It is always a joy to come together to give thanks to God at this time of harvest and I find myself thinking that joy through in a new context now l find myself in a new rural location. The harvest has been brought more fully to mind as I have over the summer seen the fields around us change and develop. I have witnessed fresh shoots growing forth from the ground, growing green then changing into a variety of hues and then changing into the multiple colours of the harvest.

I have seen growth and development and the care needed to promote the produce of the field. I have experienced the beauty of farming in the open spaces around us and also grown in my understanding of the pressures and demands placed upon the farming community. I have even been blessed in seeing buzzards and many hawks which I have found difficult to identify on my many walks and runs along the country lanes. Reminding me of the cycle of life and the inter-dependence of all aspects of God’s creation.

I have also learnt that at certain times of the year in order to promote the harvests of today and tomorrow certain things need to be done not least muck spreading which can have quite an impact on the senses especially when attempting to eat breakfast in the warmth of a summer morning!

We live in an abundant place, where the beauty of the harvest is very self-evident and of course it is fitting that we come together to give thanks to God for his bountiful provision to us, whilst also being aware that not all harvests succeed and indeed many throughout the world continue to periodically fail, producing great hardship and considerable distress to countless millions of people.

Even our own harvests may not always be as productive as we would like them or indeed at times expect them to be, and a reduced yield or a poor quality grain can have considerable impact on the livelihoods of many.

And yet as we gather in celebration we should indeed be always thankful no matter how the harvest impacts upon us both locally or globally because the harvest which truly matters is the harvest of the labourer’s of God.

The prophet Isaiah speaks very powerfully of God’s bounty and generosity toward his children. His message is one of hope and speaks with certainty that God will restore, protect and make full provision for those who love him. We however as Christians are reminded that God through Jesus Christ opens up the possibility of the greatest harvest of all, for the seed of faith has been planted within us and our response to that seed is what enables it to grow and to flourish.

We are called to respond in thanksgiving to God through Jesus but not demanded to do so. God does not judge us through our failures but rather through our own awareness of both self and other. For in Jesus our failures have already been forgiven. God desires us to draw close to him in order that we may reap all that is sown in the lives which we lead.

For God’s harvest is brought in effectively not by the combine harvester but through his gift of righteousness, a gift which is given freely to all and as the bible tells us is scattered abroad to the poor and rich alike.

When God offers us this greatest of all gifts we are called to respond to it, and we are called to respond with the generosity of our hearts, for in being generous to others we truly give thanksgiving to God.

The harvest of generosity is of course lived out through the medium of service. Initially that is shown forth in our service to others. That service is asked of us both in the religious and spiritual arenas just as much as within the secular world in which we live, which is why we are reminded to pray so that through the harvest of our prayers to God we may indeed lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

As we rejoice in the abundance of God’s gifts to us and hold all around us in prayer we traditionally remember those who are less fortunate in this world.

And often our generosity is the means whereby we ourselves scatter abroad the gifts of the harvest to the poor and needy within our own communities and of course to those throughout the wider world.

It is in our response to the needs of others that we in turn give service to God, God not only calls us to worship him but to seek to live out our lives in accordance to his will. But how do we know what the will of God truly is, once again this is made clear to us through the medium of service, Service this time to the words of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus shows us the way to the harvest of our souls. It is in service to all that he calls us to do that we can truly give thanks to God for the indescribable gift of his righteousness to us.

We are called to follow in the footsteps of Christ with joy in our hearts. We are called to be a thankful people we have a rich harvest before us and that harvest is always abundant because it is not dependent on the weather or good husbandry or on the dreaded muck-spreading but it is and always will be bountiful because God’s love and care for us never fails. God’s harvest to us is always abundant, it is a harvest which is always fulfilling and joyful, because it is delivered to us through the depth of our faith, and it is in the certainty of faith in Jesus Christ that we give thanks to God.

So as we give thanks for the harvest of the fields and all other aspects of the natural world, let us also give thanks for the gift of faith, which transforms our lives, helping us to be generous to others and give service to them, for it is in giving service to others with a cheerful heart that we in turn give service to God and to the Gospel of Christ,

Amen.