**Morning Praise @ Home 8th January 2023**

**Plough Sunday at Shotwick**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**Bible Readings** **Isaiah 2:2 – 5 Luke 9:57 – 62**

**Reflection from John**

An old farmer who was about to die called his two sons to his bedside and said,

**"My boys, my farm and the fields are yours in equal shares. I leave you a little ready money but the bulk of my wealth is hidden somewhere in the ground, not more than eighteen inches from the surface. I regret that I’ve forgotten precisely where it lies."**

When the old man was dead and buried, his two sons set to work to dig up every inch of ground in order to find the buried treasure. They failed to find it but as they’d gone to all the trouble of turning over the soil they thought they might as well sow a crop, which they did, reaping a good harvest.

In autumn, as soon as they had an opportunity they dug for the treasure again but with no better results.

As their fields were turned over more thoroughly than any others in the neighbourhood, they reaped better harvests than anyone else.

Year after year, their search continued.

Only when they had grown much older and wiser, did they realize what their father had meant.

Real treasure comes as a result of the hard work of ploughing and sowing the land. (Source unknown).

Plough Sunday appears to be a very ancient festival. Often the plough was fêted and drawn through the streets to be blessed in church. This was thought to ensure food for the coming year.

However it was abandoned following the Reformation but revived by the Victorians.

Traditionally it is celebrated on the first Sunday after Epiphany: that is TODAY.

The following day, Plough Monday, was the first day that work in the fields recommenced after Christmas.

It is good that we give thanks to God for our earth – and the rain for we need it for our agriculture to flourish.

The importance of agricultural life was something that was commonplace to the people of Biblical times.

God wants humanity to be involved with the land.

Until I had to prepare this sermon, ploughing wasn’t something I had particularly paid attention to in the Bible. However it turns up a surprising number of times in the Old Testament.

Farming was so commonplace for the people of Biblical times that we see the metaphor of sowing and ploughing used to get over spiritual truths.

Take Hosea. Look what he says:

*Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unploughed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.” Hosea 10:12*

And of course, the famous passage from Isaiah 2:2-5 where the prophet says -

*In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.*

*3 Many peoples will come and say,*

*“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob.*

*He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.”*

*The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

*4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation,*

*nor will they train for war anymore.*

*5 Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.*

But the concept of sowing and ploughing is not just an Old Testament analogy.

We all know Jesus’ parable of the sower very well.

But it wasn’t just Jesus who used agricultural images.

The apostle Paul uses the concept of sowing and ploughing to show that there are different roles for people in life:

*9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it about oxen that God is concerned? 10 Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever ploughs and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.* (1 Cor 9:9-10)

I’d like to end by looking at one of the times Jesus specifically refers to the plough.

We read in Luke 9 that:

*59 He said to another man, “Follow me.”*

*But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”*

*60 Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”*

*61 Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”*

*62 Jesus replied, “****No one who puts a hand to the plough*** *and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

*Jesus is urging those who are willing to hear what he is teaching and put it into effect in their lives to find their path with Him and then to follow it as faithfully as someone endeavouring to plough a straight furrow.*

Personally I sometimes find it hard to keep a straight furrow in my life as a Christian. But then, as in real life, ploughing is very costly in time and preparation.

But if we sow and plough faithfully in our spiritual lives we can expect the results that the apostle Paul waited for when he said:

*“whoever ploughs and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.” (1 Cor 9:10)*

May I leave you with this thought – on Plough Sunday.

**What sort of world are you hoping to leave behind from your ploughing in life?**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by John**

Let us pray to God our creator, who has given us the earth’s goodness for our delight, and entrusted it to our care and tenderness.

For all those who live in captivity to debt, whose lives are cramped by fear from which there is no turning

except through abundant harvest;

Lord, we pray: may those who sow in tears **All: reap with shouts of joy.**

For all who depend on the earth for their daily food and fuel, whose forests are destroyed for the profit of a few;

Lord, we pray: may those who sow in tears **All: reap with shouts of joy.**

For those who labour in poverty, are oppressed by unjust laws, are prevented from speaking the truth,

and long for a harvest of justice;

Lord, we pray: may those who sow in tears **All: reap with shouts of joy.**

For all who are captive to greed and waste and boredom, whose harvest joy is choked with things they do not need;

Lord, we pray: may those who sow in tears **All: reap with shouts of joy.**

Save us from all that holds us captive, restore our vision, that our tongue may be filled with laughter

and our tongue with songs of joy.

Lord, we pray: may those who sow in tears **All: reap with shouts of joy.**

**The liturgy for the blessing:**

*The Blessing of the Plough or other agricultural equipment*

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation: for in your abundant care you have given us fertile land,

rich soil, the seasons in their courses.

You provide seed for sowing, water, light and warmth to bring forth the miracle of growth.

You give us skill to work the land, to prepare and nourish it, that it may be fruitful.

Bless all the labours of your servants, bless the tools and machinery used in your service;

By your blessing, let this plough be a sign of all that you promise to us.

Prosper the work of our hands, and provide abundant crops for your people to share.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **All: Blessed be God for ever.**

God speed the plough. **All: God speed the plough.**

*Prayer for the land and the community*

Grant favourable weather, temperate rains and fruitful seasons, that there may be food and drink for all creatures. **All: Hear us, good Lord.**

Bestow your blessing upon the lands and waters, and all who work upon them, to bring forth food and all things needful for your people. **All: Hear us, good Lord.**

Prosper all who care for the earth, the water, and the air, that the riches of your creation may abound from age to age. **All: Hear us, good Lord.**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**