



Sunday 4th October 2020

Welcome to our Sunflower Harvest Service

Prepared by Mervyn & Kathryn

Every good gift is from God!

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We will announce the winners of our Sunflower Competition during the online service, but so as we don't give the game away prematurely, we'll publish the results and pictures for the written service next week!

James 1:17-18

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created.

Prayer

Father, we are so grateful for your faithfulness, your provision and your great love for us. Show us how to love our neighbours across the world, so that all may have enough to eat. In Jesus name we pray, Amen

Thankfulness is one of those important keys that can unlock doors that keep us in bondage to resentments, bitterness, vengefulness, discouragement, cynicism, and unforgiveness perhaps. Cultivating a spirit of thankfulness is an important aspect of recovery from those places and back into freedom so that we can enjoy our lives and flourish in the blessing of God.

We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand;
he sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine
and soft refreshing rain.

All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above,
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for all his love.

We thank you, then, O Father,
for all things bright and good,
the seed-time and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food:
accept the gifts we offer
for all your love imparts;
and that which you most welcome,
our humble, thankful hearts.



**Happy Birthday Jen S, God bless you.
We hope you have a lovely day on Friday.**

As I was looking at the sunflower competition pictures, I was reminded of a part of the Bible. If I show you these two pictures it may give you a clue!?

You have probably guessed, the comparison between these two flowers brought to mind the dreams that Pharaoh had in the story of Joseph.

Let's read the account now from Genesis 41:14-33



So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, who was quickly brought out of the dungeon. After he had shaved and changed his clothes, he went in before Pharaoh.

15Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

16"I cannot do it," Joseph replied, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

17Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: "In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, 18when seven cows, well-fed and sleek, came up from the river and began to graze among the reeds. 19After them, seven other cows—sickly, ugly, and thin—came up. I have never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt! 20Then the thin, ugly cows devoured the seven well-fed cows that were there first. 21When they had devoured them, however, no one could tell that they had done so; their appearance was as ugly as it had been before. Then I awoke.

22In my dream I also saw seven heads of grain, plump and ripe, growing on a single stalk. 23After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—withered, thin, and scorched by the east wind. 24And the thin heads of grain swallowed the seven plump ones.



I told this dream to the magicians, but no one could explain it to me."

*25*At this, Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. *26*The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven ripe heads of grain are seven years. The dreams have the same meaning. *27*Moreover, the seven thin, ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind—they are seven years of famine.

*28*It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. *29*Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, *30*but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will devastate the land. *31*The abundance in the land will not be remembered, since the famine that follows it will be so severe.

*32*Moreover, because the dream was given to Pharaoh in two versions, the matter has been decreed by God, and He will carry it out shortly.

*33*Now, therefore, Pharaoh should look for a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt.

I love the story of Joseph, and in the scene we have just read, Joseph who has been in prison for years **for doing the right thing** has just been presented to Pharaoh, because Pharaoh’s butler has just remembered that Joseph helped him with a dream while he himself was in prison.



Joseph is an inspirational character and from the outset of his dealings with Pharaoh, nails his colours to the mast. The first recorded thing that Joseph says to Pharaoh in reply to his request for help is, **“I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he requires.”**

What a great statement! Humble, confident, wise and liberating; taking the focus off himself and putting the focus onto God. This is a statement that we can harness and adapt for ourselves as we face difficulties and mountains in life.

When faced with something too big for us, we can say, **“I can’t do this, but God will give me the grace I need for this situation.”**

Now, back to the dreams - there are four points that really bless me from these dreams - four anchors if you like, that we can hold onto. I should say that it was Dick and Jean's skinny sunflower that led me to this passage, not the many fine specimens that were entered. That in itself encourages me, because in our weakness and vulnerability, we can be a big blessing and inspiration to others.

1, God's provision through planet earth is incredible!

In the dream Pharaoh was told there would be seven years of plenty, and it happened! So much so - that it says in verse 49 of Genesis 41- that they stopped counting, because it was beyond measure!



What an amazing planet we live on! Year after year it produces vast amounts of food, plus meets our needs for clothing, shelter, medicine and recreation! The variety is staggering, new and fresh every year. During these seven years -in the passage we read -it seemed to go up a gear! Sadly, our modern world in the west is based on economic growth, and we are grabbing more and more of the earth's resources that we don't need and destroying huge areas of bio diversity.

Thankfully we have the hope of Jesus and his restorative power. We see him demonstrating his power over the natural world by calming storms, turning ordinary water into fine wine and multiplying a tiny amount of food to feed over 5000 people! May we as God's people experience the deep satisfaction that is only found in relationship with Jesus, and model lives that are not based on consuming more and more unnecessary stuff!

2, God cares about food allocation and distribution

We see in these dreams God initiating a huge feeding programme to save lives, and that his concern is for all people and not just Joseph's family.



There's a huge challenge for us here. Are we living in a way that cares for and considers others? The world produces more than enough food for everyone, but even with all our advanced education and technology we're still not very good at sharing it around! I have heard it said that if the whole world lived as we do in the west it would take three planets to sustain us!

How is it that in 2020, some of us take so much while others get so little?

Some of you can remember rationing - could we learn some lessons from that season?

Praise God for organisations like the foodbanks that help those struggling,

Another inspiring local group is the Ulverston Food Waste Project. Formed in 2019, they aim to reduce the amount of good food being sent to land fill and redistribute it in the local area.

Find them on Facebook

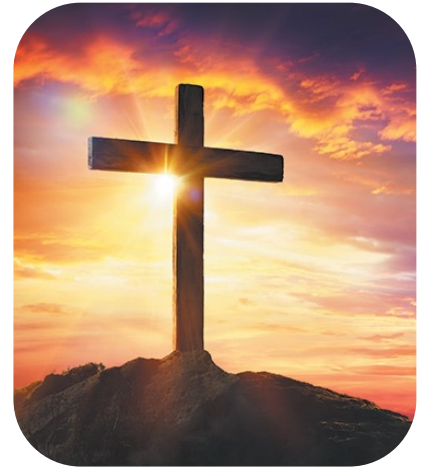
3, God is not surprised by difficult times and seasons!

In fact these seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine were appointed by God. Verse 32 says, *“The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon”*

Interestingly, studies in ice-cores found on mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the mountain that supplies the river Nile with water have recorded that a drought did take place around 3600 years ago, which is around the time the Bible sets Joseph’s story.

God clearly knew what was in store for the next 14 years, and provided a rescue package for the people. He didn’t take the hard times away, but he gave the people what they needed to get through that season.

God’s ultimate rescue package is offered to humanity through Jesus. Jesus took into himself all our self destruction, defeated its power on the cross and through his resurrection opens the door for us to be in joy-filled relationship with God. We can start that relationship by simply talking to Jesus and asking him to become a reality in our lives.



4, God has a bigger plan

Joseph says to his brothers later on in Genesis 50:20, *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”*

God had told Abraham many years before that his descendants would spend time in Egypt, and as a direct result of the famine Abrahams family did move to Egypt, fulfilling that promise.



We can be confident that God knows all about the current covid situation, it hasn’t caught him off guard, and like a master chess player we can be assured he is working out his purposes and plans. Like Joseph, things that the enemy may try to use to harm us, God can use to achieve a greater good. We can see good emerging from this current situation as people re-evaluate what is really important, and as many people turn to God in a new way.

The seven year famine must have been really hard for the people, and as the famine progressed, people sold all they had to be able to buy food from Joseph. On one level this seems a little harsh, but the people were still grateful to him. They saw him as their saviour! Joseph in many ways is a picture of Jesus, and as we receive the life Jesus offers, we realise it is worth more than any material thing as he incorporates us into his big eternal plan!

So, let's recap these four points, I hope they comfort, encourage and maybe challenge you in some way...


1, God's provision through planet earth is incredible

2, God cares about food allocation and distribution

3, God is not surprised by difficult times and seasons

4, God has a bigger plan and invites you to be part of it!

Amen!



*While the earth remains, seed time and harvest,
and cold and heat, and summer and winter,
and day and night shall not cease.*

- Genesis 8:22

Father God

Thank you for your faithfulness and your goodness to us. Thank you for giving us fresh daily bread, would you satisfy us with your deep love so we don't need to over consume and harm people in other parts of the world.

May we overflow with you goodness and generosity to those around us and carry your hope and peace deep into our neighbourhoods so that others would get to know you.

In Jesus name we pray.

Amen

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