

Upper Tay and Tenandry Churches of Scotland

4th October 2020

Welcome

CH4 229

- 1 We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand;
he sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine
and soft refreshing rain.
*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord,
for all his love.*
- 2 He only is the Maker
of all things near and far;
he paints the wayside flower,
he lights the evening star;
the winds and waves obey him,
by him the birds are fed;
much more to us, his children,
he gives our daily bread.
- 3 We thank you then, O Father,
for all things bright and good,
the seed-time and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food.
Accept the gifts we offer
for all your love imparts,
with what we know you long for:
our humble, thankful hearts.

Matthias Claudius (1740–1815)

translated Jane Montgomery Campbell (1817–1878) (*alt.*)

Let us pray together

Dear God,

This is a time of separation

But you, Lord, know no wall, no boundary

And so we, your people, do meet

We meet in a rush of communion and fellowship
Which is your gift to us
We are bound together by the love that will not let us go
Lord, we praise and worship you
This is a time of harvest
We see the brilliance of our world
The azure blue of sky and sea
The verdant green of grass and hill
The deep dark brown of earth and furrow
And we rejoice
We see the bounty of our world
The fish of sea and river
The beast of field and hill
The fruit and plant of tree and earth
And we rejoice
But we confess, Lord, that we have failed
Failed to nurture and protect these glorious gifts
Failed to harvest them wisely
And share them freely
And so have failed to use these gifts to your glory
Forgive us, Lord, and bring us to a deeper understanding of our place in your creation
Help us to know that we are not owners but guardians and keepers of this good earth in all its brilliance and bounty
Which is for the nurture of and sharing among all your people
This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, and our Saviour and Lord,
Amen

Reading – Exodus 7: 14-25 - The Plague of Blood

¹⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the river. Confront him on the bank of the Nile, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. ¹⁶Then say to him, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you

have not listened. ¹⁷ This is what the Lord says: By this you will know that I am the Lord: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. ¹⁸ The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water."

¹⁹ The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs—and they will turn to blood.' Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in vessels^[a] of wood and stone."

²⁰ Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. ²¹ The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt.

²² But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said. ²³ Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. ²⁴ And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.

Sermon - Going for the Nile

When you read the history of our area, you become so aware of crucial the River Tay has been to life here, it is the remnant of the ancient seas and glaciers which forged this landscape, it was around here that farms and settlements grew up, that people have water to drink.

For centuries the Tay has been the source of life for people who live here.14-25

The source of life, of soil, source of water, of power, source of transport.

Also, one of the experiences you have when you paddle is that you appreciate the immense power of the river.

If you can think of the Tay as being like, then think how the Nile was in the time of the Exodus.

To give you a sense of scale – the Tay here at its source is about 50 miles.

When the Nile goes through Egypt the source is about 4000 miles away.

At its widest point, the Nile is over 1.5 miles wide, here it is about 50, wide.

This is a place of immense power, it is where you drink, its how you water crops, its where ships come and go,

If the regime of Pharaoh controls the Nile, it controls Egypt

The Nile is a constant, in an arid country, some streams may come and go, even rivers may disappear, but the Nile will always be there.

So when you read the story of going to the Nile, you are going to the very centre of the power and the identity of Egypt. This is the first plague and it is almost as if God goes for the jugular. So this is a story about God's power even over the most powerful facet of the world that everyone knows, and over the regime that claims to be able to control that world.

1. Distorted relationship

This is a story about a distorted relationship that Pharaoh has, and when he has that relationship then people and nature itself is a casualty.

Pharaoh is confronted with the fact that the God of the outsiders, Yhwh, has a claim over him, makes demands of him, seems to be above him. How insulting for a ruler such as Pharaoh that not only is there a God who seems to be more powerful than him, but it is the God of his slaves which is more powerful than him.

And Pharaoh refuses to believe this- he hardens his heart.

And he defies God, worse still his technologists, his magicians, they seem to be able to do the same thing. Pharaoh is prepared to let his magicians – his brightest minds – destroy the Nile as a way of trying to shore up his own power.

And he will not let this people God. And what happens is that the Nile gets destroyed with blood, it ceases to be a source of life and is now a source of starvation, death to fish, and desperation.

And this seems to be a parable of what happens when our relationships with each other are distorted, when we assume ourselves as greater than God, when we think that the lives of the poorest matter least to us, when we convince ourselves of our own invincibility, then nature becomes a casualty, caught up in the cross fire of broken human relationships.

1. I think that this is a story about divine power, about the sense that the earth's is God's that this is gift, and that God has the power to bring life.

We do not make ourselves live, God blesses us with life.

1. I think it is a story about the damage done when our relationship with nature and power and God is distorted.

Lynn White, in a famous paper in 1962 argued that it was a distorted relationship the land, a heavy plough lead to population growth, but it was a spiritual change in our relationship with the earth.

That we will not change our relationship with the environment, our hearts will be hardened, until we have this spiritual change,

The whole of the natural world as gift. And its power and a humility in our part in it.

That it is not guaranteed, epidemic shows, distorted relationship with nature.

In this building here, we've had to actually thing our relationship with bats, the source of Coronavirus.

Humans in close proximity. Certainly problems with air pollution make us more susceptible to disease.

There is even some evidence that the Covid epidemic is related to our distorted relationship with nature and with each other.

One recent magazine article stated:

That would be hard to prove, but there are some theories linking them. "In the past century, we have escalated our demands upon nature, such that today, we are losing species at a rate unknown since the dinosaurs, along with half of life on earth, went extinct 65 million years ago," Aaron Bernstein, MD, director of the Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment at Harvard, said in a [conversation posted on the university's website](#). "This rapid dismantling of life on earth owes primarily to habitat loss, which occurs mostly from growing crops and raising livestock for people. With fewer places to live and fewer food sources to feed on, animals find food and shelter where people are, and that can lead to disease spread."

So I think this says to live in gratitude, to give thanks to grow, to touch soil, to give thanks for water, to campaign to live more sustainably.

This is what we celebrate in harvest, that this is a gift, a divine and good dependency, every year it comes in we are glad, and these gifts will not be squandered.

And what we hear in the story is a challenge, to live more rightly with those who are poorest, lest the world we both share ceases to become a source of life.

AMEN

CH4 228

- 1 God, who made the earth, declared it good in the beginning,
planned a time and purpose for all things that were and would be.
*While earth remains,
there will be seed-time and harvest,
summer sun and winter moon,
the dead of night, the bright day.*
- 2 Though humanity defiled the Eden God had cherished,
God did not despise the world; its worth he always could see.
- 3 God, in Christ, then came from paradise to imperfection,
repossessing earth and people through a tomb and tree.
- 4 Wood though felled to earth produced a flower that will not perish,
seed, though dead and fallen, burst to life and rose up again.

Korean text, source unknown

English version John L. Bell (b. 1949)

Prayer for Others

Dear God,

As we come to prayer,

Help us move from being centred on ourselves only

To selfless love for others.

Help us to pray with more than words

Which hearts turned towards you

And give us faith to pray

For you hold us in the palm of your hand.

We pray that in your love, and your compassion, you might be with those we know

Those whose struggles, cares and concerns are known to us

In the silence we name them before you.

Silence

At this time we also give thanks for harvest.

We give thanks where the crops have grown and been harvested

Where livestock has been healthy

Where those who farm have seen the fruit of their labours.

And we pray for all our labours, all our work,

Voluntary and paid

In jobs we have dreamt of, or jobs we no longer love

We pray that our work would reap a plentiful harvest.

We also ask that you help us to be better stewards of creation

Forgive us our greed for cheap food

Forgive us when we take for granted all the work that has enabled us to be fed

Help us to live in better relationship with this good earth.

All this we ask

In the name of Jesus,

AMEN

CH4 233

- 1 Come, you thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest-home:
all is safely gathered in,
ere the winter storms begin;
God, our Maker, will provide
for our needs to be supplied:
come to God's own temple, come;
raise the song of harvest-home.
- 2 All this world is God's own field,
bearing fruit his praise to yield;
wheat and tares together sown,
are to joy or sorrow grown;
first the blade and then the ear,
then the full corn shall appear:
Lord of harvest, grant that we
wholesome grain and pure may be.
- 3 For the Lord our God shall come,
and shall take his harvest home;
from his field shall in that day
all offences purge away;
give his angels charge at last
in the fire the tares to cast,
but the fruitful ears to store
in his storehouse evermore.
- 4 Even so, Lord, quickly, come;
bring your final harvest home:
gather all your people in,
free from sorrow, free from sin;
there, for ever purified,
in your presence to abide:
come, with all your angels come,
raise the glorious harvest-home!

Henry Alford (1810–1871) *(alt.)*

Blessing

Deep peace of the Running Wave to you
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you
Deep peace of the son of peace to you,
In the name of the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer,
AMEN