West Sussex Area Ministry, United Reformed Church (Billingshurst, Petworth and Pulborough)

**Bulletin for Sunday 23 October 2022**

Good morning friends.

This Sunday our worship has a seasonal, Harvest thanksgiving theme.

Let’s pause as we prepare to worship… and then praise God as we sing our first hymn:

Hymn: For the fruits of all creation (R&S 42)

Prayers: Generous God, as we remember your good gifts to us

we bring our thanks for the harvest -

for our daily food, with its variety and flavour,

and for those whose work and skill

grow, process, transport and sell it to us.

We give thanks too for the changing seasons,

for the mists and changing colours of autumn,

and for new life and fresh growth after the rain.

We ask your blessing on everything we do,

and on everything we give in your service,

today and every day. Amen

followed by The Lord’s Prayer

Readings: Psalm 65

Reflection: This psalm is a hymn of praise to God the creator in wonderful poetry, and it’s absolutely full of vivd imagery.

We had several gorgeously colourful sunsets earlier this week, which are brought to mind by the description of sunrise and sunset in verse 8, which I love:

“you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy”!

Beyond the creation of the earth itself, with its shape and colour, God is understood to be the source of life and growth… and ultimately, therefore, the harvest which allows human life (and indeed all sorts of life) to survive and thrive here. When I read in verse 9, “You visit the earth and water it”, I have a mental picture of God as a gardener with a watering can, gently, carefully, and patiently bringing green life and growth to the world.

We are reminded that God isn’t concerned for us only, but for the whole of this amazing blue and green planet: “the pastures of the wilderness overflow”, because nature is alive and growing and loved by God. Then in the final verse we come closer to home, as the meadows and the valleys also produce abundantly - not because of our human endeavours (or not because of us alone) but because God has created them to do so: “the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain”. And the suggestion that they do so joyfully, surely reflects the joy of farmers and growers everywhere at a good harvest safely gathered in.

Look at the words of this next hymn - it reflects the sentiments of the psalmist. We can only do so much, however hard we work. In the end, the harvest comes from God.

Hymn: We plough the fields and scatter (R&S 124)

Prayers: Living God of all creation

we pray for those through whom we receive our food

including farmers and others involved in agriculture,

pickers and packers and distributors…

We pray too for the areas of the world

where conflict or disaster lead to starvation,

holding before you charities and others giving aid.

Remembering our own communities,

we pray for those we know and love…..

In Jesus’ name we ask all our prayers,

including the unspoken prayers of our hearts. Amen

Hymn: O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder (R&S 117)

So we remember the words of God in Genesis (8:22):

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest,

cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.

Blessing: Now may the blessing of God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

be with us and with all those we love,

this week, and always. Amen

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Sunday at Six service on Zoom at 6pm this Sunday - all welcome.

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