "imitate" Jesus; they participate in him wholly. We're told in verse 17 that we know the Spirit of truth because it "abides in you" and "will be in you". Everything that matters, that is, ultimate intimacy with God and Christ, is available now. God is not holding out on us in any way - life, abundant life, is available for living from this moment into eternity. And so it is with Creation. The righteousness and justice that Isaiah speaks of that will bring about transformation, is ours for the taking. We need to make it happen.

Hymn God in his love for us R&S 85

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.

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.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
long have we wasted what others have need of,
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
ours, as his stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse and destruction,
good Lord, deliver us, world without end!

F. Pratt Green

Lord's Supper

We remember, as we do at every communion service, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Come to this table, all who hunger for justice.
Come to this table, all who desire to know themselves better.
Come to this table, all who desire change.
Come and be fed by God's own hand through Creation's gifts.

Today's Communion prayers use material from the Eco Congregation, Scotland for the Season of Creation.

The Lord be with you.
Lift up your hearts.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

And also with you.
We lift them to the Lord.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Throughout all ages, as mountains dance and trees applaud
the cries of birth are also loud for all to hear and tend.
Your Sabbath and Jubilee insist: "Refreshment and rest for all Creation".
But we made exceptions.
Your People sought milk and honey, yet injustice laid lands waste.
Your prophets: priests and farmers call us to account.
Yet your loving signs of warning fall often by the wayside.
And greed and pride insist on harmful choices knowingly embraced.
Yet still comes Christ Jesus, friend of wildlife, beloved of the poor
scolding the seas, teaching with trees, and God's wildness in the Wind.
When with Christ we shoulder the cross of healing;
we shudder at the disaster of truth denied by power,
And yet... Risen and present through food and faith Christ calls us afresh
to care for a damaged world.
Holy, holy, holy God of power shared
Sky and soil's abundant glory:
Hosanna: help us God! Hosanna: heal Creation!

This is the mystery of faith:

Christ has died
Christ is risen
Christ will come again.

Lord God, send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine, and upon your people,
that Christ may be with us, and we may be ready to live for you
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it
and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way
he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as
you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you
proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine

Prayer after communion

God-with-Earth, invited and fed at your table we are remade, repurposed. May this food empower
us to cherish your Creation who we are also. And whether our cares be light or heavy, our song be
strong or weak, keep our hearts warm, our hands open, our lives ever embracing and embraced by
your love Amen

Prayers of intercession

Today, as well as Harvest, is Homelessness Sunday, and so we pray for all women and men who
are homeless. For those sleeping under bridges, on park benches, in doorways or bus stations
outside high street shops and many other inappropriate places. For those who can only find shelter
for the night but must wander in the daytime. For lives broken apart because they cannot afford to
pay the rent. For those who have no relatives or friends who can take them in. For those who have
no place to keep possessions that remind them who they are. For those who are afraid and
hopeless. Lord God, help us to see the face of Jesus in the eyes of every person experiencing
homelessness who we meet. So that we may be empowered through word and deed, and by your
grace, to bring justice and peace to those who are homeless.

We also bring before God things especially on our minds this week:

We pray for peace in the Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan.

For those affected by climate change – thinking of those enduring flooding in eastern Spain and
Ibiza. And for those affected by the earthquake in the Philippines.

We pray for those known to us who are ill, those who care for them and those who mourn. **SILENCE**

At the end of the Season of Creation, and celebrating the richness of the harvest, we pray for creation, for our world and all creatures in it:

We pray for your created world. You created the universe and all that lives and exists in it. The earth is filled with your creations. You make the grass, plants, and fruit-bearing trees grow, you feed the birds of the sky, you care for all your creatures on Earth. Out of your love you created human beings, give us the strength to faithfully till and keep your created world according to your will. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for humanity, for every community, and every person in it. Grant that we may treat our fellow human beings with respect: that we may accept all in their diversity, that we may support and uphold the human dignity of our neighbours. Give us a grateful heart, that we may see ourselves as part of the great and rich whole of which you have created humanity. Grant us understanding, responsible thinking, and valuable work. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your Church, that she may be a messenger of life and an agent of your love throughout the world. Instil courage in the hearts of those who follow you, that we may dare to proclaim hope to those who live in fear, encouragement to those who doubt, comfort to those who despair. Give your Church the strength of unity to proclaim your Gospel in word and deed as part of the world in crisis. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the sick, the destitute, the oppressed and the vulnerable. We pray for our fellow human beings and for all fellow creatures affected by war, conflict, genocide, and ecocide. Serve justice to those who cry out to you, and to those who have no ability to cry out. Humble our hearts to relate to our fellow creatures in distress as true brothers and sisters. Give us the courage to act on behalf of those who silently endure injustice and guide our steps in the way of righteous and long-lasting peace. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord's Prayer

Hymn All creatures of our God and King R&S 39 omit v 5&6

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!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
ye clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, alleluia!
thou rising morn in praise rejoice,
ye lights of evening find a voice;

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for thy Lord to hear,

Alleluia, alleluia!
Thou fire so masterful and bright
that givest us both warmth and light,

Dear mother earth, who day by day
unfoldest blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia!
the flowers and fruits that in thee grow,
let them his glory also show;

Let all things their creator bless
and worship him in humbleness,
O praise him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One:

W. H Draper

Blessing

May the One who breathed creation into life,
the One who walked in harmony with the earth,
the One who inspires us to learn from the world around us, breathe life into you,
enable you to live in harmony with the planet,
and inspire you to learn from the life that surrounds us,
and the blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore. Amen