

## Order Of Service

### Harvest Thanksgiving 2021

Good morning and welcome to our Harvest Thanksgiving Service. Welcome, notices, birthday box. We are here to say "Thank You" to God our Father for the harvest.

THANK YOU VIDEO

Harvest is a time to recognise and give thanks for all that God has done for us and is doing as we celebrate another harvest gathered in. In the words of our opening video I say to you; thank you, thank you, thank you for providing the usual remarkable display of products. Let's stand and declare our thanks to God!

This is a time for giving thanks;  
a time to be mindful of the good that encircles us.

***Thank you, God, for all you have given us!***

Friends and family encourage and care,  
and this community shows us God's loving ways.

***Thank you, God, for all you have given us!***

We find a home in God's creation  
and the earth gives us good food to make us grow.

***Thank you, God, for all you have given us!***

The seasons change.  
Sunshine comes and goes,  
yet your loving care for us is eternal.

***Thank you, God, for all you have given us!***

from the Iroquois-Matilda Pastoral Charge website.

[http://www.iroquoismatildapastoralcharge.org/uploads/2/8/6/1/28613371/october\\_11\\_2015\\_bulletin.pdf](http://www.iroquoismatildapastoralcharge.org/uploads/2/8/6/1/28613371/october_11_2015_bulletin.pdf)

*Ask people to bring stuff up during first song*

We are going to sing of our thankfulness now in this traditional harvest hymn:

### **75 Come ye thankful people**

Let's pray:

***Father, as we celebrate this season of thanksgiving***

***We give thanks for the blessings of food, provision and nourishment.***

***Please grow in us a harvest for the world.***

***Come sow a seed of hope within our souls Lord,***

***that we might yield goodness, patience and kindness in abundance.***

***Sow a seed of peace in our lives Lord,***

***that we might bear the fruits of forgiveness, compassion and righteousness.***

***Come sow a seed of love in our hearts Lord,***

***that others would reap the blessings of family, friendship and community.***

***May each seed of hope, peace and love grow within us***

***into a harvest that can be feasted on by all.***

*In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen.*

## 585 We plough the fields and scatter

I WILL STAND

In the New Testament, Jesus taught us to think of God's bringing others into His kingdom as part of a harvest. He says this in LUKE 10:2-4

***'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road...' etc.***

God's most important harvest is bringing in a harvest of men and women, who realise that He loves them, wants them to be part of His family, and as they trust and follow Jesus find forgiveness of their sins and find new life and hope in Him. And as we can see, just as Jesus called His disciples at that time into His market field, He calls us to do the same, and all those who follow Him.

TOMATOES IN GLASSHOUSE

Most tomatoes in Britain and even in places like Spain are grown in massive greenhouses or polytunnels. They produce millions of tons of tomatoes each year because the conditions in the greenhouses are ideal to grow nice juicy red tomatoes.

REID TOMATOES

This is the first year that we tried to propagate tomatoes from seed and then grow them outdoors, and as you can see we managed to produce amongst our tomatoes, this big boy. It's a big green tomato that must need to be ripened indoors, but at the moment is enjoying the present warm weather. It has been difficult to produce fruit in the garden this summer, with long dry periods, cool periods and some windy weather. But we have succeeded and I'm looking forward to eating our crop. That is in the full knowledge that some of the crops we tried didn't grow well at all.

I WILL STAND

The harvest that God wants us to reap, the harvest of people can be easy to reap in some places, but there are other parts of the world where it is difficult to be a Christian and the harvest tricky. To help us appreciate the scale of the harvest, BMS has given us this little quiz to explore some church facts.

BMS QUIZ

TITLE

*I Will Stand* is a reminder that as well as having UK mission staff in the field, BMS also supports local partners in many countries and that is where our focus is today. That's often because it's difficult to place foreign missionaries in countries where there are governments which anti-foreign mission, particularly where Christians are a minority and suffer issues of persecution, either official or turned a blind eye to by the authorities. Additionally, local mission staff are able to engage local people more effectively. Today we are going to explore three examples of how BMS supports Christians in countries where it is difficult or illegal to actively evangelise.

I Will Stand is not just about us having compassion on the persecuted. We have had services like that before. Persecution is nuanced. Sometimes it is dramatic, where Christians are killed, tortured and jailed. Other times it is in the form of petty violence, petty destruction of property, discrimination, prejudice, insults, shunning and the like. Let's hear the words of Jesus in the Beatitudes given to His disciples on the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:22-23

***Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.***

It confirms that those persecuted are a blessed people. Whereas it's true that those blessings are stored up in heaven for them, being a Christian in a persecuting society often results in lives changed when they live as a witness to Christ despite the threat of persecution.

In the Book of Acts we see incidents of lives changed as a result of persecution episodes, such as the conversion of Paul in Acts 9 and of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16.

Some of the places where the Christian faith and churches are growing most rapidly are countries where Christians are discriminated against or even actively persecuted such as in India, in China and also in Muslim-majority countries. But to stand as a Christian can be costly too. We are going to hear and pray for three people BMS partners are supporting. Because their activities are either illegal or they will suffer considerable persecution if their names and countries are revealed they are just referred to by initials. Their activities have borne fruit, but as we will hear that has been personally costly for each of them.

BEARING FRUIT CAN BE COSTLY

VIDEO

BEARING FRUIT CAN BE COSTLY

K's example is a truly Pauline story – a persecutor encountering God, becoming an evangelist and then one of the persecuted as he seeks to share his faith. When we look at the persecuted church we often hear of a God who makes a way in the most unlikely situations – then lives are changed and people drawn into the kingdom. K is now a BMS partner, evangelist and church planter in India. That's a risky business but as you heard, in his own village, most families are now Christians. God bears fruit through the power of His Spirit and a willing person who is prepared to share the message.

PRAYER

Let's pray for him and other Indian church planters:

***Lord, we pray for church planters in Asia who are facing persecution because of their faith.***

***Thank you for the many, many people they are reaching with the gospel, and for the new house churches they have formed.***

***Please protect church planters and new believers. Please soften the hearts of those who want to harm them.***

***We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.***

It's a reminder to us that we have the same God. Our story may not be dramatic as K's or the other two stories we are going to hear, but whatever situation we may be going through, God can make a difference when we pray and allow Him to work in us and through us. I could say a lot to encourage you, instead I give you this song, which says I more eloquently than I can!

VIDEO SONG: GOD WILL MAKE A WAY

BEARING FRUIT CAN BE COSTLY

So, for the persecuted church, bearing fruit is potentially very dangerous. Here is a second story about a lady BMS calls Z. God made a way in her life in a spectacular way.

VIDEO

As with the previous video, this lady's story starts with an encounter with God. She found herself isolated from other Christians and we heard how difficult she found it to learn more of Jesus or even get baptised, yet God made a way for her to learn of Him and through it, she shared the Good News with her family and they came to Christ – her struggle and risk brought others to Jesus. The BMS seeks to connect partners with isolated Christians they come into contact, with and we are going to pray for isolated believers in a moment.

What drives people to take risks to go to church and even speak about their faith in countries where they can get into serious trouble for revealing they are Christians, particularly in Muslim majority countries in the Middle East where changing religion is a serious criminal offence? It's because their experience of God is real, their walk with God is close because it costs them to follow Jesus.

How costly is our faith? How costly it is, and the effort we are prepared to make to seek and follow God's will, will tell us about our walk with God. Sometimes our faith can burn a little low for whatever reason, and I hope that hearing these stories today may help us reflect on the meaning of our faith this morning and on the cost of our faith to us.

One thing I will ask you to reflect on in the notes this week is where our priorities as a church lie. For the sorts of countries our people are drawn from today, the priority is to try to faithfully bear fruit despite the limitations and risks of persecution.

What is the biggest issue in the church in Britain right now? It's about mask-wearing. That's quite a contrast. How costly is our faith to us really? What is truly important?

Let's reflect on what's happening for example, to the church in India and China where the church is bearing fruit despite persecution, with say, Britain where the church is contracting and struggling. Is that because something that doesn't cost much isn't worth much?

Let's pray for isolated Christians like Z in Muslim countries where being a Christian is costly.

***Father, we pray for isolated Christians.***

***May they find other believers who can encourage them, whether that is face-to-face or through social media. Help them to find ways to faithfully follow God, even when they have to live out their faith in secret.***

***We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.***

I know that there are those of you that find your faith costly. There are others of you that have found your faith a struggle over these past months. How can we keep our faith strong and secure when we are being buffeted by life. This next song reminds us that God's love endures forever. That is what Christians like Z have found and we need to affirm that too.

**1241 Give thanks to the Lord**

BEARING FRUIT CAN BE COSTLY

Our God is faithful. Harvest is a time of the year when we remember that God is always faithful to us. That's an important thing to remember when we are going through a difficult situation in our lives. For those accepting Christ by renouncing Islam to follow Him, their families often cut them off completely and never speak to them again. Here is the story of J, who found that becoming a Christian was very personally costly.

## VIDEO

### BEARING FRUIT CAN BE COSTLY

Like two others, out of the difficulty and risk of being a Christian in a country hostile to her faith, J found a way to reach others and BMS supports her in that. People are coming to Christ through her ministry.

Why? Why would anyone want to turn to Christ in most North African Countries, knowing that the cost is significant for doing so. Because they understand that the Christian who presented Jesus to them has something real, something the spiritual and moral bankruptcy of Islam can't give them. A faith and a relationship with God that's real, that's daily.

It doesn't matter what society anyone is in; genuine Christian faith will attract others and they will trust Jesus whatever the cost. Is that where we are at right now? We will be praying about that in a few moments. In the meanwhile, let's pray for J and her ministry.

***Heavenly Father, we pray for people who have been rejected by their families because they have chosen to follow Jesus.***

***May they experience the unconditional love of God.***

***May they find strong Christian communities.***

***And we pray that their families would accept them and reconcile with them.***

***We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.***

## HOW CAN I HELP?

*I will stand* is about standing with those who are sticking their neck out to follow Jesus; people that BMS is supporting. How can we help? First of all we can pray and I shall put the prayers we pray this morning on the website page for today.

We can also give. We're not taking a special offering up for this today – the offering basket is just our regular offering – and this is because we tithe our regular offering between BMS and Home Mission. If you want to give specially to BMS then details are in the Weekly Sheet and also on the website page for this morning.

## PRAYERS

### BMS PRAYERS (2)

***We pray for BMS-supported ministries reaching out to people who are hostile to the gospel.***

***Help people to have wisdom to know when to speak and when to be silent.***

***Give them the right words to say. And we pray that they would see many people come to know Jesus. (2)***

***We pray that through the ministries of BMS-supported believers across the globe, thousands of people will experience whole-life transformation.***

***As Christians living in hard places seek to share the gospel in word and deed, may people experience the love of Jesus for the first time, and may it transform every area of their lives. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.***

PRAYER

***Father we pray for ourselves as a church, that you will restore to us our enthusiasm for our faith if it has grown dim. Father may we desire to walk in your Spirit in a fresh way. May you take from us whatever spirit of discouragement we may have in our lives and give us the power and grace to count the cost afresh of serving and following you, both individually and as a church. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen***

*Lift up individuals before the Lord to close.*

The service today is called *I will Stand*. It brought us the question of how much we are standing for Jesus in the freedom our society gives, and it challenged us to stand too, with those living in countries where they don't have freedom. It also reminded us of how much fruit is borne when Christians stand up and stand out for who they are. And why does that happen? Because our faith is founded on rock solid foundations and our final song reminds where we stand.

### **589 We shall stand**

I would normally close with a blessing, but I'm just going to close with this reflection from BMS.

BMS REFLECTION

## **Items for reflection and discussion**

*Read Luke 10:2-4*

1. What is our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ? What did our short films this morning show about bringing forth fruit in difficult situations? How may that reflect on where we are individually and where we are as a church right now?

*Read Luke 14:25-33*

2. What does this passage tell us about the cost of being a follower of Jesus?

3. Mark said “; let's reflect on what's happening for example, to the church in India and China where the church is bearing fruit despite persecution, with say, Britain where the church is contracting and struggling. Is that because something that doesn't cost much isn't worth much? ” Do you agree?

*Read Luke 6:22-33*

4. Why does God bless those who are persecuted? What can we learn from this for our own spiritual lives about the risk of following Jesus wherever He leads?