

October 9 2022  
Harvest Thanksgiving



**God calls us to worship:**

Responsive reading: Psalm 100

Hymn: #803 “Come, ye thankful people come”

**We respond in praise, confession, and supplication:**

Prayers of Praise and supplication (*Please remain standing*):

O God, the only Creator,  
who from the first didst make the earth fruitful,  
that all Thy creatures might live:  
we joy before Thee with the joy of harvest.  
As of old Thy people  
brought to Thee the first-fruits of the ground,  
so now do we present our humble and hearty thanksgiving.  
And we beseech Thee to grant us such due sense of all Thy mercies  
that we may show forth the honour of Thy Name  
and make Thy praise glorious;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.<sup>1</sup>

Prayers of Confession (*Please be seated; said in unison*):

**Merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed.  
We have not loved you  
with our whole heart, mind, and strength;  
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.  
In your mercy  
forgive what we have been,  
amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be,  
so that we may delight in your will  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your holy name.  
Amen.**

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer for Harvest Thanksgiving, *Book of Common Order*, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1964. pg. 290.

Assurance of grace: 1 Timothy 1:15; 2:5-6a  
(The response to: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" is: "**His love endures forever.**")

**God speaks to us:**

Unison prayer for illumination:

**Living God,  
to turn away from you is to fall  
and to turn towards you is to rise.  
By the power of your Spirit,  
reform your church  
and help us to hear your word  
in ways that we will understand it truly;  
so that in understanding we may trust fully;  
and that in trusting we may follow you always.  
Give us, dear God,  
your help in all our responsibilities;  
your guidance in all our uncertainties;  
and your wisdom in all our discerning.  
Where we are corrupt, purify us.  
Where we are in error, direct us.  
Where we are divided, reunite us.  
And use your church to your glory  
and the service of your people,  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.<sup>2</sup>**

Reading of Scripture: Deuteronomy 26:1-11;  
Philippians 4:4-9;

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<sup>2</sup> A prayer for the church from the writings of the Reformers.

## Thanksgiving

The Israelites celebrated three pilgrimage festivals which involved annual journeys to the temple in Jerusalem. The second of these was the *festival of weeks*, observed “seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain.” (Leviticus 16:9)

After 40 years of wilderness wanderings following 400 years of slavery in Egypt, they had finally made it by God’s gracious providence to border of the land God had promised their ancestors. They were going to be free to live and worship as God’s people in God’s land.

One can only imagine the rejoicing of those first generations as they began their settled life in this land of milk and honey. As they harvested their first crop on their own land, their hearts must have been filled with gratitude.

Their praise and thanksgiving would have been a joyful noise indeed!

It is an unfortunate characteristic of the human species that we easily forget our dependence on God. We easily forget the God-given mercies with which we have been blessed. This is especially true if we’ve grown accustomed to any degree of comfort and prosperity.

When I was a student minister, I was struck by the observation that the people I met who exhibited the greatest degree of sincere and unashamed, God-directed gratitude and unshakable belief and trust in God and His providence, were those who either themselves immigrated or their parents did. And those who were most reluctant to audibly praise God, and who were somewhat apathetic about blessings received, were those who had lived for some time, and often some generations with a relative degree of comfort.

The Lord God knew that as one generation followed the next and the years in the wilderness were reduced to the oft-repeated – and increasingly hard to believe – stories of the older generation, that profound joy and gratitude would be diminished by the comfort and predictability that comes with settled and prosperous living. And, as gratitude is replaced with entitlement, the awareness of one’s need for God disappears. So, in His wisdom, God instituted this yearly festival of thanksgiving: The Festival of Weeks.

Deuteronomy 26 describes the liturgy of the festival, the order of service:

- “Take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket”;
- “Go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name”;
- as you bring the basket of first-fruits to the altar, recount how the Lord “heard our voice and saw our affliction, how the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm”
- gather with your household, with strangers, and with the priests to “celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.”

As I read this passage this week, I was struck by how similar the liturgy of the festival of weeks is to our own liturgy of offering.

Our financial offering, is to be the first fruit of our monthly harvest. In other words, its not meant to be a last-minute-whatever-money’s-in-my-wallet kind of giving. Whether you give 10%, 2%, or 20%, our offering to God is to be a percentage of our *gross* income. Before you set aside any money for taxes, food, mortgage payments, fuel, or car repairs, you set aside a portion to give to God.

This is the “first-fruit.”

Offering our first-fruit not only recognizes that all good things come from God, it is an act of faith by which we publicly affirm God will provide what we need. We can offer from the top because we know God will provide more.

So, as a regular offering of thanksgiving by which we remind ourselves of our dependence on God and that “all good gifts around us are sent from God alone,” we set aside our weekly/monthly offerings of financial first-fruits.

Then, we bring our first fruit to “the place that the Lord our God has chosen as a dwelling for his name,” which is any place that 2 or 3 gather in the name of the Christ, by the bond of the Holy Spirit. Having thusly gathered, we place our first fruit in a basket (in our case, we use a wooden plate), and bring the basket before the altar.

It needs to be noted that Jesus made the once and for all sacrifice on the cross. There are no more sacrifices to make, so we don’t have an altar in our sanctuary. We have the Lord’s Supper table.

So, we place our first fruit in a basket and bring the basket before the Lord, placing it on the Lord's Table. As we do, we praise God, recounting how the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, how the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And this, we normally do with prayers of thanksgiving and by singing the doxology: "Praise God from whom **all blessings** flow."

Our liturgy of offering, is our weekly liturgy of first fruits; our weekly liturgy of thanksgiving.

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*Thanksgiving is the act of worship whereby we affirm the goodness of God, recognize and recount the mercies with which He has blessed us, and confess our dependence on Him.*

*Thanksgiving, therefore, is the act of worship by which you prepare yourself so that "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."<sup>3</sup>*

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When we gather each year on Harvest Thanksgiving Sunday, we do so to recount the ways the Lord God has provided for us over the past year.

God provides the cycles of rain and dryness, of sunlight and darkness that are necessary for seeds to germinate. He provides the wonder-inspiring biological process by which the seed transforms into a plant that produces fruit which we can eat.

*We plough the fields and scatter  
the good seed on the land,  
but it is fed and watered  
by **God's** almighty hand.<sup>4</sup>*

God provides what is necessary for our temporal living in this present age.

*And*, He provides His own life through which we can experience the life that is of eternal quality.

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 4:7

<sup>4</sup> Hymn: "We plough the fields and scatter"

Jesus described himself as the bread who alone provides sustenance that endures whether the weather is favourable or contrary, whether the harvests are lean or plentiful.

Just as the fruit of the harvest only benefit us when we apply them to ourselves: when we eat the bread and the turkey, the peas and the pies, so too we experience the blessing of Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection when we apply his loving kindness to our living:

When we believe and confess that God is real, good, and able,

When we believe and confess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God,

When, in obedience, we apply His word to our circumstance,

When in *everything*, by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving*, we let our requests be made known to God,

And when we gather in the place that the Lord God has chosen as a dwelling for His name. We bring the first-fruit of our labour and put it in a basket. We bring the basket to the Lord's Table while singing His praises and recounting the mercies He has given by His mighty hand and outstretched arm.

**Hymn:** #807 "We plough the fields and scatter"

**We respond in thanksgiving, intercession, and faith:**

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

Generous God, on this Harvest weekend,  
we thank you for all things great and small,  
for moments of wonder and for ordinary exchanges  
which fill our lives with meaning and offer us a sense of wellbeing.  
May our friends see in us the signs of a grateful heart.  
God of all goodness,

**Receive our prayers.**

Generous God, as we give thanks for the harvests of the earth  
and all the goodness that sustains us,  
we pray that you will show us how to live respectfully in creation  
and protect all that is precious to you.  
Wherever harvests have been disappointing,  
show us how to share what has been produced so that no one goes hungry.  
God of all goodness,

**Receive our prayers.**

Generous God, we pray for the good of your world  
and the common good in our community.  
Where there is strife and hostility between peoples and nations,

inspire leaders to show wisdom and courage in their decision making.  
We pray for people and places hard hit by flood or fire, tornado or hurricane,  
epidemic or earthquake

*(Hold silence for ten seconds)*

May neighbours with resources maintain generosity and compassion  
for the long work of reconstructing lives and livelihoods.

God of all goodness,

**Receive our prayers.**

Generous God, we pray for our neighbours and those of our number  
who are facing health challenges or difficult times for any reason...

*(Hold silence for ten seconds)*

And we pray for family and friends under stress or in sorrow  
whom we name in silence before you.....

*(Hold silence for ten seconds)*

Make us generous in compassion and understanding for each one.

God of all goodness,

**Receive our prayers.**

Generous God, in Jesus Christ we have met your generous love and mercy.  
Through our lives and by our prayers, reveal his love and mercy to this  
generation,  
for it is in his name we offer the prayer he taught us:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Offering:

*When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is  
giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and  
settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the  
ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God  
is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place  
that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.<sup>5</sup>*

Let us return to God the offerings of our lives.

*Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while congregation sings:*

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;**

**praise him all creatures here below;**

**praise him above, ye heavenly host;**

**praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost**

Prayer of dedication

Hymn:

#802 "For the fruits of all creation"

**God sends us with God's blessing:**

Benediction

Congregation sings "Amen"

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<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 26:1, 2

