

Firstfruits

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Preacher: Rev Gordon Kennedy

[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.

May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your great glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. It's been really good today to share in the service with members of our eco team. It is great that in our congregation, we have a group of folks who help us to think about creation care and our responsibility as disciples of Jesus to care for all creation.

I'm sure the team would really love me to say, if you're interested in eco themes or creation care or any of these things, you're more than welcome to join in with the team.

You've seen them all. They'll be through in the hall after the service. Go and speak to them and find out how you can join in and share in the work of our eco team.

[1 : 17] We've already achieved our bronze A plaque as an eco congregation, so there'll be lots of things to do as we journey towards a silver plaque.

But do remember our eco team and pray for them and look for opportunities for you to join in with them in helping us all care for God's creation.

Harvest is a really good time of year. I think whatever else is happening in the world, we should notice that the seasons have revolved once again and it's come round to harvest time.

When we lived down in Newcombe, you always knew when it was harvest time because you would always get stuck behind tractors on the roads. But you never really minded because these farmers were doing some wonderful work at this time of year as they gathered in the harvest.

You would see as you moved round farm to farm the same groups of farm workers going from farm to farm to share and gathering in the harvest.

[2 : 31] It's good to bring the harvest home. Even with all the advances that we have in crop technology, things like hybrid strains of wheat or greens, there's still a lot about getting from the seed to the harvest that we're not in control of.

If Storm Amy had arrived in June or July rather than Friday, we might not have had such a good harvest this year as many of the early crops would have been damaged or destroyed.

And it isn't too long ago in our own country that a year with a bad harvest would mean real hunger for lots of people living in Edinburgh and in other towns and cities in our nation.

We can't make it rain and we can't make it stop raining. We can't make the sun shine at the right time and in the right way.

Harvest reminds us that all good things around us are sent from God. Everything is in God's hands and it's good for us to be thankful for that.

[3 : 59] Our proper concerns for the too many others who have no food or little food. For the too many others who this year will have poor harvests.

Our concern for them should not diminish our thanksgiving that God has been graciously at work among us. Our very real concerns about the harmful effects of climate change, which it turns out is not a con.

Our very real concerns about the effects of climate change, the damage that has been done and is continuing to be done to our planet, should not hinder our songs of joy and thankfulness.

It is good and right for us to give thanks to our God. I couldn't find a verse in the Bible that mentioned pockets of hope, so I've let the eco team down.

The closest I could get to it was the idea of first fruits. And our two readings this morning both share that word, that theme.

[5 : 14] The idea that the first fruit is an advanced sign of hope. A pocket of hope, if you like. There is a first fruit of the ground and a first fruit of humanity.

From all that our God has graciously given us, we get to bring him the first fruits. When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, you shall take some of the first of the fruit of the ground which you harvest from your land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Put it in a basket and go to the place the Lord your God will choose to make his name dwell there. It was just last week. We were reading in Genesis 4 about Abel's offering from the flocks and the herd and Cain's offering from the ground.

Here in Deuteronomy, Moses preaches God's word to God's people and tells them and us to bring an offering of the first fruits from the ground.

This is one of the passages which tells us that God's regarding Abel's offering and not regarding Cain's offering isn't as simple as the difference between flocks and crops.

[6 : 44] I don't think the idea that the first fruit is necessarily the best fruit is what's going on here. I think the idea is simply that as it says, it is the first fruit.

Imagine for a moment you are a subsistence farmer. You and your family, often an extended family, live in a terribly poor shack or hut, perhaps in a village, perhaps on a field.

You've got a field of your own or a share of a field and the only food your family is going to get is what you grow in that field.

At the time that the people entered into the land of Canaan, they would have been subsistence farmers. Many people in our family line going back would have been subsistence farmers.

Many people today live like this. What they grow is all they have to eat. the first fruit becomes really, really important.

[7 : 55] It is a symbol of hope, a small sign that all the rest is coming. If the first fruit has been come and gathered in, you can hope that the later harvest will also come and fill up the barn.

Don't you think if you're a subsistence farmer, it would be a great temptation to take the first fruits and put them in the barn and the second fruits and the third fruits and fill up the barn till you reckoned you had enough grain stored away to see your family through the winter.

And then, and only then, think about what you might give away to others. God, the generous giver, asks us, the grateful receivers, to give away first.

The first fruits are what we offer him. In this, we demonstrate our dependence upon our God for all things.

In this harvest season, let's remind one another increasing maturity as a disciple of Jesus means increased dependence upon Jesus.

[9 : 23] When we sing together nothing in my hands I bring, that's what we really mean. When we say that we walk by faith and not by sight, that's what we really mean.

When the apostle Paul writes of us being dead in our trespasses and our sins, we learn that we are able to do only what the dead can do, nothing. We have nothing of ourselves to bring to God.

We cannot do anything of ourselves to make ourselves right with God. We are wholly dependent, not only in spiritual things, but in physical things.

We can't make the sun shine, we can't make the rain fall, we depend absolutely upon God for every mouthful of food we eat.

We are wholly dependent. And God, the generous giver, asks us, the grateful receivers, to give away first.

[10 : 33] We are going to depend upon God. We're not going to depend upon filling up our barns or our granaries or our storehouses. We are going to trust God and give away to Him first.

And only then are we going to think about providing for ourselves and our families. in this we demonstrate our commitment to care for others.

Some of our politicians might think it's not their job to feed the hungry and they love to tell us that. As disciples of Jesus, it is our calling and our privilege to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit the prisoner, to welcome the stranger.

our neighbor is everyone and anyone who is in need. The first call on our time, on our talents and our money is to give it away to serve God.

Social justice and compassionate care for the others cannot be separated from the gospel. Those who follow Jesus the compassionate, Jesus the jade, generous, Jesus the welcoming, can only follow him into this kind of life.

[12 : 01] So this harvest season, let's remind one another. Yes, we are saved by God through the cross of Christ, but we are saved to serve.

We follow Jesus to bless others, to bless all creation. our salvation as part of God's great mission to renew and restore all things.

We are saved to serve. And we serve God's mission with the first fruits. This is because if we don't give the first fruits, we're not going to get round to giving anything at all.

I wonder if at the weekend you look at your diary for the next week and think about what you're going to do through the next week.

A bit of forward planning. When you thought about your diary for the next week, did you put serving God and his mission in first?

[13 : 02] and then only put the other things round about? Or do we plan the days taking the first of our time for our entertainment and our enjoyment and filling in the gaps that are left over with God?

When we do our budgeting with our money, when we think about what we have coming in and what we have going out, do we prayerfully consider what we can give away to God's mission first?

In the coming weeks we're going to be talking about our financial giving. This is part of our first fruits. Do we plan instead to give the first of our income to ourselves and then give out of what's left over to God and his work?

What about those gifts and abilities that God has given us? To share in a team like the eco team and encourage one another to care about creation? Gifts and abilities to help out making and serving tea after our service or working the computer to do the live stream or opening the door and welcoming people in.

Gifts and abilities that we might all have. Do we think about how we're giving the first fruits of them to serve our God? God? When we see we give the first fruits, do we really mean it?

[14 : 39] Notice what Moses said we actually see when we give the first fruits. Go to the priest who's in office and say to him, I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.

When we give the first fruits we are declaring that God is a faithful God that he has made promises to us and kept every one of them.

We are saying as we give away the first fruits of our time and our talents and our money that our God is trustworthy and we will live in dependence upon him.

on the cross our saviour Jesus finished the work of salvation. We are already made right with God. By the gift of the Holy Spirit at work within us we have already been brought into the kingdom of God.

The promise that we would live together with God is already fulfilled in the gospel. We declare these truths as we give away the first fruits from all that God has given us.

[15 : 59] If in Deuteronomy the first fruits are things which we bring to God in James it turns out we are the first fruits. Do not be deceived my beloved brothers every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. It is by God's own will that we have all been brought forth into creation.

We did not choose to be created. Our father has chosen us and he now presents us, holds us on display before all creation.

We are the first fruits that God offers to his creation. This is not a work we do by ourselves. This is achieved in us by the father's word.

Jesus the word calls us into the kingdom and answering his call we become the first fruits, the people of God. The holy scriptures written and living word of God transform us through hearing and believing God's word and we become a kind of first fruits to be given to creation.

[17 : 30] God's God's sovereign will, the end product of God's transforming word is that we become a kind of first fruits of his creation.

God's mission is to renew and restore all things. These weeks we've been reading in Genesis 1 to 3 of God's good creation and the harming of that creation by our human sin.

To overcome the effects of human sin, God became human. God transforms humans, you and me, through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As the first fruits of God's mission, we are offered by God to all creation to be co-workers with God in his mission of renewing and restoring all things.

As a kind of first fruits, we are given by God to care for creation. We reduce our waste. We choose to recycle. We desire to live in harmony with creation, not in competition.

[18 : 48] Our choices are God's works. We choose to bless his creation. As a kind of first fruits, we are given by God to declare his word of truth to all people.

The same word of truth which has transformed our lives will transform and renew the lives of others. The same word of truth which brought us to the cross, which worked in us the forgiveness of sins, which set us free from the guilt and penalty of sin, that same word of life is for all people. But only if we speak it, only if we declare it, the reason why so many have not heard this word of truth is our silence.

God is giving us as a kind of first fruits to all people so that all people might know that every good and perfect gift comes from God. That all people might know that our God and Father is not variable like the weather, but his purposes of grace, his mission of renewal, his works of love are constant and sure.

So this harvest season lets us submit to being a kind of first fruits, the first fruits that God brings forth from his work of salvation and hands over to serve his mission in all creation.

[20 : 23] Let's renew our commitment to sharing God's care and blessing for all creation. Let's be the first fruits that God is making us into. This harvest season, yes, let's bring our first fruits as gifts to give to our God, but let us also be the first fruits that God is giving for all creation.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you, the God of all grace and goodness, the God who open handedly gives to us and gives again.

We pray that you would give us generous hearts, that we would give to you first of all that you have given us, that we would be your first fruits, that we would go and serve you and bless all creation. Be with us and hear our prayer, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.