

Beyond Consumerism

HARVEST

THANK YOU!

TO OUR FARMERS



Arthur Rank
Centre

CONFIDENT RURAL CHRISTIANS



Reflecting on Food and Food Producers

I wonder what images harvest brings to your mind. Is it one of walking through local fields of neatly stacked bales? Or immense acres with commercial contractors harvesting on an industrial scale? Or perhaps you live in a seaside village, where the harvest of the sea is what first springs to mind. These are all rich reminders of the amazing planet we inhabit, of the riches of the land and sea around us, and the vital role UK farms play in feeding our nation.

In other parts of the world, harvest might not bring to mind such positive memories. In late 2019, Kenya and many other countries of East Africa endured a massive infestation of desert locusts. Thousands of hectares of cropland and pasture were ravaged. The locusts destroyed everything in their path, threatening the livelihoods of millions of people, a stark reminder of how tough farming can be. Harvest can also be associated with slave labour and exploited migrant workers, toiling long hours for poor pay in a desperate bid to feed their families. In this Beyond Consumerism resource, we focus on food and food producers at home and abroad.

Build on tradition

Harvest refers to the process or period of gathering in crops or to the quantity of a natural product gathered in a single season. The word derives from Anglo-Saxon 'haerfest' meaning 'autumn'. Throughout the world, the harvest of the main cereal crop, typically wheat, corn or rice, has always been an occasion of celebration when the crop was 'safely gathered in'. However, a good harvest can never be guaranteed. Disease or insect infestation can drastically diminish a crop and farming will always be weather dependent. Climate change continues to increase the risk of extremes from severe drought to devastating storms.

While we celebrate God's provision and give thanks for this year's harvest here, charities like Tear Fund regularly use harvest to draw attention to the plight of farmers and food producers around the world, where the impact of climate change is felt ever more acutely. In East Africa, once beautiful, productive land is now degraded and unproductive desert, whereas in Bangladesh and Pakistan extreme monsoon rains and flooding have swept away most of the crops. In these countries, there will be no harvest this year with food producers and their families forced ever deeper into poverty and starvation.

Explore biblical principles

The Bible has much to say about sowing and reaping, hardship and plenty. It also speaks about harvesting and gleaning. God's blessing goes hand in hand with generosity and compassion towards those less fortunate than ourselves. Here are three bible readings and some reflections to use in a Harvest Service.

Deuteronomy 24. 19 – 22

This summarises God's instructions for the harvester: "When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." (v. 19) The same principle applies to olives and grapes, and any other crops you might harvest.

Ruth 2

The book of Ruth is a wonderful story of God's grace and provision in the midst of difficult circumstances. Famine forced a family from Bethlehem to seek refuge in the country of Moab. Later bereavement forced widowed Naomi to return home with her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth. Chapter 2 focuses on gleaning, putting into practice God's instruction in Deuteronomy. We see Ruth's generosity, care and compassion towards Naomi rewarded as she is offered protection and encouraged to glean in the fields of Boaz, whom she later marries. It works very well as a dramatized reading.

The notion of gleaning is not particularly familiar to us today, and yet it reveals a God-principle of leaving spares, valuing leftovers, and being deliberately inefficient for the benefit of others. Today, a kind of gleaning is practiced by humanitarian groups. This can include farm donations to a food bank or homeless project but also the collection of food from supermarkets that would otherwise be thrown away at the end of the day.

2 Corinthians 9. 6 – 12

Paul challenges the Corinthian church to be generous and cheerful givers: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." (v. 6) This takes the principle a stage further going beyond crop harvest to the fruit of godly living. A cheerful giver according to the Greek is someone who is prompt to give without grudging their gift. This whole passage encourages abundance, generosity and charitable donation on every occasion.



WORSHIP RESOURCES

Here are some suggestions and ideas, which could be used in a Harvest festival in the open air, in church, or at a Harvest Supper.



In one of our villages, the allotments are next to the churchyard. On a Sunday morning, we might be in church, but where is everyone else? Why do we assume that when God is at work, he will do everything in a church building?

I got this idea from a local man who once a fortnight takes his wheelbarrow around the small estate where he lives gathering produce for the local food bank collection. Those in the neighbourhood respond generously on a regular basis. It's a great way to involve local food producers and engage with those who don't usually come to church on a Sunday morning, although it will require a little research and forward planning.

Choose a time when most allotment holders are usually busy on their plots. Invite allotment holders to donate harvest gifts to 'the wheelbarrow' and then join in a short open-air thanksgiving for harvest amongst the allotments. Produce can then be auctioned off or shared with a local homeless project.

A Harvest Confession

We say sorry to God for the times we take our food for granted, waste God's precious resource and forget the poor and hungry.

Lord, in our selfishness we take for granted plentiful food supplies, while the poor go hungry day after day.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, in our carelessness we discard and waste food, forgetting those who worked hard to produce it for little reward.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, in our apathy we ignore the mistreatment and exploitation of farm workers, doing little to right the wrongs of injustice.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May the God, who has given in abundance for the benefit of all, forgive us for our lack of gratitude, strengthen us in concern and compassion, and make us eager to serve him in the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Engage with the local school

Harvest is an ideal time to offer to go into school for an assembly or to invite the whole school into church. The 'Open the Book' dramatized assembly material includes a great assembly about Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. This lends itself to exploring the principle of gleaning with primary-aged children. The Lion Storyteller Bible by Bob Hartman and Krisztina Kallai Nagy is the basis for 'Open the Book' and this is always a good resource to use with children.

A Harvest Affirmation

As we celebrate harvest, let us affirm what we believe:

**We believe that the earth is the Lord's and all that lives on it;
we believe that living gratefully and giving generously are marks of faith.
We believe that all humanity should have sufficient food to eat, and that we must all act now to support food producers around the world
so that the children of tomorrow may not be burdened by the mistakes of today.**

**And so we commit ourselves to think globally,
to trade fairly,
to live responsibly,
to love this world as God loves it, who, in Christ, became part of creation.
Amen.**

Adapted from
Harvesting the World: A Liturgy for harvest festivals
Wild Goose Resource Group

DIY Harvest Prayers

This is not an original idea but it works really well in an all-age setting. The word HARVEST has over fifty other words within it. Working in small mixed-age groups, encourage the congregation to list the hidden words and then use a few of them as a basis for writing their own prayers about food and food producers locally and around the world.

The leader might begin:

Lord of the HARVEST, we bring to you our prayers for the world in which we live.

Then each group might add a simple beginning:

We think of the word SHARE. We pray for a fairer share of the world resources...

We think of the word STARVE. We pray for those who are unable to grow sufficient food to feed their families...

Other suitable words might be:
HAVE, TEARS, TRASH, HEART, TARES, HEAT.

The leader might end:

Lord of the harvest, source of all life and giver of good things, in your mercy hear us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.





Music Suggestions

'Autumn days, when the grass is jewelled', Estelle White, 1969, StF 121 and 'Cauliflowers fluffy and cabbages green', traditional, both are ever popular with schools for harvest

'Fill your hearts with joy and gladness', Timothy Dudley-Smith, AM 283, HON 155, CH4 103, MP 147, SoF 717

'For the fruits of his/all creation', Fred Pratt Green, 1970, AM 284, StF 124, HON 169, CH4 231, SoF 1234, MP 153 – two tunes are offered including the traditional Welsh folk tune 'All through the night'

'God whose farm is all creation', John Arlott, AM 285, StF 122, HON 221, CH4 226

'Great is your faithfulness, O God', Matt Maher, 2003, MP 1178, SoF 1812

'In the Lord I'll be ever thankful', Jacques Berthier, Taizé, AM 334, StF 776, HON 766, CH4 772, MP 865, SoF 817

'Inspired by love and anger', John Bell, Graham Maule, tune: Salley Gardens, AM 562, HON 317, CH4 253

'Pears and apples, wheat and grapes', Joseph Booth, CH4 232 a hymn of thanksgiving for harvest of land, earth, sea

'Praise and thanksgiving, Albert F Bayly, tune: Bunessan (Morning has broken), AM 287, StF 125, HON 543

'Praise God for the harvest of orchard and field', Brian Wren, 1974, tune: Stowey, StF 126, CH4 230

'The harvest is here', Dominic Grant, tune: Laudate Dominum, StF 128

'We're singing a harvest song', (For the harvest) Mark and Helen Johnson, 2012, 2016, Sing Harvest, Out of the Ark – a song of thanksgiving for children with more good songs in the same book

'We see the fruitful harvest', Sam Hargreaves, tune: Morning Light (Stand up, stand up for Jesus), *Harvest Worship: Church Service Pack*, 2019, Engage Worship

Ancient and Modern: Hymns and Songs for Refreshing Worship, (AM)
Singing the Faith (StF)
Hymns Old and New: One Church, One Faith, One Lord (HON)
Church Hymnal 4th Edition (CH4)
Mission Praise (MP)
Songs of Fellowship (SoF)

Further resources for Harvest

Common Worship Times and Seasons, Seasons and Festivals of the Agricultural Year, p. 623ff or at:

www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/churchs-year/times-and-seasons-4#mmm372

Harvest Worship: Church Service Pack, three services for Harvest time, Sara and Sam Hargreaves, 2019, engageworship supported by Rural Ministries

Ruth's Harvest (pdf download), Tim Aldred, celebrates harvest based on the biblical story of Ruth, addressing issues of injustice and poverty. This can be found together with other Iona Community harvest resources at:

www.ionabooks.com/?s=harvest&post_type=product&type_aws=true

'Bread of Community: Harvest Festival – Bringing the whole of ourselves', Chris Thorpe, a fully worked service in *Ploughshares and Firstfruits*, 2020, Canterbury Press

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