

Lammastide

2 August 2020

This message was written and recorded by the Reverend Jeff Martin, minister of Cupar Old Parish Church linked with Monimail Parish Church, for the congregations' Youtube channel, "Monimail and Cupar Old."

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuOoxNUHuy4>

Video Description

Farmers serve as our prophets for today, reminding us that God remains faithful, both in seasons of difficulty and in times of plenty. The reading is Psalm 65: 11-13.

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Friends, I begin today  
with a reading from the 65th psalm:  
"You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.  
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,  
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together for joy."

Of all of the essential workers  
who have continued on  
throughout the lockdown  
to do what needed to be done,  
I wonder if the farmers  
have had the labour that was the most normal,  
but perhaps also the most easily overlooked.

Health service workers  
met the challenge of the virus head on,  
and farmers tilled the ground  
and planted the seed.

Shop workers dealt with customers  
who were demanding, frightened,  
irritable, frustrated, and dazed,  
and farmers tended to cows and ewes

that were giving birth.

Teachers had to plan lessons for students  
that they would rarely be able  
to interact with directly,  
and farmers continued to live  
in close contact with the land they tend  
and the animals they care for,  
listening to the land,  
listening to the creatures,  
and responding as was needed.

The rest of us “non-essential” folk  
either learned how to do our jobs  
whilst sitting in our living rooms,  
or we spent the time wondering  
if we would have a job to go back to,  
and farmers checked the weather reports,  
then made plans to irrigate,  
or not,  
depending on the cooperation,  
or not,  
of the weather.

A new legion of delivery drivers  
took to the highways and byways  
to satisfy our online shopping needs,  
and perhaps they cursed  
the tractors ahead of them  
that were impeding their speedy delivery,  
as farmers continued to do the essential work  
of feeding the nation.

And now another turn of seasons is upon us,  
and the harvest of grains has begun.

I feel fortunate to live where I do,  
with easy access to nature.  
I've been able to walk almost every day,  
and my time out of doors  
has been good for my body,  
good for my mind,  
good for my soul.

But I am a visitor in nature;  
I am a spectator,  
not a participant.  
My appreciation of the land  
and of the seasons  
remains naive and somewhat superficial.  
My livelihood does not depend  
on a correct response  
to a change in barometric pressure,  
or on the right diagnosis  
of that lamb's troubling cough.

My new theory  
is that the farmers will see us through  
this time of difficulty—  
partly because they have worked to ensure  
that we all are fed;  
but also because their lives on the land  
are a testament to us all  
that life goes on.

Sometimes there are struggles;  
sometimes there are tragedies;  
sometimes there are unexpected blessings.  
And life goes on.

Seasons come and seasons go.  
One year the planting is delayed  
by late winter rains that saturate the earth,  
and leave every field a muddy bog.

The next year, seeds are planted  
and irrigation begins almost immediately,  
because the heavens will not release  
even a single drop of moisture.

A storm makes a ruin of a field  
days before the harvest was to begin.  
A gate is left open—  
probably by a walker passing through—  
and half a day is wasted  
rounding up the cattle

who had convinced themselves  
that “the grass is always greener...”

And if farmers in the UK  
are anything like farmers in the United States,  
they spend a good portion of time  
listening to market reports,  
wondering if the price they’ll be paid  
will really make it all sustainable.

I think there’s much to be learned  
when we listen to the land  
and to the seasons,  
to the sky and to the earth.

Those who tend the land,  
those who live within the rhythms of the seasons,  
those who spend half of their words  
cursing drought or flood,  
and the other half singing praises  
to the miracle of life unfolding around them—  
yes, I think these are the ones  
well-suited to serve as prophets  
to a population largely separated  
from the lessons of the natural world.

These are the ones to remind us  
that when difficulty and tragedy come,  
as they will,  
they remain for a time,  
and sometimes they are indeed bitter to bear.  
But then there will be a time of quiet,  
and of regeneration,  
and a season of rebirth will come again.

We bear the scars,  
we bear the griefs,  
of dreams not realised,  
of hopes not fulfilled,  
of illness and loss and suffering.

God knows this.  
God is not indifferent to our pain.

But God is in it for the long haul,  
not just a single season,  
but throughout the ever-rolling rhythm of life,  
from one generation to another.

And God—  
the One who called time into being in the first place,  
and set the seasons in their never-ending dance—  
God knows that in due course—  
with healing, with restoration, with time—  
all things may become fruitful and life-giving again,  
even a barren heart,  
a broken spirit,  
a parched life,  
a hardened mind.

I expect farmers know this.  
They know it in time of harvest and abundance,  
they know it in the quiet of winter,  
they know it when spring returns,  
and life begins again.

I invite you to pray with me now:

Loving Spirit,  
you moved over the creation  
to bring forth life—  
abundant and beautiful and fruitful life.  
Help us to see your handiwork all around us,  
in the diversity and productivity of your world,  
but also in its resilience,  
and its ability to be restored  
after storm or devastation,  
even after all promise has seemingly been destroyed.

Then, also by your power,  
life begins again,  
new, fresh, fragile, yet strong.

Work within our hearts and minds;  
work within our community and nation;  
work throughout all of your creation;

that from this time of difficulty,  
we may rise again,  
trusting that you lead us  
into new seasons of life and productivity.

Help us to not cling  
to the way things always were,  
but instead  
may we open ourselves  
to the new things that are now possible,  
when we release our grasp  
on things that have no life or meaning.

Lead us then  
into your good future:  
seasons of life and promise,  
seasons that contain both joy and sorrow,  
blessing and burden,  
and, as always,  
the love from you that has no end. Amen