

Harvest Festival Introduction

Bible Readings

OT

Leviticus 23:33-43

Epistle

Gospel

John 7:37-39

This service creates opportunities for people of all ages to:

- Rejoice in God's provision at Harvest tide
- Remember God's great acts of salvation in history
- Rely on God for his continued blessing and protection

Main idea

This harvest service is designed to help congregations celebrate the good things that God has given us and to remember our dependence on him. The service is shaped by the Feast of Shelters (or Tabernacles) which has a dual emphasis on rejoicing in the (fruit) harvest and remembering the time the people spent in the desert after being set free from Egypt. The service has a natural link to the Preach Exodus resources within Giving in Grace. It can be used to celebrate the Harvest at any point within the preach Exodus material. However, it can also be used as a Harvest Service with any of the preaching tracks or indeed as an entirely separate and independent resource.

Background

The Feast of Shelters, or Sukkot, is an important festival for the Jewish community. The instructions for its celebration in Leviticus 23:33-43 declare that it is to be a week of joyfulness coming at the end of the harvest of fruit – grapes, olives, dates and figs in the land of Israel. The grain harvest in Israel is celebrated earlier in the year. The celebrations involve the best fruit and waving the branches of various trees. The other main element is for the family build a temporary shelter as a reminder of the time the Israelites spent living in tents after being set free from Egypt. It is a way of owning that experience of day-to-day dependence on God.

The harvest service should help the congregation to experience both those elements in a vivid way. Firstly, this should be a happy occasion. Don't miss out the 'Celebrate' section which suggests ways of making this harvest a treat to enjoy together. The happiness also

comes through in celebrating the wonderful fruit God provides. Secondly, this should also be a time for remembering our dependence on God. Through building a shelter, the service includes opportunity for people to identify themselves with the experience of God's people in the desert. We also remember the times in our own lives where we have learned more of what it means to depend on God.

Our harvest celebrations have a worldwide flavour, too. The harvest we enjoy comes from all over the globe. We have an impact on producers in many countries – providing them with much-needed income or trapping them in poverty. Our demand for goods and produce from around the world has a significant impact upon our natural environment. Remembering our dependence on God must make us think of those for whom living in a makeshift shelter and having no food in store for tomorrow is a continuing reality. Faced with this, the message of the Feast of Shelters is not to beat ourselves with guilt or to wallow in complacency but to be rejoicing in God's gifts and to take appropriate action – to be happy and remember.

Jesus and the feast of Shelters

The Feast of Tabernacles is closely associated with the beginning of the spring rains in Israel. Every morning of the Feast, the High Priest took water from the Pool of Siloam poured it into a silver basin which drained to the base of the Altar in the Temple as a visual prayer for God to bring the coming winter rains. On the last day of the Feast, this ceremony of water was carried to much greater degree. This was called the Hoshanna-Rabbah

ceremony. Jesus used this occasion to proclaim the Gospel text:

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water

The Celebrate! activities

This section offers some ideas for enhancing the celebrations at the harvest festival for the local church

- How to build a Shelter
- Preparing for Harvest
- ideas for enhancing Harvest celebrations: World Cafe; parish breakfast; Harvest word search
- "A Week of Harvest" take home sheets