

Harvest Sermon on Psalm 65 A Smile on God's Face that No Pandemic Can Stop

Harvest is one of the most beautiful times of celebration in the church year.

We all are dressed in colourful clothes.

We all are cheerful and excited.

And we come together to offer our thanks to a caring and loving God.

We thank for God's goodness and care, and we see the fruits of the earth as an image for all that God has given to us throughout the seasons of the past year.

We give thanks for all that helps us live day by day,
and we ask God to crown our lives with his grace and abundance.

At harvest time we thank God for all the gifts which have been given to us, and for all the opportunities made available to us from the world and its resources.

Yet, this year showed and shows us more than the years of the past that we are not in control. Covid-19 and with it the Corona crisis came into our lives, almost unnoticed in its beginning – and then like a whirlwind that put our lives completely upside down.

Everything changed.

Church life too.

2020 – what a year.

Who would have thought a year ago that this here is the way we are celebrating our beloved African-style Harvest Festival?

Nonetheless, it is good not to cancel it!

It is good to mark a point in the turning of the seasons when we remember God's goodness to us.

The words of Psalm 65 remind us that Harvest Festival celebrations are as old as humankind is. People have been celebrating the harvest over the centuries.

We are in one long line of tradition with people all over the planet.

Here in the psalm is King David, the great poet of Israel, writing words for the director of music.

Our God is an amazing God, says King David.

God is a God of real abundance.

He lavishes us with good things.

Picture the scene the poet is building up...

You may see carts overflowing with good things as they roll home in the warm evening sunshine. The tired workers sitting on the top of the corn or the vegetables.

Beautiful landscape, fertile soil, flocks of sheep on a hill...

King David writes of creation shouting for joy and singing.

That's what we are thanking God for today.

We cannot but praise him for it all.

And thank him for our very lives.

Psalm 65 is positive – through and through.

That's what attracted me when I first read it.

It holds a beauty of words and images which is almost overwhelming.

High mountains, roaring seas, crowds of happy people,

morning light and evening sun,

splashing water and golden grain,

tender rain showers and the steady growth of plants,

green pastures with flocks of sheep,

hills & meadows, valleys and rivers...

And as the climax of it all the sentence that God crowns the year with bounty.

Crowns the year... what an expression: the work of the people is crowned by God's doing. He tops what we can do with his blessing...

Who could ask more?

Psalm 65 is full of praise and joy, goodness and satisfaction.

It begins with a God who listens and forgives, who provides a home and feeds.

The people of the earth celebrate and praise a God who created the earth not as an outsider but from within it...

“You,” says the poet, “You, God” visit and water... provide and prepare.

God is in there with his people...

God is in the middle of earthly life and cares not only with the most necessary things but with richness and abundance. God is a rain-giver, a gardener, a guardian of a good and beautiful world.

God is a lover... a lover of life and a lover of humanity.

No matter who we are and what we have done, God’s grace is always embracing us.

God wants us happy, healthy, full of love, wonder and awe.

We are invited to trust that God is in all things, and we shall see the creator in every creature.

Nothing is separating us from God.

The universe is the body of God, earthly life and the divine spirit are knit together and in constant interaction.

In all this, nature (all that has been created: human beings, animals, plants, mountains, seas and skies) is shouting and singing for joy.

What a beauty!

And what hope that lies in such beauty.

“You are the hope of all ends of the earth.” (v5)

On days when the newspaper gives us the latest Covid-19 infection numbers,
and tells us of political & racial conflict across the ocean,
when social media publish messages of political leaders denying the ecological and
medical dangers with which humankind has to deal this year,
when the television shows us the desolate faces of hungry and hopeless people in Greek
refugee camps,
when we fear for our job and are threatened with a second lockdown,

when our kids have to do home schooling again, and public places are closed down for the second time this year, it is hard to feel that hope.

An overload of bad news can weigh heavily on our hearts and make us numb.

As a way of remaining faithful to God, of remaining hopeful,
let us emphasize God's undying love for the world.

Let us remember that he wanted us to be his partners and co-workers.

God wants us to care for this world with its stunning beauty.

He assures us that deep down where all life began there is a power and a will to persist and survive, to recreate and transform that no pandemic can stop.

What an image of hope in a chaotic and restless world of crisis and fear!

And we are meant to be in the centre of the hope-picture: we are the protagonists, those who transport God's hope to others.

We are those with a godly task to heal and transform.

God's hands are full of healing stuff.

He wants to shower the earth with it.

He wants to equip us with it.

We must only see it.

We must take it and use it.

It will help us sing and dance in our life's chaos and have hope in the future of our planet.

In the image of God, our creator, we are invited to a creative response and responsibility to his calling – not just dutifully but resourcefully and creatively, and with an extra portion of humour...

The earth is waiting for us, the undying flow of creation will help us move, and the beauty of grace will embrace us.

Amen.