Harvest festival

Rejoice, remember, rely

An all age service for Harvest
Celebrating Harvest Festival

Bible Readings
Psalm 65: 5-13 "It’s a wonderful world"
Leviticus 22: 33-43
John 7; 37-39

You Will Need
- 3 types of fruit (or equivalent images) – mouldy, extra large, exotic
- A basic tent or shelter either set up before hand or during the service (See appendix one)
- Pictures of fruit/foods cut out and coloured in; modelling materials, paper chains etc. this may be an all age activity in preparing for Harvest.
- Pictures of fruits; balloons, tinsel; sand & sand tray, craft sticks, large bowl and jugs of water;
- Week ahead calendar to take home

Harvest is unusual amongst the various festivals of the church and community year, in that you get to choose when to celebrate it. A church can choose the date, the time, the place and the content. There are no fixed readings, although there are many suggestions.

Harvest Festival is a relatively recent addition to the church calendar. In some ways it takes us back to those Victorian rural dreams, when the local vicar or parson was a lynchpin in the community and the church and community would be drawn together to celebrate all that God had provided. Harvest was also a clever mixing of ancient folk customs around the celebration of a harvest successfully completed with a sense of praise and thanksgiving to the Creator.

This harvest service is designed to help congregations celebrate the good things that God has given us and to remember our dependence on him. This particular service is shaped by the Jewish Feast of Shelters (or Tabernacles) which has two purposes. First, it celebrates the fruit harvest; second it remembers the time that the Israelites spent in the desert. Alongside an opportunity to celebrate the rich variety of God’s provision with exuberant joy, the Feast of Shelters also involved families building temporary shelters as a reminder of the time the people were living in the desert as a nomadic people.

There was another important moment during the celebration of the Feast. Every morning the High Priest took water from the Pool of Siloam and poured it into a silver basin which drained to the base of the altar in the Temple. This was a visual prayer for God to bring the spring rains. Jesus used this occasion to proclaim: “If any one thirsts, let them come to me and drink.” This will also be part of the celebration of the Harvest.

This service outline can be used in church, school or other location and can be used at any point during the Preach Exodus sermon series. It can also be used as a standalone Harvest service

Setting the Scene

If this service is a traditional Harvest celebration, perhaps the decorating of the church can reflect the emphasis on fruit.

Depending on the resources available, you may also wish to build a shelter (unless you are going to build it during the service)
Ensure that as people arrive they are offered things to taste with a fruit theme – bowls of raisins, olives, slices of apple, grapes etc. People should walk offering these with generous abundance.

If you are not going to do the building during the service, encourage people to cut, colour and make fruits and other decorations as they arrive.

We Gather

The Lord be with you
And also with you

Informal welcome

Introduction

Invite people to hold up the harvest gifts they have brought with them.

Look up to the roof – and beyond to the sky

"Thank you God for your goodness that blesses us and the earth.
You are generous

R: Thank you, God

Invite people to look around at the congregation and beyond the walls

Voice: Thank you God for the people who made this food and those who will share in it.
You are generous

R: Thank you God

Invite people to look down at the ground and the earth beneath.

Voice: Thank you God for this place, this (village/town/city), this church and for your faithful love over many generations
You are generous

R: Thank you God

Hymn with offering of harvest gifts

We say Sorry

Making connections:

Harvest makes us aware of how much we have to enjoy, but it also makes us aware of how often we fail to take care of the world and those around us.

Hold up or show a picture of a fruit that is going bad.

Lord God, Sometimes we turn our eyes away and forget that there are wrong things happening in your world

Lord have mercy

R: Lord have mercy
A liturgy of Harvest

Hold up or show a picture of a very large bowl or bag of fruits

Lord God, sometimes we are greedy and buy more than we need, forgetting that there are people who have very little

Christ have mercy

*R: Lord have mercy

Hold up or show a picture of an out-of-season fruit flown many miles

Lord God, sometimes we are careless and waste the resources in your world

Lord have mercy

*R: Lord have mercy

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.

Sing
either an appropriate hymn or the Gloria

Collect or prayer for the day

Creator God, you make all things And give us the earth and the seasons, the rain, the sun and the wind; Make us thankful people with generous hearts, Ready to share your goodness and love With all creation; Through Jesus Christ our Lord

*Amen.

We Listen

*You may also need or want to include presentations from school at this point.*

Read the Psalm

from The Message Bible

Leviticus – see end for script

Gospel

if your Harvest is a Eucharist, then the Gospel must be included. Suggest reading it from a high point in the church. If the service is not a Eucharist, then the Gospel will be used/repeated as a beginning to the prayers
The Activities/Talk

If you have not already built a shelter, then invite a family (pre-prepared) to come out and begin to build the shelter.

As they are doing so invite other members of the congregation to make decorations ready for the shelter e.g. cutting out fruit shapes, making containers from various craft materials, making paper chains; drawing pictures of the congregation

When the shelter is ready (or if it is already in place- begin here)

Begin by talking how much fun it is to put a tent up! Ask for any camping memories from among the congregation – some positive, some alarming.

Explain that the Festival of Shelters is not about having a holiday, but is a special festival to help celebrate all that God provides for us. Every year families build a shelter – and the keen ones then live in it for 8 days – but it wasn’t in the Autumn (as our Harvest is often) but in the Spring when the weather is getting warmer in Israel.

Invite people to bring things forward to decorate the shelter with paper chains, tinsel, baubles, balloons etc. Explain that the festival was an occasion of great rejoicing – not just making merry with friends and family, but being glad because of God and all that God has done for us.

Then invite someone to come out and put the sand into the sand tray. Ask people for ideas as to why they would have put sand inside the tent – most of us spend a lot of time on holiday trying to keep sand out of the tent! Talk about how we often have objects that help us remember special and significant times. If possible share an example from your own home or from your church. The sand was a reminder of the time that the people of Israel wandered in the desert. (If you have been following Preach Exodus, this could be a good time to ask about what happened during that time).

Although it was a tough time, the people learned to trust God and to understand more of God’s love and faithfulness.

In the good times we sometimes forget all that God has done for us. So the people would bring the harvest into the tent, placing bowls of fruit there to so they could think again about how much they rely on God. Invite people to add the pictures of fruit to the tent.

Put three words onto cards or a screen:

Rejoice, Remember, Rely.

These are the three things at the heart of the festival – and at the heart of our harvest celebration too. We are rejoicing at all the blessings in our lives, we are remembering that God has been with us through all the ups and downs of our lives and we know that we rely on God to provide us with all we need.

We Respond

We declare our faith

Making connections: We share together as God’s family, remembering all that we believe:

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
Source of all being and life,
The one for who we all exist?

R: 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?

R: 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?

R: We believe and trust in him
This is the faith of the church.

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

Prayers
Depending on the numbers who will be participating, you may need to have several sand trays outside the tabernacle, and two or three bowls and jugs.

Place a tray heaped with coloured craft sticks nearby. *(You will need to adjust the instructions according to the colour of craft sticks you obtain. Alternatively, use coloured dots to indicate the prayer colours on the end of neutral coloured sticks)*

Display a large card with the colours and instructions.

Invite people to select a craft stick and then make a prayer according to the colour stick they have chosen. Place the stick into the sand as a sign of prayer. Repeat as many times as they wish.

Explain the activity and then read/repeat the words from John 7 as the time of prayer begins.

You may like to play music quietly during the activity.

**Green - The colour of life and growth.**
Pray for all those who work to ensure that the resources of the world are used wisely and for all who work to bring us food.

**Yellow - The colour of sun and joy.**
Pray for those who work to help us have enjoyment and fun and pray for those who may be sad on this day.

**Blue - The colour of water and rain.**
Pray for all those who are struggling to make a life in nations where there is not enough water or where there is too much.

**Red - The colour of love.**
Pray for those you love and for those whose relationships have gone wrong, especially for families that are split apart.

**Purple - The colour of leadership.**
Pray for those who have authority in our nation and our world, that they may be people of compassion and integrity.

**White - The colour of peace.**
Pray for those places and situations where there is no peace and for those who work to bring peace and reconciliation in different ways.
When people have finished using the prayer sticks, they should go to the water jugs and slowly pour a small amount of water into the bowl, praying for their own personal needs as they remember Jesus promise that he will give water to all who thirst.

When everyone has returned to their seats, you may like to gather all the prayers together using these or similar words:

Generous God, as we celebrate your blessings in our lives, we ask you to hear our prayers for the world this day. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear the needs around us; give us courage to take action and patience to keep praying. In Jesus name.

*R: Amen.*

If this is a non-Eucharistic service, use the Lord’s prayer to gather prayers together

If a Eucharist, end prayers as above.

If the congregation are to receive their Giving in Grace literature packs at the end of this service then invite them to take the packs and to make their response to God’s goodness in the completion of their response forms

If the congregational responses are to be offered to God at this Harvest service then do so at this point and consider using the Litany of Thanksgiving from the Giving in Grace website under Design the Programme in the More Resources section at the Harvest Festival tab.

The Peace

*N.B* A seasonal invitation to the peace may be used here.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace
If we live in the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit.
The peace of the Lord be always with you.

*R: and also with you*

We go out into the World

As people leave hand out the 8 day prayer calendar, encouraging them to pray every day as the Feast of Tabernacles was an 8 day festival.

Blessing

May God’s joy be in our hearts (place hand on heart)
May God’s peace be in our world (sweep hand out in front)
May God’s love be known between us (hold hands or touch palms) and the blessing of God etc...

*R: Amen.*

The Dismissal

Minister: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

*R: Thanks be to God.*
Appendix One

To this day Jewish families construct a simple shelter outside their homes for the week long celebration of the Feast. By tradition the roof must have gaps so that the stars can be seen – a reminder of the promise to Abraham – and the shelter is decorated with many types of fruits. If so desired the traditional harvest gifts can also be placed in and around the shelter.

For the basic construction of the shelter the frame of a small family sized tent or a small gazebo is ideal. Use blankets or throws for the walls and scatter cushions for the interior. Try to cover the roof with leafy branches such as willow and myrtle. Use string or clothes pegs to hang fruits and flowers around the shelter. Have a small table inside with an (unlit) candle or a Jewish menorah, some bread and wine, fruit and flowers.

In some churches it may be possible to actually build the shelter as part of the harvest service itself. This has been done, for example, in a church parade service with scouts building the shelter as the preacher spoke. Alternatively, build the basic structure before the service and during the service focus on the decoration of the shelter, using the guidance in the service outline. For example, volunteers could construct the shelter as part of a Saturday evening harvest supper then invite the rest to a short service of hymns and prayers to end the evening. Alternatively, build the basic shelter as an all age activity on a Saturday morning, alongside preparing the pictures and decorations to be used at the Sunday service.

If a shelter in church is not possible or not felt appropriate could it be located elsewhere on the church premises or even outside the church?

In the service you may like to use this simple script based on Leviticus 23: 39-44 as a narrative while the shelter is being decorated.

You will need two readers standing either side of a pre-assembled bit of furniture or empty box which contained self-assembly items.

Reader 1: Now I wonder when I ought to get round to doing this...

Reader 2: On the 15th day of the 7th month (aside: probably September); after you have finished doing the hard work of harvesting and gathering

1: How long is this going to take me?
2: You start with a complete day’s rest, then celebrate for 6 days, then have another day’s rest.

1: I like it! So after my day of rest, what do I do?
2: On the first day pick the best fruit from your trees and cut lots of leafy branches to use during the celebration

1: What do I do with them?
2: (aside:) It doesn’t exactly say. Mmm but the implication is that you build a shelter)

(Loudly) you keep this festival every year for your children, your grandchildren, their children, their grandchildren.

1: Okay. I get it. So I build a kind of tent out of branches. Then what
2: You live in the shelter for the rest of the festival. That’s seven days.

1: Seven days! I should have gone to Ikea after all! Why am I doing this?
2: You build the shelter and stay in it for 7 days so that your children, your grandchildren, their children, their grandchildren, and every generation to come will know that God was with them when the walked free from slavery in Egypt. God was with them when they wandered in the desert. God was with them when they lived in tents. He is the Lord our God.
1: Wow! Better get on with it then. Just checking: who gave these instructions?

2: Moses gave all these instructions to the people of God – but on God’s instruction to him. So God. God gave the instruction.

1: Cool!
Appendix 2: A prayer calendar
Copy this onto a small A6 card or onto a bookmark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the week</th>
<th>Prayer activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Find a fruit or vegetable that you like and one that either you don’t like or have never tried. As you look at them, give thanks for the variety of God’s provision and pray for those who have limited choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Stand in the front doorway of your house looking around your neighbourhood. Pray for the people who live nearby and give thanks for your home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Take a walk or drive to four key places in your daily life e.g. school, church, office, and football club. Stop at each one and remember that God is with us at every point in the journey we make through life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Make a pile of receipts from shopping or a pile of toy money. Pray for those who are struggling with money and ask God to help you be generous Complete your Giving in Grace response form or, if complete, commit afresh to act on your response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Place birthday candles in a cake to represent ten people who matter to you. As you light the candles pray for each person. As you blow them out pray that God’s light will continue to shine in their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Make a visit to a local park or play area. Sit on a bench or swing and give thanks for green spaces. Pray for all who work to take care of creation and all who long for freedom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>As you walk towards church today, take time to jump for joy at least 3 times! Each time you jump give thanks to God or all his blessings OR Choose 3 people to pray for, and if you meet them give them a high five or send a card to those you don’t meet. Praise God!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>