



Preach Exodus! Harvest Festival

Service Outline

Leviticus 22:33-43

(Please note that reference is made in this outline to additional Harvest liturgical resources. These can be found on the Giving in Grace website. Hover on the preaching button and from the drop down menu click Preach Exodus! A link to Harvest Festival on that page will take you to the Harvest page and the Liturgical resources can be accessed from there.)

Preparation

In any special decoration of the church for harvest, bear in mind the 'fruit' element of the theme for the service. If it is your custom to invite the congregation to bring harvest gifts, it may be appropriate to encourage the bringing of gifts with a fruit theme. The gifts brought could include the fruit of people's skills and work of many kinds.

The service should include an opportunity to enjoy good fruit together at some point. You could have helpers at the door as people arrive, or circulating round the congregation before the service begins, offering cut pieces of varied fruits.

Opening Sentence

On the last and great day of the festival Jesus was standing there and cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and those who believe in me, let them drink

John 7:37-38

Welcome

As part of the welcome, introduce the service as a harvest celebration with a difference, e.g.

As every year, we will be celebrating the harvest of good things that God has given us. But our celebrations will also help us think about the Festival of Shelters – the festival that God instructed his people to hold each year at the end of the fruit harvest. It is still celebrated by the Jewish community around the world. One of the instructions for the festival was for everyone to be enjoy themselves. So that is how our service will begin.

We Rejoice

The congregation can be divided into two parts A and B – or say the words of this acclamation in bold type all together. Saying the acclamation twice through will help participation by those who can not read. (The same acclamation can also be repeated before each of the songs through the service.)

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

A: Serve the Lord and be glad;

B: come to him with joyful songs.

The Lord is good;

A: His love goes on for ever

B: His faithful love never fails.

(Adapted from Psalm 100:1,5)

Hymn or songs

Use one or more hymns or songs of praise and thanksgiving.

Harvest gifts

The invitation to bring forward harvest gifts can be made during or after the opening hymns or songs.

Collect

A collect can be found in the Harvest Liturgical resources

Enjoy the fruit

If appropriate, comment on the fruit (of all kinds) which are part of the decorations and harvest gifts. In Israel, the Festival of Shelters follows after the harvesting of fruit through the summer – grapes, olives, dates and figs. Around the world, people enjoy many different fruits at harvest time.

Challenge members of the congregation to identify different fruits from around the world by taste alone. Blindfold the volunteers. This could be organised as a quiz between two teams or the two sides of the church. Comment again on the variety of wonderful fruit that we can enjoy – that God has given us – and the other ways in which we use the word 'fruit' – for all the good things that God makes us able to produce.

The taste challenge could include the citron fruit – which plays an important part in the Jewish celebrations of Sukkot – as the 'beautiful fruit' of Leviticus 23:40.

Psalm 65

This psalm captures the joy of the grain harvest. Either say the whole Psalm together or use the shortened version (verses 1,9-13 NCV) provided in the Harvest Liturgy resources

Penitence

An excellent Harvest themed confession from Common Worship is provided in the Harvest Liturgical resources. The words of confession can be introduced by showing a fruit which is damaged and not appealing to eat. Use these words or others to introduce the confession:

As we celebrate what God has given, we also need to confess to him how we and our society have spoiled his creation by using it wrongly::

At the end of the confession either the traditional the words of absolution are used or the alternative taken from Psalm 103:8-12 which are found in the additional Liturgical resources.

Hymn or song

Use one or more hymns or songs thanking God for his abundant gifts.

We remember

Bible reading: Leviticus 23:39-43. (John 7:37-39)

Introduce the reading as the instructions for the Festival of Shelters. Ask the congregation to listen out for what the people were instructed to do as well as being happy.

Building the Shelter or Succah

Guidance on how to build a Shelter are provided in the *Celebrate!* section of these Harvest Festival resources. In some churches it will be possible for the actual construction of the simple Shelter during the course of the service itself. In other churches a Shelter will need to be built in advance as part of the preparations for Harvest. In this case skip to the section below "*Decorating the Shelter*".

Provide the necessary resources for building the Shelter. The volunteers to build it should include a mixture of ages. Explain that they are like an Israelite household building their shelter for the Festival together.

As they are building, invite the congregation to listen to a family building their Shelter set in the time when the Israelites had just settled in the promised land and their desert wandering was over. The script '*Building the Shelter*' requires four performers and is designed to be used as an audio drama. However, it could be used as the basis of an acted-out sketch. It can be found at the end of this service outline.

Decorating the shelter

A brief talk at this point can summarise the main themes from the Festival of Shelters being explored in the service. The points could be explored interactively, inviting the congregation to suggest examples of how we do each of these three things as Christians today. You could illustrate each theme by attaching appropriate items to the shelter.

1. **Rejoice** (Leviticus 23:40) This does not mean just being happy, but 'rejoicing before the Lord your God' – being happy with and because of God'. Recap how this has already been done in the service. Add some celebratory items to the Shelter, e.g. balloons, tinsel.
2. **Remember** (verses 42-43) The Shelters were to be reminders of the time the Israelites were in the desert moving from place to place. It might seem more like something to forget. But God wanted them to remember where they had begun – in the desert. Place a large tray heaped with sand inside the shelter. (Note: This will be used later for the intercessions.) We too remember beginning steps in our journey with God – give a personal example and add to the shelter an

item connected with this time in your life.

3. **Rely** (verses 42-43) Why should the people remember the time in the desert at harvest festival? When we are comfortable it is easy to give God a lower place in our lives. In the desert the Israelites had to learn that they depended on God for everything they needed to live. We too need to remember that we rely on God for everything. At harvest we especially remember that we rely on him for our food and material needs. Each Communion service we remember what God has done for us in Jesus and that we rely on him for forgiveness and new life. Add appropriate items to the shelter, e.g. some fruit, a cross.

Affirmation of Faith

An alternative creedal statement suitable for an all age service can be found in the additional harvest Liturgical resources. Otherwise use the regular provision for the service.

Our stories

Beforehand, invite a few members of the congregation to bring an item which is a reminder of a time when they learned about depending on God. Ask each one to tell everyone about that time in just one or two sentences and then to place the object in or on the shelter e.g. when a friend or family member was ill or in danger; when church finances hit a crisis; during World War 2; a redundancy; being bullied at school.

Hymn or song

Sing a hymn or songs expressing our dependence on God

We rely

Intercessions

A form of intercessions can be found in the additional Harvest Liturgical resources. Alternatively give each person two simple 'flags' made by doubling a self-adhesive address label around one end of a cocktail stick. Invite them to draw or write on one flag any situation or person they want to pray for today. On the other invite them to write their own name or draw themselves. Recap that the shelter is a reminder of the Israelites learning that they had to depend on God – to trust him whatever the situation. Invite everyone to bring their flags and stick them in the pile of sand in the shelter as a way of bringing those situations to God and expressing our own dependence on God.

Acclamation

Use again the acclamation from Ps 100:1,5 found at the beginning of the service.

Hymn or song

Blessing





Building the shelter

As the shelter is built, four people should perform the following audio drama. Alternatively, the script can be fully acted out with props as a separate item before the building of the shelter.

Ben: Dad, Dad, come here. We've got to tie all these poles together.

Dad: What?

Ben: To build the shelter of course.

Dad: What?

Ben: Dad, don't be stupid. It's the Feast of Shelters – harvest time. We always build a tent thing in the garden, don't we? Look, Mum's got mountains of stuff out already. She's just getting some more bits of wood.

Mum: Here we are. Let's get going. Now, dear, you hold those and I'll tie these together. Ben, you go round the other side. Hold it steady. Now we just need to tie that piece to there. (*Calling*) Hannah? Hannah? Come here. We need you.

Han: Oh, not boring tent building time. Boring, boring.

Mum: Just tie that piece of string will you. Before the whole lot collapses. There, lovely. Now we can start on this side. I'm planning a nice little entrance porch with a sort of side room off it. Then through here we'll make an opening down to the kitchen and dining room. Then over here we can build the staircase.

Dad: What?

Mum: Well, we've got to get to the upstairs rooms somehow.

Han: Mum, this is completely over the top. It's supposed to be a simple shelter. A tent.

Mum: It *is* simple. The second bathroom will be really quite small. You carry on and I'll pop out and get some wallpaper.

Han: I'm not building this. What's the point anyway?

Ben: It's supposed to remind us about Great-grandma and Great-grandad living in the desert after God set them free from Egypt.

Han: I know that, brainbox. But that's just old stories now, isn't it? Boring.

Ben: And it's to thank God for all the things we have grown this year.

Dad: What?

Ben: Dad! Figs, olives, you know.

Han: It all seems pretty stupid to me. I'm too old for silly games and stories.

Ben: So where would we be without God, then?

Han: I don't know. Egypt, I suppose.

Ben: And how would we have survived in the desert without God?

Han: Will you stop preaching at me?

Ben: So we need to remember, don't we?

Dad: What?

Han: That we need God. That he gives us everything we need.

Ben: And we live in a *simple* shelter for the week, so we don't forget the story. So we don't forget God.

Mum: Here we are I've managed to get some beautiful silk for the upstairs curtains and a gorgeous golden chimney pot. We'll have the best shelter in the street.

