

## Thanksgiving / October 8, 2023

### Psalm 67:1

*“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.”*

#### **The earth has yielded its increase, God will bless us**

The harvest was an important time of the year for Israel, as it was and is for all people. In the ancient world the harvest was seen as the effects of the prayers and sacrifices humans offered to their gods. The gods gave rain from the heavens, sunshine, warmth, germination, growth and harvest, in accordance with the quality and quantity of prayers and sacrifices humans offered. Prayer, sacrifice and ritual actions stimulated the gods to action. In seeking to induce their god to action the prophets of Baal shouted, danced and cut themselves. Elijah simply prayed, *“Answer me that the people may know that you, O Lord, are God.”* The Lord answered with rain from heaven to show that He is God, gracious, kind and loving.

The earth yielded its increase, not because of the words and actions of Israel. The earth yielded its increase because God is gracious and loving. God loved Israel and worked to provide for their needs before they thought to petition Him in prayer. The Lord commanded Israel to pray and worship Him with sacrifices, not to stimulate Him to action, but to express their thankfulness for His constant action of providing them with their needs of body and spirit.

The Lord is gracious. He gave freely and abundantly out of the heart of His love for His people. And not just to His people. He provided and continues to provide for the needs of all people and of all living things. The psalmist sang, *“The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”* The earth yielded its increase, because of God’s blessing. The harvest festival was a celebration of God’s blessing. It was a time to proclaim His way on the earth, so the nations would know His saving power.

God gave blessings to Israel out of the heart of His bounteous love, because love is the essence of His being. He made Israel His people and blessed them, so they would make His name and the power of His love known among all the nations of the earth. The Psalmist sang, *“That your way may be known on earth, your saving power among the nations.”* God gave blessings to all nations out of the heart of His bounteous love, whether they recognized Him or not. God wanted Israel to make the nations know that He did these things and not because of sacrifices they offered, but because of His love as their Creator. God wants all people to know Him through His love, which He expresses constantly through the cycle of seasons; and which He expressed most fully in giving Jesus, His Son, to redeem the world from sin and death. God gave Jesus as the fullest expression of His grace, kindness and saving power.

As much as God wants people to receive the fruits of His kindness in the harvest of the earth, He wants all people to receive His greatest kindness in knowing Him as God and Saviour through faith in Jesus. He gave Jesus to be the Saviour of all people. He is the Saviour of all who believe. God created and blessed Israel, so that His saving power would be known among all nations. God blesses us all in many ways. He blesses us most fully with His saving power through faith in Christ Jesus. Every physical blessing passes away with time. The blessing that is eternal is the blessing of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. In Jesus we always have reason to be thankful, regardless of the quality and quantity of the harvest. In Him we receive the blessing of forgiveness and the grace of salvation in time and for eternity.

The psalmist sings, *“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us.”* Has your face ever shone? Have you ever seen someone’s face shine? When Moses emerged from the tent of meeting after conversing with the Lord, his face shone the reflected glory of God. His face shone with such brilliance he had to cover himself with a veil. How would you feel if you saw such a thing? When Jesus stood with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration His face radiated the glory of God, not as a reflection, but as an inner light. In the book of Revelation, John sees Jesus’ face shine in the fullness of His divine glory. He said *“His face was like the sun shining in full strength.”* Light is a metaphor for the glory of God. Light represents His absolute holiness, purity of being and power. The glory of God shines on us in kindness in the face of Jesus.

God covers Himself with light as with a garment. God dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. Moses wanted to see God’s face. God said, *“No one can see my face and live.”* Light both reveals God and hides God. How brightly does the face of God shine? The New Jerusalem where God will dwell with His

redeemed people in the fulness of His glory, needs neither sun by day nor moon by night. The Lord illuminates the city with His glory. There the redeemed in Christ will see His face and live. Jesus' face shone the radiance of the glory of God, both on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the book of Revelation. His shining face showed that He is the image and glory of God in human flesh. In Jesus, God's face shines upon us in kindness, compassion and forgiveness. In Jesus, He makes His saving power known in all the earth.

A shining face expresses happiness, pleasure and satisfaction. Our faces shine when we are surprised by joy. The blood rushes to our cheeks and our faces are flush with excitement. Our faces glow when our hearts are filled with happiness. Our face shines when we see someone we love. Our faces darken with anger and shine with happiness. God who dwells in unapproachable light doesn't have a face as we would commonly use the term. To say that God's face shines upon us means that God loves us and is favourably disposed to us. It means He forgives our sins and covers our sinfulness with the cloak of Christ's righteousness. It means He takes pleasure in seeing us, hearing our prayers and blessing us. It means that God extends His blessing upon us in time and eternity.

God is the eternal Spirit who fills all things. In Jesus, God puts a human face on His being and His love. Jesus is the human face of God. In Jesus, God's face shines to provide for our needs of body and especially our needs of spirit. His face shines to provide us with forgiveness of our sins and healing in our relationship with Him. His face shines to provide us with His righteousness to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst for Him and His righteousness. His face shines in the water of baptism through which He constantly wipes our sins away. His face shines in the bread and wine of Holy Communion through which He feeds our spirits with His body and blood so our faith is sustained through the trials of life and comes to fruition in the great harvest of resurrection to eternal life.

God's face shines on us and all people in many ways through the creation. God's face shines on us most brightly in Christ Jesus. He is the image of the glory of God. He shared our humanity. He felt physical hunger and thirst. He enjoyed a good meal with family and friends. He celebrated the harvest. He became our Saviour through the sacrifice of His cross. In Christ we are able to receive the blessings of creation with thankfulness and praise, despite the sufferings of life. In Him we receive the blessings of recreation, which will be fully expressed in the harvest of resurrection to life everlasting. Then we will see the face of God and live in His presence eternally.

At Thanksgiving we thank God for the gifts of the creation, which He richly bestows upon us and all people. The regularity of the seasons, seed time and harvest are signs of His providential care for all that His word called into being. The increase of the earth is a sign of God's grace offered for all to receive through faith in Christ Jesus. We receive the gifts of the creation as a foretaste of the greater gifts of the recreation that is in Christ Jesus. In Jesus, God makes his saving power known among all nations. In Jesus, God's face shines upon us in mercy and peace.

Thankyou gracious God for every gift of body and spirit. Continue to provide for our needs of body and open our hearts to receive the gifts of your Spirit; faith in Christ, hope for eternity and your love that endures forever. In Jesus' Name. Amen