



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 81

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Today's readings

Psalm 67 ("The Nations Called to Praise God")

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.

May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him. Amen. (NRSV)

James 5:7-12 ("Patience in Suffering")

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the
precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late
rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is
near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the
Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the
prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed we call blessed those who showed
endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the
Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Above all, my beloved, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but
let your 'Yes' be yes and your 'No' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.
Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land* (CH:229)
- 2 *God, who made the earth, declared it good in the beginning* (CH:228)
- 3 *God, whose farm is all creation* (CH:226)
- 4 *Praise God for the harvest of orchard and field* (CH:230)
- 5 *Come, you thankful people, come* (CH:233)

In the Name of the Father and of

Having been raised as Scots, most of us are well familiar with our strange climate in which rain tends to play quite a big part. And those of us who were raised in the west of Scotland feel like we have proper inside knowledge of what it means to be soaked to the skin. Moving only 60 miles from west to east makes us realise what a difference that short journey can make. East Lothian is no desert – don't get me wrong – but it certainly knows how to put on a glorious day on a regular basis.

In this part of the world we are never far from farms and, of course from farmers whose job it is to take the weather as it comes, and work with it season by season. The skills which farming involve are beyond most of us to comprehend. And as for the risks, the worries and the unremitting hard work: all of these point to a calling which may be fascinating but which is never easy.

Farmers in every part of the world face their own challenges. So come with me now as we travel in our imaginations far from this green isle of beauty and head west and south to one of the USA's least hospitable terrains: New Mexico. Theologian Talitha Arnold notes that the people who settled upon that arid landscape many generations ago must have realized that they would be facing massive challenges if they were to farm desert soil both productively and profitably. It is said that a 19th century governor of the State had a line which offered so much truth to the unwary: "All calculations based on experience elsewhere fail in New Mexico."

It is not just in the deserts of the southern USA that nature's elements can wreak havoc with agriculture. While New Mexico can succumb to too much sun and not enough rain, in Scotland we often find that order reversed, with apparently never-ending downpours from off the Atlantic causing concerns for our nation's farmers. Yet their tenacity and their hard-worked wisdom and understanding of fields and floods means that they carry on year after year, growing the food which sustains each one of us. And we are thankful!

Nobody knows what the New Testament writer James did for a living, but he certainly had an understanding for the ways of agriculture, recognising the need for rain to kick-start the germination process, and at the end of the growing process the equal need for water to swell the grain prior to harvest. As James writes in his letter:

The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.

James knows that a farmer needs two things: patience and endurance, trusting in a merciful God. And what goes for the farmer goes for the Christian also.

Consider first the need for patience in our lives. We live in a world of "now", when people with a mobile phone and a credit card can buy whatever they want, whenever they want it. And having tap-tap-tapped your order for a new pair of shoes or a second-hand pair of porcelain vases, you just need to sit back and wait for the purchase to arrive at your door the very next day. There's no hanging around any more.

Similarly, do you remember the old blue aerogrammes that you would use to send a letter (a what???) to cousin Alice in New Zealand? With your pen you would write your news, seal it up, take it to the Post Office, and send it off by air mail to arrive in Auckland in seven or eight days. Or maybe 10. Or 12. It didn't matter much, because air mail was as quick as it got and you knew you had to be patient because – frankly – there was nothing else for it. And three weeks later ... a reply would hit the doormat from cousin Alice. Joy all round.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

These days I can use my phone (yes, my *phone*) to take a picture of my latest batch of Anzac biscuits fresh from the oven. Five seconds later I am sending the shot to my cousin Julianne in Sydney. Two seconds go by and WhatsApp tells me that Julianne has both received and opened my picture. Finally, after another five seconds pass by, Julianne's reply turns up: "Are those jumbo oats you're using? They look great. Tell me how they taste."

With a service like that there is very little need for patience. And with lives being lived in the legendary "now", we have to wonder whether patience can remain a cherished virtue for very much longer. If our children and grandchildren fully expect to have immediate access to information, to products – to you and me! – their entire lifestyles are bound to change. How can it be otherwise when Facebook and Twitter and Instagram keep them up to date? And when Zoom and Teams and Facetime keep them chatting around a strange two-dimensional world where the internet is king?

In a hectic world, there can be no room for patience. Yet patience, as any farmer will tell you, is vital if we are to be fully human. We have no right to an immediate reply, just as we have absolutely no right whatsoever to an immediate field of wheat shedding its glorious golden sheen in the late summer breeze. We have to wait for everything to arrive in its due season.

Of course, there are times when life throws up its challenges and its crises. The farmer contends with day after day and night after night of dismal heavy rains. Harvesting becomes a nightmare as good farming soil turns bog-like in the wet. While previous years might have brought plenty, there is no guarantee of a fine crop with each and every harvest. Low yields impact upon livelihoods, so that's when endurance plays its part, looking ahead in hopefulness to future harvests, provided the farmer could keep their head above water.

Yes, life can be tough ... no matter what your profession. And in a world where the media continually portray material wealth as the great aspiration of modern living, with celebrity lifestyles following swiftly in its wake, some young people may find themselves lulled into a false sense of security where they believe good times will be just around the corner.

If patience is a virtue today as ever before, it strikes me that endurance is nothing less than a necessity. Consider our world of wealth for some and poverty for many. Over the last 18 months we have seen death and suffering – whether physical suffering or mental – and I fear that economic suffering will grow enormously in the winter that is to come. On this harvest Sunday, it seems only right for me to dwell on the need for our churches to be ready to be there to help those in our neighbourhoods whose endurance is stretched to the limits and beyond, with redundancy, debt and poverty lining up to take the place of materialism, aspiration and conspicuous consumption. In the months that will follow, it may very well be that our local charities will be calling on us to play our part through foodbank provision, assistance for young people, care for families in real need, help for refugees seeking sanctuary away from terrible violence, or any number of other issues which need addressing.

Interestingly, the same James who spoke about the need for patience and endurance also had a lot to say about social justice. As we look ahead, not knowing what the winter will bring, we would do well to focus our minds on his radical thinking for a world in need:

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. Amen.

Praying for others

God of life, sustainer of all,
We thank you for the rich variety of food which is harvested,
for the work of so many committed people
and the creativity of many others.

For all who are engaged in the vital work of agriculture and fisheries,
for those who transport, who process and who sell,
for chefs and cooks, whether in restaurants or in homes,
we thank you at this Harvest time.

God who loves all humanity,
this day we bring to you in prayer those who lack proper food.
Bless them, we pray, by using us to bring justice and care:
nurture in each one of us the graces of generosity and hospitality;
help us to strive to do the right in our own communities;
guide us in the ways of neighbourhood-building and peace-making.
In thanking you for earth and for air, for sunshine and for rain, for seed and for bread,
inspire us to share your blessings far and wide.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers new beginnings:

Like many gardeners, I have started the process of “putting the garden to bed”. You know the drill – cutting back dead perennials, weeding (is there ever a time in the garden when you don't need to weed?), lifting and potting up stray seedlings. Soon I'll need to lift and store some of my dahlias and mulch other tender plants to help them over winter. The last of my tomatoes will ripen and then the old plants will go on the compost heap. Then I can clean the greenhouse out.

It can often seem a slightly sad time of year. It all seems focused on loss and endings. But all this effort is actually preparation for growth to come. Cutting back perennials gives new growth in spring a chance to come through and get light. And all that old growth I've cut back goes into my compost. That will be used to nourish and prepare the soil in autumn and spring so next year's growth is even better.

Lifting the seedlings that have self-seeded all over the place gives me new plants for next year to share with friends, replant in my own garden or donate to the Christian Aid plant stall. Storing and protecting tender flowers means they will burst into growth next year as the weather warms. And I also tend to plant bulbs at this time of year too. Lots of tulips, daffodils and hyacinths go into pots. They too are a preparation of new life next year. In fact, some have already started to form new shoots.

So, it isn't really loss and ending; it's joy and new beginnings, just a little hidden from view for a few weeks but still there nonetheless.