

Harvest Festival

Harvest Festival – September 2020

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rev Chris Blackshaw, Pioneer Minister for Farming, for his thoughts for a Harvest Festival.

Our new online music resource is now live: [here](#) you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4). The search function allows you to bring up a list of songs by keyword, tune, theme, author, composer and metre, covering all of the indexes in the hymnbook. The site features Weekly Worship and thematic/seasonal playlists, alternative settings and background information on the hymns.

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Introduction

There is something wonderful about harvest time, it is a favourite service for many, when we can share in a sense of achievement and celebrate that a crop has been gathered in safely, but of course harvest happens all year round, not just in the autumn.

As soon as the first seeds were planted I am sure that when they began to sprout, grow and multiply, people were overjoyed with their achievement and I'm sure a harvest celebration, in some form, soon followed.

Before the luxury of large supermarkets people gathered up food and stored it to get them through times when food was scarce – their food was seasonal. There are other harvests to consider such as the harvest of the sea or the sale of animals that provide meat to sustain us. Harvest is still a popular festival and can be celebrated in different ways. It may be a more pertinent service in rural communities, where churches can see the farming year unrolling on their doorstep, but it gives the urban and rural churches an opportunity to connect together. Often it is celebrated by bringing food items in tins and packets to church, which is sometimes shared with the local food bank. In some rural churches we see images of days gone by, when sheaves of corn, milk churns, scythes and rakes are used to set the harvest scene, accompanied by baking; those wonderful mouth-watering cakes and freshly picked fruit and vegetables from the garden are brought in abundance to lay out in God's house. In some churches the celebration of harvest continues the following evening with an auction, when all the produce is sold and lots of fun had when bidding for the different lots. Some churches may have a harvest supper to celebrate.

Luke 12:13-31 – (New Living Translation)

I often find that it helps to read a bible passage more than once. Firstly I read it quietly to myself and then I read it out aloud, when I often hear another message. Then I look at different key words in the sentences – sometimes those words can tell us so much, yet it is all too easy to pass over them. Then we can move to the bible commentaries and it can be surprising to find another approach that stimulates a different way of thinking. And we have many to choose from – even if a commentary is old and out of print, do not presume it is not of value. By reading several different commentaries we can find nuggets of wisdom that motivate our thinking from both yesterday and yester year.

Then we can move to the internet – there is a world of information that can help us to prepare for our service.

Another very important part of the service is the selection of hymns. The hymns should take us on a journey through our time of worship. But take the opportunity to go deeper and look at who wrote the hymns and why they wrote them and suddenly we have a moving story we can share with people. (The [CH4 website](#) includes biographical notes on the hymn and tune writers). It is good to show our appreciation for others, as has been seen on Thursday evenings at 8pm during the Covid-19 lockdown, so why not show appreciation to our farmers by displaying a banner outside church saying, “Thank God and the Farmer for the Harvest”, or write letters to local farmers to say thank you, or even to the local National Farmers Union Scotland representative, who can circulate your thanks to all their farming members.

Sermon ideas

As we read this passage from Luke we see Jesus was speaking to two types of people – those who had much and those who had little. We can reflect on the place of material possessions in our lives and we will find that for some people their main priority in life is to accumulate wealth and have a good life, paying little attention either to God or God’s word, and seeking to amass as much as they can. In this passage we find a common problem that still exists in farming today; disputes over land, one brother falling out with the other over land and inheritance. Of course this is not restricted to farming; it can happen within a family in any context. But the passage also reassuringly gives great hope – the promise of God’s love and care.

As we read on and start to look more deeply at the text, we touch on issues such as anxiousness, trust, faith and the Kingdom of God and we might begin to question the priorities in our lives.

As I look out of my farmhouse window across my fields, I see the birds going about their day, finding food wherever they can (sometimes from my hen run or cattle troughs) and I see my lambs grazing and I ask myself, what worries do they have? I look after them and give them care and love and when I compare their lives to the busyness of ours I wonder which of us has got it right.

Do we find that the more we have the more we want? Has Covid-19 caused people to take stock of their lives and to prioritise what is important in life? Has it enabled people to be content with what they already have? Do we listen to what God says and then apply it to our own lives? If we view our possessions or success in life as the result of our own talent and efforts, will we think of ourselves as the owner of these things, whereas in reality we are only stewards of all that God has provided?

Prayers

I believe we should use prayers that are simple and not full of 'churchy' language; prayers that are down-to-earth and relevant. We can use words to describe God in creative ways such as the great gardener of all creation, the great architect of the universe, the giver of all life – there are so many words that we can use that conjure up wonderful images of God in our minds. In preparing for prayer it is essential to know what is going on in the world, even on the morning of the service. Use online news sites as they are up to date. Be aware of the issues and needs in the community you are part of. But most of all, pray from your heart.

Call to worship / Gathering prayer to set the scene

God of harvest time

we gather together today as Your people and Your church

to celebrate and to give thanks

for the harvest we have been fortunate enough to share in.

Enable us to be fruitful in our worship

and to praise You with joyful hearts

Amen

Thanksgiving

God of all creation,

we praise and give thanks for all that You have given to us in our lives.

We thank You for the beauty of the Scottish landscape,

the beautiful braes, the burns, the highlands and the Islands.

We thank You for the orchards,

the excellent grazing pastures

and the rich soil for cultivation.

We thank You for all those who work the land and sea

to provide food to feed us;

for farmers who grow crops

and produce livestock with love and care

and those fishing the deep oceans.

We thank You God for the rich variety of food

that comes from all across the world.

We thank You for the enjoyment and pleasure we find in sharing food in celebration and fellowship.

We pray for those who grow, prepare and distribute the food we eat.

Intercession

We pray today for farmers and farm-workers, especially those we know in our parishes.

We pray for them in the heat of summer and in the dreichness of the wet and cold of winter, as they tend their stock daily and cultivate their fields, as they manage the hedges, woodland and waterways.

We pray for safety in a hazardous industry, encouragement for the solitary, and a fair price for their products.

We pray for seasonable weather, good growth and good yields, so that there may be abundant harvests to feed hungry people. For safe work practices and healthy habits for all farmers, so that people and communities may flourish and be strong, For health and happiness in the home life of all farmers, and for families to work together with love, respect and harmony,

For wise financial planning, land care and asset management, so that farmers may be confident about the future of their farms, for good communication between country and city, so that we may understand each other's needs and encourage one another.

We pray for this country to increase its self-sufficiency in food that people and supermarket-buyers will support local growers. We pray for all those who provide seasonal labour at harvest time, for those who clean and process our food – often in tough conditions, for those who transport, inspect and sell our food and for all who cook it for us, remembering particularly all the new school caterers feeding our young children.

We pray for rural and regional networks
working to overcome rural loneliness and isolation;
the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution
and the National Farmers Union Scotland.
We pray for the Church of Scotland's Farming Minister,
Rev Chris Blackshaw,
working amongst the farming community in Ayrshire
and across Scotland,
supporting farmers and the agricultural community.

Generous God,
as we celebrate Your goodness to us in Scotland
we also remember the plight of those whose harvests have failed.
We pray for those whose land or crops have been affected
by floods, drought, or fire
by pests and disease.
For those whose families are hungry
and for those who have no seed or livestock for the future.
We also remember those here and abroad
who are dependent on food banks.
Help us to be generous givers –
of our money, food and time,
as Christian disciples in this place,
and show us how to be stewards of the resources of Your world,
for the benefit of all people.

Collect

Creator God,
You have made us stewards of Your earth,
You have charged us to tend it
and to grow food in season;
help us to respect and to use them to Your glory
and to cherish all life that comes from You,
so that we may share in the labour of all creation
to bring relief to those in need
and to sustain ourselves in our own well-being;

through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with You,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever
Amen

Blessing

May God who clothes the lilies
and feeds the birds of the air,
who leads the lambs to their pasture
and the deer to still waters,
who multiplied the loaves and fishes
and changed water into wine,
lead us, feed us, multiply us,
and change us to reflect the glory of our Creator
now and through all eternity.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
rest upon you and remain with you
now and for ever
Amen

Alternative Material

This material has been supplied by kind permission of **Spill the Beans** and allows you to explore the readings or theme of the service in creative ways that include everyone gathering for worship.

New material from Spill the Beans is provided in the latest issues available from their [website](#).

Starter Ideas for All-Age Talk

Have you had your cereal this morning?

What did you have? Corn Flakes, Weetabix, or something fancy?

Show different brands of cereals; you could do an online search for 50 favourite kids breakfast cereals. Talk about which cereals they have tried and which they have not.

I guess you didn't have cereal like this?

Show congregation some barley, pulses, rice or some such.

These do not look all that appetising do they?

Explain to children and remind adults that there are two different types of cereal.

Truth is that although this type of cereal is not what we would have for breakfast we do have it in other meals and this cereal is **very important** to the world diet.

For some people 'important' is not a strong enough word. It would be better to say that these cereals are 'essential' or 'necessary for life'.

Share the importance of this cereal for the world's hungry. Statistics could be found that indicate how many people are hungry in the world and what food is eaten in some places as part of their staple diet.

There are two sides to our Thanksgiving Service:

The easy bit is to acknowledge how thankful we are for what we have.

The harder part it is to be so moved by the fact that we are provided for, and that we are so well-off in comparison to others, that we recognise our responsibility to share. To sometimes share what we have; and always to make an effort to make sure that the world's resources are shared out fairly.

Read Mark 6:30-44.

Somehow Jesus played a part in making sure that whatever food there was that day was shared. Surprisingly it not only fed all the people, but there was some left over too.

There is a great blessing in being given, and inherent value in sharing.

Harvest or What?

A meditation based on some favourite harvest hymns.

We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land

Well, not us. Not for some time either.
We do not get our hands dirty,
preferring instead to buy pre-packaged,
pre-washed, pre-prepared everything,
from sliced white bread
to ready chopped carrots.

Never mind that our choices
are flown half way across the world.
We like quality.
And, on occasion, we will even pay for it.
Harvest is something we're prepared to leave to others.
The physical harvest
is someone else's worry.
If the weather's bad or if crops fail
we will simply shop elsewhere,
move on, pay more.
We certainly won't starve.
We've not been that close to the land for a long time now.
It's nothing new.

To reflect modern life and contemporary culture
perhaps our harvest celebration
needs to be revamped,
needs to reflect our experience:
of work and toil,
of sweat and tears.
Isn't harvest about celebrating our gifts and our skills,
all that God has given us to make life good?
Isn't it about giving thanks for the comparative luxury we know,
and that we protect at all costs.
It is so far removed from work on the land
so can we not find another way to celebrate?
We plough the fields and scatter?
Not us, not any more.

Come, ye thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home

Oh yes.

It is good to give thanks once a year.

Thanks for all those little luxuries.

Thanks for God's blessings.

Once a year, it is good to give thanks.

For the Lord our God shall come
and shall bring his harvest home

Now that is sounding a different note.

God harvesting people.

But we won't worry too much about that.

We are simply here to give our thanks for now.

We don't need to worry about the future at harvest.

We will just celebrate the present.

And leave the future to God.

That is part of harvest too, isn't it?

That God takes care of the future.

Come, ye thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home

Pause

For the fruits of all creation
thanks be to God

We will celebrate all that we can see around us.

We will congratulate ourselves on being so well-off
that we can sing heartily the words:

In our world-wide task of caring
God's will is done
In the harvest we are sharing
God's will is done

Yet, to make our words ring true today
we have to see beyond our beautiful colourful displays of fruit
to the responsibility that God places on each of us
to make the kind of harvest we celebrate
alive with meaning for the world,
alive with meaning for those who will sleep rough tonight,
alive with meaning for those who will go to bed hungry,
alive with meaning for the poor all around us,
and, yes, alive with meaning in Iraq and Afghanistan,
in Sumatra and Zimbabwe,
in all the places where God's children are to be found.

May we and they know that our world is not as God intended,
that in creation there is more than enough to go around
if we could only share.
And so, in our plenty,
it is not that we should waste time on feeling guilty
but that we should turn God's goodness to us
into a call to serve the world through our sharing.

Our God, who stretched out the heavens
and created everything in wisdom,
relies on us to care and gives us what we need to do just that
and so we will take our fruit this morning:
symbol of all the goodness of God,
we will take our fruit:
symbol of the power of God,
we will take our fruit:
symbol of the call of God
and we will give thanks, we will share from our place of plenty,
we will give thanks to the God of the harvest
and we will share God's food for God's world.

Prayers

Prayer of Dedication

Print the Order of Service on different coloured paper. Ask everyone to hold up their Order of Service when their colour is mentioned or when the word 'rainbow' is mentioned.

We give thanks for red:
for apples and faces after running through the cold.

We give thanks for orange:
for evening sunsets, Jaffa cakes and autumn leaves.

We give thanks for yellow:
for the corn and the fields and the stacks of hay.

We give thanks for green:
for the colour of creation that gives us so much.

We give thanks for blue:
for the water that runs and the sky that flows.

We give thanks for purple:
and the berries and richness of all we have been given.

We give thanks for the rainbow of colours:
the diversity of gifts and the colour of life
that makes us your rainbow people
and through all the gifts we have
and the sharing we do
may we bring a rainbow of colour to the world.

Call to worship

Six people, each with a bundle of coloured tissue squares stand along the balcony – you can adapt this for the pulpit or other high place. They drop their tissue squares when their colour is mentioned.

This is harvest
and in our diversity and colour
we come together
to give thanks for God's gifts to us
and to dedicate our gifts to God
in the reds of autumn
and the oranges of sunset,
in the yellows of corn
and the greens of fields,

in the blues of skies
and the purple of berries
we bring all creation together
in celebration.

So let us gather,
each of us a shade in God's rainbow people,
and sing praise to the creator of every harvest colour.

Responses

Leader: God of the harvest,

All: gather us in.

Leader: God of the plentiful,

All: gather us in.

Leader: God of the abundant,

All: gather us in.

Leader: God of us all,

All: gather us in.

All-Age Prayer

Creator God,

ECOLOGY is the science of understanding the interactions between all living things.

It is also:

E for the Environment, which deserves our care and protection,

C for the Continents, diverse and special,

O for the Oceans, rich in the spectacular, and full of mystery,

L for Love, that is the energy in the midst of all that is good,

O for Order, instead of chaos,

G for God who must be praised for making it all, and

Y for You, (and me), for whom all this is given,

and whose help God asks for in order that the world's **ECOLOGY** stays right, and all living things share well the creation God has given.

Amen

Sending

This links to the rainbow symbolism of the Dedication and the Call to Worship.

We have coloured in a rainbow today
made of the diversity of colours we are in this place
go and take a piece of rainbow with you
and share its hope this harvest time.

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Musical suggestions

You can hear samples of these suggestions in the 'Weekly Worship' section of <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/>. This new online music resource will allow you to listen to and search the breadth of music available in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4).

You will find hidden gems and alternative arrangements to familiar songs that will inspire creativity and spark fresh curiosity about how we best use music in worship.

- CH4 225 – “Summer suns are glowing” – A hymn that paints a picture in your mind and speaks of sunshine and the light and love of God
- CH4 229 – “We plough the fields and scatter” – A harvest service without this hymn is like fish without chips; you simply have to have it as it brings to life what harvest is about; the planting and growth of the seed
- CH4 233 – “Come ye thankful people come” – A rousing hymn that says yes the harvest celebration has begun
- CH4 235 – “God is working his purpose out” – A hymn that speaks of listening to God, so ideally would be sung before the address

“The Manx Fisherman’s Hymn” – A hymn that speaks about the harvest of both the land and sea. Sung to the tune, Peel Castle https://hymnary.org/tune/peel_castle

Hear us, O Lord, from heaven Thy dwelling-place:
Like them of old, in vain we toil all night,
Unless with us Thou go, who art the Light;
Come then, O Lord, that we may see Thy face.

Thou, Lord, dost rule the raging of the sea,
When loud the storm and furious is the gale:
Strong is Thine arm; our little barques are frail:
Send us Thy help; remember Galilee.

Our wives and children we commend to Thee:
For them we plough the land and plough the deep;
For them by day the golden corn we reap,
By night the silver harvest of the sea.

We thank Thee, Lord, for sunshine, dew, and rain,
Broadcast from heaven by Thine almighty hand
Source of all life, unnumbered as the sand
Bird, beast, and fish, herb, fruit, and golden grain.

O Bread of Life, Thou in Thy Word hast said,
Who feeds in faith on Me shall never die!
In mercy hear Thy hungry children's cry,
Father, give us this day our daily bread!

Sow in our hearts the seeds of Thy dear love,
That we may reap contentment, joy, and peace;
And when at last our earthly labours cease,
Grant us to join Thy harvest home above.

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