

**Pentecost 21 / Thanksgiving / October 14, 2024**

**Psalm 104:14**

*“You cause grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth; wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.”*

**God provides bread for life in time and eternity**

At the harvest festival we give thanks to God for the blessings of the earth. The food we eat. The water we drink. The people with whom we share life. This moment in time. We give thanks for everything by which God preserves our lives in the world and the life of all things living. The earth is unique among all the heavenly bodies in the solar system and among all the heavenly bodies in the universe, so far as our science can tell. The earth is amazing in its properties that allow for the conditions for life to exist. Atmosphere (non-toxic), just the right amount of nitrogen, oxygen and argon; water, soil, proximity to the sun and most importantly the perfect angle of incidence to provide the right balance between heating and cooling. The earth is amazing in its ability to produce the things necessary for the continuance of life and its expression in a multitude of life forms; complex, intricately made and interconnected. In the earth we see something of the genius and power of God, who called it into being and sustains it by His powerful word.

In the scriptures the Lord reveals Himself as the only God, the Creator of the heavens, the earth and all that is in them. He is the Creator who cares for the earth and all He made to dwell in it. The psalmists saw God at work in the life of the earth, the cycle of the seasons, seedtime and harvest. The earth was the Lord’s Garden, which He watered with rain from heaven. The creatures of the earth were God’s pets if you will. The sea monster Leviathan played in His ocean like a duck in a pond. He called them into being by the power of His word, nourished and sustained their lives through the produce of the earth. Human beings were and are, the pinnacle of His creation; formed by His hands, infused with life by His Spirit. In the produce of the earth, we see God’s providential care for all creatures, but especially for His human creation. At the harvest festival as we give thanks for the bread that sustains our lives in time, we remember the spiritual nourishment that God gives in His Son Jesus. In Him we see the fullness of God’s love for His creation. Through Jesus, God provides the most important bread; the bread that nourishes our spirits in time and for eternity.

Psalm 104 celebrates the majesty of God as He reveals Himself in the creation. The heavens, deified by ancient peoples, were to the psalmists, God’s clothing. The Lord covered Himself with light as with a garment. The habitable earth was like a house the Lord constructed for His people to dwell in. He lay the beams of His chambers on the waters. He set the earth on a foundation that will not be moved. The Lord expressed His power over the forces of nature that both sustain life and destroy it. He set a boundary for the waters that they might not cover the earth and drown everything in which is the breath of life. The Lord cares for His creatures, human and animal, by providing a safe habitat and by nourishing them with water, grass, bread, wine and oil. The psalmist celebrates the majesty of God in the creatures He has made, especially in His human creation, whom He formed with His hands and into whose nostrils He breathed the breath of life. He sings, *“In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.”* These all look to Him and to all, He gives food in due season. We respond with praise and thanksgiving!

God’s animal creation lives in time and in time passes away. God’s human creation lives in time and in time also passes away, but God gave us something He gave no other physical creature; a sense of time and eternity. In the creation account in Genesis, God says, *“Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.”* God gave humans the sun, moon and the stars to mark the passage of time. We pass through life beneath these markers, day and night, seed time and harvest. The sun, moon and stars mark time and in this witness to our mortality. In them we see eternity and realize we cannot attain it. King Solomon said, *“God has set eternity in our hearts.”* God set eternity in our hearts, so that though the realization of the limits of our lives, we would see beyond the blessings of time and seek eternal blessing in Him and the power of His life. Our physical needs remind us of our spiritual needs. The physical blessings for which we give thanks lead us to give our greatest thanks for the spiritual blessings of life, love and eternity, which God gives and we receive in Christ His Son.

We count our blessings at harvest, be it in the gathering of the produce from the fields, or when we otherwise receive remuneration for our labours. It is our nature to count as blessings primarily those things that are of the earth; things we can see, touch and taste. We are of the earth, physical beings who live in a physical world. It's easy to relegate the blessings of the Spirit to a lower place and to forget God's Spirit is the source of every blessing, even of the earth. Our Psalmist sings, "*When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit they are created and you renew the face of the ground.*" All things are of the Spirit, whether they are things we can touch, taste and see, or things we feel in our hearts and sense in our souls. All things are of the Spirit, because all things are of God. As St. Paul said, quoting ancient Greek poets, "*In Him we live and move and have our being.*" We count our blessings by remembering that the blessing of life and every creaturely comfort come from the Spirit of God, for He is the Life of all things living and the Giver of all that creates and sustains the life of the world and life in the world.

We count our blessings by seeing the physical benefits of the Lord as signs of the greater benefits He gives to our souls through the gift of His eternally begotten Son to be our Saviour. The physical should always lead us to the spiritual. The bread of the earth leads to the bread from heaven. Our physical needs which God fulfills, lead us to consider our greater spiritual needs, which He also meets in a greater way through His Son Jesus, whom He gave to be our Saviour. Jesus cared for people's physical needs as signs of our greater needs of the spirit. Before He healed a paralyzed man in his body, He forgave the sin of his soul. He fed on two occasions, large groups of people with a small amount of food, a few fish and some pieces of bread. It is easy for God to bring blessing from the physical world. He has more difficulty with the human spirit. Many of the people Jesus fed physically were unable to see the spiritual purpose of the physical sign. They could not or would not see beyond their bellies and the hunger that returned the next day. They sought Jesus for more bread. Jesus said, "*Do not labour for the bread that perishes with use, but for the bread that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*" Jesus gave Himself for the life of the world. Jesus offers Himself to us as the living bread which a person shall eat and live forever. In Him God provides bread for life in time and for eternity.

May God who opens the earth to receive seed and waters it with rain from the heavens so that it germinates, buds and blossoms to produce a harvest that sustains life in time; open our hearts to receive the seed of the gospel. May He water it with the promises of our baptism, nourish it with the bread of life in the body and blood of Christ in holy communion and bring it to a harvest of eternal life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Him God provides living bread for time and eternity. In Jesus' Name. Amen.