

ABBEY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING

Harvest Service

10.30 am 11th October 2026

Led by Revd Zoltan Biro and Jill Bird (preaching)

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk

Find us on Facebook @Abbey Baptist Church, Reading



Theme: The Great Harvest (*Matthew 25.1-13; Revelation 21. 1-7*)

Welcome and Introduction

Today we celebrate Harvest, which is probably the most widely celebrated festival on the planet. Almost every culture has a version of it. Today also marks the final part of our Harvest sermon series. During this season we explored what it means to become fruitful, we learned to see the harvest and last week we have seen what happens when people respond to Jesus and enter new life through baptism. Today we will celebrate God's goodness and look forward to the day when the King gathers the great harvest at the end of the age, as a symbol of this amazing banquet we will also gather around the table for church lunch.

Call to Worship:

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

We worship you.

The mountains are his, the rivers are his.

We worship you.

The trees are his, the flowers are his.

We worship you.

Every person, every breath, every word is his.

We worship you.

We come to you, Lord, the God who loves us all and keeps us all.

We worship you today. Amen

Song:

Come on and celebrate

His gift of love, we will celebrate

The Son of God who loved us

And gave us life.

We'll shout Your praise, O King,

You give us joy nothing else can bring,

We'll give to You our offering

In celebration praise.

Come on and celebrate, celebrate
Celebrate and sing,
Celebrate and sing to the King.
Come on and celebrate, celebrate
Celebrate and sing,
Celebrate and sing to the King.
Patricia Morgan and Dave Bankhead
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Family Time

(There will be an offering taken during this song)

Song:

Chorus:	All things bright and beautiful	The cold wind in the winter
	All creatures great and small	The pleasant summer sun
	All things wise and wonderful	The ripe fruits in the garden
	The Lord, God made them all	He made them every one Chorus

Each little flower that opens
Each little bird that sings
He made their glowing colours
He made their tiny wings **Chorus**

The tall trees in the greenwood
The meadows where we play
The rushes by the water
We gather every day **Chorus**

The purple-headed mountain
The river running by
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky **Chorus**

He gave us eyes to see them
And lips that we might tell
How great is God almighty
Who has made all things well **Chorus**

Cecil F. Alexand

The Lord's Prayer: *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever and ever. Amen.**

Young people leave for their groups

Bible Reading 1: Matthew 25.1-13;

Bible Reading 2: Revelation 21. 1-7

Song:

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Chorus:
Great is thy faithfulness,
Great is thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hast provided;
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. [Chorus]

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine and ten thousand beside.
[Chorus]

Thomas O. Chisholm

Sermon: Harvest festival – day of celebration

It seems many cultures have special days of celebration at harvest time. Hong Kongers recently celebrated the Mid-Autumn festival. The feast of tabernacles or ingathering in September is the Jewish festival from the Old Testament. At CIRDIC where many of us have helped serve food we have had so many gifts of food brought in from Reading churches' generosity at their harvest festivals, that our tin store is overflowing! A lovely time of celebration of God's goodness.

But for believers we are also awaiting a final great harvest or ingathering at the end of time. We are going to explore what Jesus teaches about this in Matthew's gospel as we complete our harvest series. We have spent the previous weeks in Matthew 13 – Jesus' teaching on what the kingdom of heaven is like using harvest pictures. But today we are moving to his last chunk of teaching in the gospel, Matthew 24-25, when he talks a lot about this final harvest day.

I was talking with a friend, who has a terminal cancer diagnosis. She has recently come to faith in Jesus. As we shared about the glorious future we are waiting for, she suddenly said, 'It feels just like Christmas eve – and tomorrow is finally Christmas day'. What a great analogy – the waiting, the preparation, the expectation, the joy. Or maybe you remember other days in your life or culture? Your wedding day, the day you finally did your last exam, or what else?

Two weeks ago we looked at **the parable of the weeds** from Matthew 13. We saw how at the final harvest, those who had chosen Jesus would shine like the son in the kingdom of their Father. But for those who had not, they would be thrown into a fiery furnace. So serious stuff here!! In fact two other of Jesus' parables tell a similar stark division – Matthew 13 **the parable of the net** and at the end of time, the net is pulled in and the good and the bad fish will be separated for ever and in Matthew 25 we get the division of **the sheep and the goats** – the sheep going to eternal life and the goats to eternal punishment.

So how can we live with these solemn eternal thoughts? Do we pretend it is not real and just get on with our lives or should it very dramatically affect how we live now?

The question is '**Is history going somewhere?**' and **Am I part of it?**

So what can we learn from the parables Jesus tells in Matthew 24 and 25.

Expectation Anticipation

What are you expecting to happen in the next year? Right to remain, move house? Get older!

It is hard if our expectations don't happen!

But Jesus taught how important it was to live expecting his return at any day or night. Matthew 24. 42-44 likens us to **an owner of a house who was not expecting a thief** and was not looking out and keeping watch, so his house was burgled. Jesus said 'Therefore keep watch because you do not know at what hour your LORD will come'.

Are you expecting, waiting for, longing for Jesus' return. Are you certain it will happen?

Have you studied the scriptures that speak about it?

Preparation

What big events have caused you to get ready? Marriage, moving country, new job? I have seen how many boxes some of you brought from Hong Kong! What would have happened if you made no preparation and suddenly the day was upon you?? Should we take Jesus' return in the same serious manner? Are you ready?

In Matthew 25. 1-13 we have the well-known story of **the wise and foolish virgins** – both groups were expecting the bridegroom to come but only the wise got themselves ready with a good stock of oil. The penalty was the wise got welcomed into the big celebration but the foolish were turned away.

What does it mean for us to be prepared and ready?? Oil in the bible often represents the Holy Spirit. Is the lamp of your soul full of the Spirit? Ephesians talks about 'Go on being filled with the Spirit' and Jesus himself at the final great day of the harvest festival of tabernacles talks about 'Out of our hearts will flow rivers of living water, by which he meant the Holy Spirit that would be given'.

We have another very challenging parable in Matthew 25 **The parable of the talents** or what do we with our life, abilities, money, energy etc in this life. It describes 3 different servants – two who fully and with dedication used what the master had given them. Another who just hid it away and wasted his potential. Where do the words laziness and self-centredness come in?? Jesus called him a wicked, lazy servant. What would Jesus say about you if he walked into the room now? Maybe there will be greater judgement for the things we fail to do than the things we do.

Our life is to be spent living for his coming, daily being filled with all the fulness of God, bringing blessings to all around us. Will God then be able to say 'Well done good and faithful servant, come and share your master's happiness'.

Celebration for some but judgement for others

There are two thoughts here – Celebration for those who have lived their lives for Jesus – filled with his Spirit and bringing blessings to our world. But also, **separation, judgement and punishment** for those who have not. This is a theme right through the bible – think of the days of Noah, Achan in the times of Joshua, the exile of the northern kingdom and many more. We cannot escape from the reality of God as judge. Revelation 14 gives a vivid picture of the **final great harvest** – the angels told to take their sharp sickles and reap the harvest of the earth and throw into the eternal fire. Judgement and hell are real! This should be a life changing thought!!

But **the celebration** – we have sung – Great celebration on that final day when out of the heavens you come. There is a foretaste in the Old Testament of this celebration – the Jewish year had 3 great festivals and even every sabbath was a reminder to stop, celebrate, feast and remember the goodness of God. Jesus' first miracle was at a wedding – celebration!

Sadly, for us Sunday has mainly lost its meaning – Keep Sunday special was a cause many of us fought hard for in the 1980's. As we go into our harvest lunch together, can we think of it as a time of fun, celebration, togetherness; a time of expectation and anticipation of the day Jesus will return. What does that look like for us as God's family here at Abbey?

In Revelation 21 is the reality of that great final celebration. It is likened to a wedding feast. Us the bride pure and spotless celebrating with Jesus the bridegroom with no more tears, pain, death or evil.

Hallelujah what a day to look forward to – Jesus for the joy set before him!

So what can we learn from Jesus' teaching today.

Are you excited, ready, can't wait to meet Jesus? Does it bring tears, as it did for me, when I shared with my friend as she imagined Christmas eve – one day soon I will say goodbye to her but with the sure knowledge we will dance and rejoice together one day in heaven.

If Jesus walked in here today, what would he say to you?? To us as a church? Would he be pleased and say 'Well done come into heaven and celebrate? Or you wicked lazy servant, depart from me?

Sobering thoughts and do take these teachings very seriously – eternal joy or eternal punishment. And of course, the need for the driving pursuit of winning your families, friends, neighbours for Jesus so that they too can be part of the great celebration on that final day.

Song:

I will offer up my life
in spirit and truth,
pouring out the oil of love
as my worship to you.
In surrender I must give my every part;
Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart.

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
to so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
as a praise of your name
for the things you have done?
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part,
of the debt of love that is owed
by this thankful heart.*

You deserve my every breath
for you've paid the great cost;
giving up your life to death,
even death on a cross.
You took all my shame away,
there defeated my sin,

opened up the gates of heaven,
and have beckoned me in.

Jesus, what can I give...

Matt Redman © 1994 THANKYOU MUSIC

Prayers of Intercession - Peggy

Our Loving Father, Almighty God,

Thank you for providing us with what we need. Today we hear your teaching of the great harvest, please help us remember to turn away from sin, be righteous, take care of each other and help those who are weak and vulnerable with a heart like Jesus.

We live in a broken world with more wars, political conflicts, terror attack, and social unrest. Please heal us and may all your people remember to act with a kind heart. May you grant wisdom to our world leaders to restore peace and remember the needs of at least among all people. **Amen.**

We pray for the escalating school protest situation in Paris and beyond. May education leaders and officials be granted wisdom to bring about positive changes to the system. May you heal those who are injured, protect those who are affected, calm those who are anxious and bring peace to the situation. **Amen.**

We pray for our country amid international and internal political developments. May you enlighten our political leaders to work in ways that recover communities from divisions. May you help us remember to treat others with a kind heart. **Amen.**

We pray for our town and those who are affected by the ever-increasing cost of living and the increasing energy cost in the coming winter. Please empower us to follow your will, give our helping hands to those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, needing clothes, sick or having other needs. **Amen.**

We pray for our church. May we all experience your gracious love. May you fill Ezra and Taisuki's family and their newborn baby with overflowing love and blessings. May you comfort those who are worried, may you heal those who are ill, may you calm those who feel unsettled. May you strengthen us to become a good role model to each other, to follow your example to be forgiving, quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

Lord, you are compassionate and gracious. May you grant us wisdom and strength to build your kingdom.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Song:

Lord, the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth You now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

Chorus

Shine, Jesus, shine,
fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow,
flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light

Lord, I come to Your awesome presence
From the shadows into Your radiance
By the blood, I may enter Your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me [Chorus]

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here, may our lives tell Your story
Shine on me, shine on me [Chorus]

Graham Kendrick © Make Way Music

Closing Prayer

Father, your church awaits the day when the Son of Man will come in his glory, and the angels with him, and he will sit on his royal throne.
Until that day, when we will be received as your blessed people, keep us safe in your care.
Make us merciful, serving your Son now as he comes to us in those in need.
We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen

Events next week:

Wednesday 14 th	10.30	Renew Wellbeing
	12.00	Bible Study
Thursday 15 th	10.30	Bible study
	10.30	Toddlers
Friday 16 th	10.30	Prayer meeting
	5.00	Table Tennis Club

Sunday 18 th	10.30	Worship and Communion
		<i>Unity: Refusing to Choose Sides</i>
		<i>1 Corinthians 1:10–17; 3:1–9</i>
	12noon	<i>Special church Meeting</i>

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