

# HARVEST BANBRIDGE

1<sup>st</sup> October 2023

## 1. WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Brian

A Warm Welcome to You all this Morning as we join together in worship on this Harvest Sunday. It is wonderful to be back after five weeks of leave that saw us staying with Wendy's Mom South of JHB. We also took a 4 day road trip down to Cape Town travelling 826 miles through the semi desert conditions of what is known as the Karoo and staying at a few of the very small towns along the way. In Cape Town, while you were busy having a wonderful heat wave, we were experiencing a cold front that had blown up from the Antarctic. I don't think many people believe us when we tell them South Africa can get pretty cold, most especially because houses don't have central heating and therefore it often feels colder than weather here in Northern Ireland. For about 8 days we were both sleeping under three duvets during our time down in Cape Town. But

back in JHB we were able to enjoy some of the warm spring weather with temperatures up into the mid to high 20's. The time away also saw us visiting a few friends, watching Unsolved Mysteries on Netflix, as well as making a few necessary visits to the South African Home Office waking up at 5am on two mornings to make sure that we got there in time to be near the front of the queue to avoid waiting all day to be served. But it is good to be back. And wonderful to be able to share in this Harvest service with you. Wendy sends her love and greetings. And I won't mention the Rugby... all I can say is it is not over yet!

Harvest is a time of thanksgiving

It is an opportunity to acknowledge the network of life that supports us and the Divine source of life which undergirds and sustains all that is.

It is an opportunity to give thanks for The goodness of the earth, and it's ability to be fertile and to produce crops for our sustenance.

Harvest is also increasingly becoming a moment that calls us to recognise how we have collectively failed to care for the earth and if we do not change our ways the consequences which we are already beginning to feel will be dire for humanity and many other species all over the world and most particularly for those who are poor and economically vulnerable.

And so Harvest also comes to us as a call to commitment... a call to commit ourselves to collectively care for this earth that is our home, that we may limit the suffering that will be passed on to our children.

As we pray I read words from that beautiful hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth"

1 For the beauty of the earth,  
for the splendor of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth  
over and around us lies:  
Source of all, to thee we raise  
this, our hymn of grateful praise.

3 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:  
Source of all, to thee we raise  
this, our hymn of grateful praise. Amen.

2. **HYMN: MP 106 Come ye thankful  
people come**

3. Prayer of Praise and thanksgiving and  
Lord's Prayer

This world is your garden, Creator God,  
A thing of beauty  
Beyond understanding ,  
A poem that is being written,  
Not in words,  
But in colours,  
Wind's whisper,  
Soaring bird,  
Snowdrop's petal,  
Gentle rain,  
Sunlight's warmth.

This is your garden, Creator God,  
A thing of beauty  
Beyond understanding,  
In your time,  
This world was put in place,  
And in your time  
Became beautiful,  
Through the craftsmanship of your love.  
Producing a harvest of goodness  
to feed not only our bodies  
but also our hearts and our souls.  
Remind us always,  
As we look at sunrise,  
Landscape and tiny child,  
That at the centre of all things,  
Is your creative love oh God, made known most  
especially in the person of Jesus who took delight  
in the birds of the air and the grass of the fields,  
for it is in his name we pray saying together:

Our Father who art in heaven  
hallowed be thy Name  
thy kingdom come  
thy will be done

on earth as it is in heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us  
And lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom  
the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.,

**SONG** – Sarah / Ellen

## CHILDREN'S POEM

Thankful -

The waitress is thankful for comfortable shoes  
The local reporter for interesting news  
The gardener is thankful for every green sprout  
the fireman for putting the fire out  
The poet is thankful for words that rhyme  
the children for morning story time  
The artist is thankful for colour and light  
The clown for her costume silly and bright  
The doctor s thankful when patients get well-

The traveller for a cozy hotel  
The dancer s thankful she loves the beat  
that stirs the heart and hips and feet  
Th chef is thankful for plates licked clean  
The tailor for her sewing machine  
The king is thankful for his afternoon tea  
The beekeeper for the honey bee  
The mayor is thankful for every vote  
the sailor for his sturdy boat  
The bird watcher is thankful to see a new bird  
The pastor is thankful for God's loving word  
The crafter is thankful for glitter and glue  
And me? I ever so thankful for you!

And on Harvest Sunday we are especially  
thankful for the gifts of the earth  
And for God's Loving Kindness that sustains us  
from birth!

4. Reading Psalm 107:1 Give thanks to the  
Lord, for he is good, His Love endures  
forever.

5. **HYMN: MP 786 Yes, God is good – in  
earth and sky**

6. Dedication of the Electric Piano – Today is a special occasion, not just because it is Harvest Sunday but because we come also to dedicate our new electric piano that was bought a few months ago and which has helped to enrich our worship.

When Jim heard that the committee had given the go ahead to buy an electric piano, he offered to pay for it and to give it as a gift to the Church in memory of his beloved wife Denise and his beloved son Keith.

And so as we come to dedicate the piano in memory of them we pause to remember each of them. We remember Keith Russell who died suddenly on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1987. He was just 16 and a 6<sup>th</sup> Form pupil at Banbridge Academy where he was very active in a number of organisations including editing the school newsletter and establishing an innovative fundraiser for Children in Need. We remember him as a talented sportsman, representing Ulster in both golf and squash.

We come also to remember Denise Russell



who also died suddenly and unexpectedly on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2013, and so the 3<sup>rd</sup> September this year marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Denise's passing. We remember her as a well respected teacher first in PE and later at Banbridge High School where she worked in the Special Needs Unit. We also remember her love of golf and of sports in general including swimming and badminton. We remember the joy she found in dancing, cooking and holidays in the sun.

And lastly we remember both Keith and Denise and dearly loved members of the Russell family and active and committed members of this Church family.

I would like to invite the Russell family to come forward and to gather around the piano as we dedicate it now.

*O God, we thank you for the lives of Denise and Keith and for all they have meant and continue to mean in the hearts of their family and in the memories of many in this church.*

*We give thanks for love and life shared together and for precious memories. And as we give thanks for their lives, so we give thanks for the gift of music and the gift of this piano and pray your blessing on it and upon us as we dedicated it now in memory of Denise and Keith Amen.*

7. SONG - Ruby - In Christ Alone
8. Reading – Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
9. READING UU 634 On Turning – by Jack Reimer A few months ago, Rev. Lena Cockcroft lent me her copy of the Unitarian Universalist prayer and hymn book, and this is a beautiful reflection from that book.
10. Turn Turn Turn
11. SERMON:

In 1959 Pete Seeger wrote the song "Turn! Turn! Turn!", also known as or subtitled "To Everything There Is a Season". It has been sung by numerous people and groups including Judy

Collins, The Seekers, Nina Simone, Dolly Parton, Chris de Burgh and most famously the Byrds in 1965 who actually made it into a hit.

To everything (turn, turn, turn)  
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)  
And a time for every purpose, under heaven

A time to be born, a time to die  
A time to plant, a time to reap  
A time to kill, a time to heal  
A time to laugh, a time to weep

In fact it is difficult to actually say Pete Seeger wrote it... It would be a little more accurate to say that he co-wrote it with King Solomon or an anonymous Jewish Wisdom teacher, depending on which scholars you consult regarding the authorship of the book of Ecclesiastes.

Traditionally it was said to be King Solomon, but many scholars would say that the language and content of the book would suggest a much later date of authorship. Whether one takes King Solomon or an unknown wisdom preacher to be the author of Ecclesiastes, it could be said that the song holds the distinction of being the number 1

hit with the oldest lyrics in the world as well as a musical collaboration spanning between 2100 and 3100 years.

Pete Seeger himself openly admits that, apart from the tune which he wrote himself, he only really wrote 7 words of the lyrics one of which was the word turn, which he used repeatedly and then the final 6 words of the song: “I swear it’s not too late”. All the rest of the words come entirely from the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 3:1-8.

Like all Biblical passages, the lines from Ecclesiastes could be open to myriad interpretations especially when viewed against the rest of the book, but Peter Seeger's contribution to the song turned the words of Ecclesiastes into a plea for world peace with the closing line: "a time for peace, I swear it's not too late."

As I have already said, the book of Ecclesiastes is traditionally attributed to King Solomon although many scholars would not take that literally. But in a symbolic sense it is significant that the book

was attributed to him. He epitomises the wealthy and well-to-do. In 1 King 10 it is said that he received 25 tons of gold every year. In addition King Solomon is said to have received revenues from merchants and traders from all the Arabian kings and governors of the territories as well as receiving wealth from those who came to listen to his words of wisdom. The Biblical writer summarises the splendour of his wealth by saying that King Solomon was greater in riches than all the other kings of the earth.

And yet, one of the refrains in the book of Ecclesiastes are the words meaningless, meaningless, meaningless. Some would translate them as ephemeral ephemeral ephemeral. It is a symbolic reminder that like Solomon, you can have all the wealth in the world and yet still not know the true meaning of your existence. You can have all the wealth in the world and still feel like life is empty, ephemeral and meaningless.

It is a reminder at harvest that temporal things, food and drink, bread, produce are vital for our existence and yet... they cannot satisfy our deeper hunger. Jesus summarised it in these

words: Man cannot live by bread alone! We all need a deeper purpose and a deeper meaning than simply satisfying our bodily needs and desires. Food and clothing and shelter may be important and necessary, but they are not enough.

Without discovering some deeper more eternal reality, the Turning of the seasons and the endless repeated cycles of life can very quickly begin to seem meaningless and ephemeral.

And so while we celebrate with thanksgiving the produce that can feed and sustain our bodies, we look for food and a sustenance that would feed our deeper hunger for things of an eternal nature... things that do not rot or waste or rust away in a few days to paraphrase the words of Jesus.

Jesus in John's Gospel is portrayed as urging us to seek the Bread that is from Heaven a bread that will help to satisfy a deeper hunger.

In a world that is constantly changing, and turning, Turn Turn Turn, Jesus, and all the great

mystics of the world invite us to discover that which is eternal and unchanging.

Meister Eckart, a German mystic and pastor from before the time of the Reformation (who got himself into trouble with the Roman Catholic Church at the time) taught that there is a divine essence within each of us, a light in the soul that is uncreated and indestructable, unconditioned, universal, deathless, a divine core of our personalities which cannot be separated from God, an essence within the soul that lies at the very centre of consciousness. He taught that this divine essence is in every person and can and should be discovered so that it's presence and it's sparkiling light can be brought forth as a reality in daily life. He also taught that this discovery of our spiritual or divine essence within each of us is life's real and higher goal. As Eknath Easwaran puts in his book *Original Goodness*, our supreme purpose in life is not to make a fortune, nor to pursue pleasure, not to write our name in history, but to discover this divine spark, or the seed of the divine that is in our hearts.

And when we realise this goal, we discover simultaneously that the divinity within ourselves is one and the same in all – in all individuals, in all creatures, and in all of life, and having discovered this Divine Essence within which Jesus called the Kingdom of God and Buddhists call the Buddha Nature, in bringing it forth into the world we begin to become part of the solution and the healing of the world, rather than being part of the problem. It enables us to move beyond our greed, fear and anxiety enabling us to bring forth the fruits of love of wisdom, courage and compassion in the world.

Turn Turn Turn, there is a season for everything under heaven, a time for peace, I swear it is not too late. There is an urgency for not just in making peace with each other in this world, but also in making peace with the earth and learning to care for our Mother earth who sustains us with food and produce, learning to live not as greedy exploiters of the earth for our own private pots of wealth but to become people whose lives are dedicated to the healing of the world. It won't be solved by technology alone, but as humanity



begins to tap into the Divine essence within as as we begin to bring that forth into the world.

Meister Eckart said that pear seeds grow into pear trees, apple seeds grow into apple trees, and God seeds grow into God. And that is our destiny to grow into the Divine beings God has created us to be. How do we make these seeds grow. How do we become farmers of the spirit watering the divine seed within, nurturing the light within us and in others that sparkles and shines...

1. Firstly, some form of regular daily meditation, that will help us every day even for a few moments to turn inwards. Eknath Easwaran suggests taking a beautiful passage of scripture or a prayer like the Prayer of St Francis of Assisi and memorising it and then saying it prayerfully and slowly every morning or every evening. This can nurture the seed of Divine love and peace within our hearts.

2. Secondly by engaging in acts of love and kindness and generosity... even the smallest acts of love, and generosity open the heart and enable

the divine seed within to sparkle and shine and in doing so brings beauty and healing into the world.

And so on this Harvest Sunday, at the turning of the seasons, and in thanksgiving for all that sustains our physical bodies, we are invited to become farmers of the spirit, watering and nurturing the divine seed within that we may bring forth and abundant harvest of love, kindness and healing in the world. Amen.

## 12. OFFERING and Prayers of Intercession and dedication:

### **Offering**

Generous God, who meets all our needs, as we bring our gifts and offerings we give thanks for Jesus who gave his life so freely for others. We offer these our gifts of thanks, praying that our lives might bear the fruit of your love and goodness in the world.

And with these offerings of love and gratitude, so we also bring our prayers for others who find

themselves in times of difficulty, illness, sadness, grief and anxiety...

God of all goodness, as we celebrate this season of harvest & thanksgiving,

And as we have given thanks for the blessings of food, provision and nourishment.

Grow within us a harvest for the world.

Come sow a seed of hope within our souls, that we might yield goodness, patience and kindness in abundance.

Sow a seed of peace in our lives, that we might bear the fruits of forgiveness, compassion and righteousness.

Come sow a seed of love in our hearts Lord, that others would reap the blessings of family, friendship and community.

May each seed of hope, peace and love grow within us into a harvest that can be feasted on by all. Amen.

**13. HYMN: MP 732 We plough the fields and scatter**

**14. BENEDICTION & GRACE**

## 15. **Closing Blessing: (sung) MP 460**

### **Supper will be served in the Ervine Hall after the service.**

Creator God, for daily bread,  
and all who work  
to bring your harvest home,  
we bring our thanks today.

(pause)

Forgive our ingratitude,  
we who have so much,  
yet waste what you have given.

(pause)

For those whose harvest is poor,  
whose crops have withered,  
water tainted, children starve,  
help those who bring relief  
and bestow on us  
an unaccustomed generosity,  
that all might share from your garden  
and all might sing your praise.

(pause)

Creator God, provider of all  
we bring our thanks today.

And in the midst of our prayers of thanksgiving, so we prayer for others who we bring on our hearts this day. For those for whom it feels like there is little to celebrate. For those who may be fearful or anxious? For those facing challenges that may feel beyond their capabilities or strength. We hold them in the silence of our hearts into the light and peace of God's love.

And for ourselves to and the challenges, difficulties and struggles that we might be facing:

God of Love, God of Peace,  
This fractured word  
Cries out in pain,  
Burns deep into my soul  
And challenges me  
To make a difference.

God of Love, God of Peace,  
God of this world,  
Scarred by grief and tears,  
Ignorance and fear,  
Soften hearts of stone,  
And begin with mine.

**God of Love, God of Peace,  
Create within me  
A heart for people,  
A desire for change,  
For new beginnings  
To start this day.**