**Sunday 26th September**

**Harvest Thanksgiving at St Mark’s Brampton**

**Reflection by Rev’d Julie on Matthew 9: 35 - 38**

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord. Amen.

How would you like to begin with a game?

*Word association……*

I have got 5 words for you to guess that each go after the word Harvest – can you guess what they are?

Harvest …… (answers at the end of this document!)

Excellent – well done and thank you.

I love harvest time – one of my memories of being a teenager in Devon is of going to the Partridge’s farm up the road and “helping” with bringing in the bales of hay – I was rubbish at it because I was not strong enough to move them, but as the youth group were all there helping out it was fine to be there offering moral support! At home, we had an apple tree and used to gather in the apples, wrap them in newspaper and put them in boxes to store them for the winter, hoping they wouldn’t all go mouldy. Steve will tell you how his job as a teenager was to work on the Blackshaw’s farm picking potatoes, and then later, when a machine picked them up he was on the back taking off stones. All these jobs were fine when we were young!

Harvest time is hard work – even today, with so many machines and ways to bring in the crops we take for granted, there is still a need for much harvesting to be done by hand. According to the Guardian newspaper, in 2020 some 70,000 people were needed to bring in the British harvest – fruit, vegetables and hops are just some of the produce that needs people to bend over, stretch up, reach in and do so day after day until the harvest is all in.

At Harvest Festivals we tend to focus on thanking God for the produce that we have in front of us; or we think of countries where the annual harvest is not reliable; or we substitute freshly bought items for tins and packets which can more easily be donated to projects such as the Foodbank – and quite rightly too. Yesterday we did all three of these things – the trolley for Foodbank is here; the display that will be going on the newly painted railings depicts flowers and prayers of thankfulness, and the donations received are going to support the work of Christian Aid. Thank you.

Jesus often used images and told parables drawing on agriculture, horticulture and viniculture. When he did so, he drew on a tradition going back hundreds of years, as the Psalmist also used imagery of sowing, growing and reaping or harvesting, as we read in today’s Psalm, 126.

But today I want us to think not so much about the produce, but rather about the workers – the people God needs to bring in His harvest. Have you ever thought about God needing workers? We don’t often think of ourselves as God’s helpers, and yet this is what Jesus tells us we are – all of us from the oldest to the youngest, the most able to the least able, the fittest and tallest to the weakest and smallest – God looks on all of us and calls us his Harvest Workers!

So what are the characteristics of being God’s worker – I offer you five Ps

**The first is Plentiful:**

Jesus makes this claim that the harvest is plentiful – we don’t need to ask God for more harvest as it is already there. Be encouraged by these words of Jesus – so often we forget that God is Lord of all, and the harvest of souls known and loved by God is already there – and is plentiful.

**The second is Praise:**

At the end of Psalm 126 the song bursts into this lyric that even though there have been tears and sorrow, the harvest is waiting to be gathered up and brought home with songs of joy. God’s workers are people who sing and have hearts full of joy – they are people of Praise.

**My third characteristic of God’s workers is that they Persevere**

Those of us who have already responded to God’s call to be His workers in and amongst His harvest fields are to be people who Persevere.

Let’s be honest, and I mean honest, not trying to beat ourselves up, but let’s be honest we, and I include myself, are not the youngest, fittest, most able people in Brampton are we?

But God has called ***us*** to be His workers, persevering in the field of His harvest.

And what is in this field – well to go back to our picture language –

maybe you used to serve God in one field, say of cabbages, but now you can’t bend down. But over here is a fruit tree with low hanging branches which are at just the right height for you to pick and harvest.

Or perhaps you have grown tired of fruit picking and have taken a rest, but if you know there is a way to collect broccoli then you know you could do that.

Or maybe you used to be at the front of the workers at the harvest and those days are well gone, but look – here is something that all of us can do –

What Jesus asks his disciples to do is to ***pray*** for more workers.

**Fourth P – God’s workers Pray**

What was true then is true for us today – we need more workers to help bring in the harvest that God says is already present.

Jesus says we are to pray using these words: “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field”.

I know someone who uses the Bible verse as a prompt – Matthew 9 v 38 and they have set an alarm at 9: 38am every day and when it goes off, they prays these words: “Lord of the harvest send out workers into your harvest field.” 9:38am works for lots of us – 9:38pm might work better for others – my encouragement is that we find what we can do, and then we do it.

For example, here in St Mark’s Church we are looking for the following workers for God’s harvest field –

An administrator

A treasurer

A Parish safeguarding link

Tots Together on a Tuesday – pack away and clean team

Time 4 Tea team of hosts

Do you know someone who would work for God in any of these places of harvest? More than this – are you willing to Pray until these workers are found and are alongside us?

**My final P - Promises**

Along with the hard work of harvest, we need to remember that harvesting is also rewarding – it is a joy and a time of celebration. It is life giving and uplifting, energising and providing nourishment into the future.

We are living in the time of harvest – God’s bounty is evident all around and we are to reflect this in our everyday lives. What is more we are in this together – we are not alone – we have each other, we have God’s Holy Spirit and we have all the promises of God stacked up around us to draw on, call upon and lean into.

When we are sent out at the end of this service today it is to love and serve the Lord – today you are sending me out into a different field in Devon, and I thank you for all the training, encouragement, love, inspiration and hard work that I have been a part of here for 4 years. On the back of these years God is moving me to be His worker for His harvest field, and I am leaving you to continue to be His workers in His harvest field here – and I take with me the 5 Ps of God’s harvest workers:

Plentiful

Praise

Persevere

Pray

Promises

Let us pray

Lord of the harvest send out workers into your harvest field.

Amen

Harvest ……..……… festival; thanksgiving; supper; workers; moon