



Harvest Festival

This short act of worship has been prepared for you by Deacon Helen Snowball to use at home. Why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Speak to us Lord, through your word,
The hymns we shall sing and the prayers in our hearts.
Be the blessing that we find as we gather here, and the message we share to the glory of your name
Amen.

Hymn: - StF 116 Sing for God's glory (to the tune of Praise to the Lord, the Almighty)
Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation,
racing across the sky, trailing bright clouds of elation;
sun of delight succeeds the velvet of night,
warming the earth's exultation.

Sing for God's power that shatters the chains that would bind us,
searing the bleakness of fear and despair that would blind us,
touching our shame with love that will not lay blame,
reaching out gently to find us.

Sing for God's justice disturbing each easy illusion,
tearing down tyrants and putting our pride to confusion;
lifeblood of right, resisting evil and slight,
offering freedom's transfusion.

Sing for God's saints who have travelled faith's journey before us,
who in our weariness give us their hope to restore us;
in them we see the new creation to be,
Spirit of love made flesh for us.

Prayers of Adoration, Confession and Thanksgiving

God of creation
We praise you for the wonders of your world;
For the beauty of earth, sea and sky,
For the repeated rhythms of cycles and seasons,
For the interdependence of all things.

We praise you for the harvest, for the wonder of nature;
For the growth of the things we need to feed us,
And the growth of the things that give us joy.
For the growth of the creatures, we share this planet with.
For the blessings and glory we receive very day.

We praise you for all that you do, and all that you are.
For the mercy you show us, the grace you give us,
and the love you pour out on us every single day.

Forgive us,
When we have sullied the beauty you have made
When we have disrupted the cycles of earth and climate,
When we have broken our connection with your world.

God who inhabits the beauty and vulnerability of the world,
Forgive us;
And in your generous love,
Help us to work with you
For the renewal of the earth.

Forgive us for the times
When we have not listened,
When we have not taken action,
When we have not seen the need

Forgive us for the times
When we have been neglectful
When we have spoken in anger
When we have been thoughtless.

In a moment of silence, bring to God the things you'd like to seek forgiveness for.

Glorious God, who made us part of a wonderfully varied creation:
We join creation in praising you.

Generous God, who made humanity in amazing diversity
So that we might, together, comprehend your bondless marvels:
We join creation in praising you.

Gracious God, who entrusts the care of all creation to us
And gives us the gift of creativity
We join creation in praising you.

You have created us, each unique, each varied,
Yet each in your image and likeness,
Help us to see past our own limited viewpoints
to learn from our past shortcomings and to learn from the delight in our distinctions,
That we might, in all our colours, genders and languages,
Be one in praising you.
Hallelujah!

Reading - Deuteronomy 16:10-20

10 and then celebrate the Harvest Festival, to honour the Lord your God, by bringing him a freewill offering in proportion to the blessing he has given you.

11 Be joyful in the Lord's presence, together with your children, your servants, and the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows who live in your towns. Do this at the one place of worship. 12 Be sure that you obey these commands; do not forget that you were slaves in Egypt.

13 "After you have threshed all your grain and pressed all your grapes, celebrate the Festival of Shelters for seven days. 14 Enjoy it with your children, your servants, and the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows who live in your towns. 15 Honor the Lord your God by celebrating this festival for seven days at the one place of worship. Be joyful, because the Lord has blessed your harvest and your work.

16 "All the men of your nation are to come to worship the Lord three times a year at the one place of worship: at Passover, Harvest Festival, and the Festival of Shelters. Each man is to bring a gift 17 as he is able, in proportion to the blessings that the Lord your God has given him.

18 "Appoint judges and other officials in every town that the Lord your God gives you. These men are to judge the people impartially. 19 They are not to be unjust or show partiality in their judgments; and they are not to accept bribes, for gifts blind the eyes even of wise and honest men, and cause them to give wrong decisions. 20 Always be fair and just, so that you will occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you and so that you will continue to live there.

Hymn StF 124 For the Fruits of all Creation

For the fruit of all creation,
thanks be to God;
for the gifts of every nation,
thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe-keeping,
thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour,
God's will is done;
In the help we give our neighbour,
God's will is done;
In our world-wide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing
God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit,
thanks be to God;
for the good we all inherit,
thanks be to God;
for the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,
most of all that love has found us,
thanks be to God.

Words © 1970 Hope Publishing Company

Reflection

I recently saw a Facebook post from a minister, about their harvest festival at church. There was a picture of the minister – none of the congregation where in it, just her smiling – and another photo of the same minister standing behind a table laden with food for the foodbank. There's nothing wrong with donating food for the foodbank, - in this day and age it's a necessity. But it's wrong to glorify in it, to pat ourselves on the back and say look how great we are. It should be about saying 'thank God for our ability to give and help'.

Why do you think Harvest Festival is in the church calendar? What is it for? It's for thanksgiving, for praising God and saying thanks for what we are blessed with.

Verse 10 of the Deuteronomy reading says '*...celebrate the Harvest Festival, to honour the Lord your God, by bringing him a freewill offering in proportion to the blessing he has given you.*' How do we calculate a proportion of the blessings God has given to us? If we feel blessed by the sunshine but then it rains – do we get to deduct a bit from our offering? I don't think it works like that.

The verse says offer a proportion to God, but it doesn't specify what that proportion should be. Often tithes are calculated at 10% of income, but that's a personal choice. It's not simply giving cash, is it? It's also time, talents, sharing and prayer.

Those who have given up time to do roles in the church – are giving to God. Those who have ever donated time to volunteer – are giving to God. Those who have given their talents – music, sewing,

cooking, – are giving to God. Those who give their cash – are giving to God. And those who spend time in prayer – are giving to God.

Is it possible to calculate how much to give to God, based on the blessings we receive from God? Is it possible to assign a numerical value to say, the birth of a grandchild, or a clear set of medical tests, or a granddaughter getting into university. Then, do we deduct a bit if things go wrong in some other part of life?

In fact, there is no way we could possibly measure God's blessings. There's no way we can add up the things we receive from God. We can never offer back to God the tiniest percentage because God gives us too much to count.

Next, in verse 11, we are told to be joyful in the Lord's presence. Why? Simply because we have much to be grateful for, to be joyful for, and God loves to see us express joy. God hates it when we are unhappy. God hates to see the mess the world is in. He weeps when we weep, mourns when we mourn, and smiles when we smile. God loves to see our joy and happiness.

The second part of verse 15 says '*be joyful because the Lord has blessed your harvest and your work*'. Again, telling us to be joyful, especially in our harvest.

Harvest might not mean today what it used to mean, and in this context its very different to a rural setting. We don't 'plough the fields and scatter' do we? It's not something I've ever done, don't know about you!

But harvest, - we generally think about farmers and wheat and cereals and vegetables but it's also whatever we produce – whether that's baking or knitting or music, or in our jobs. Whatever we produce, it's through God that we help each other. It's through the skills and gifts that God has given us that we produce. And so to show thanks to God, we are joyful.

This harvest we have a lot to be joyful about, a lot to be thankful for. We do not live in fear of bombs falling on our homes, or armed soldiers in our streets. We don't live with the fear of suddenly having to pack up and leave our homes because of another country's aggression.

We have food on our tables, food in the fridge, and the ability to not only feed ourselves, but to help feed others too.

God is good, we can celebrate harvest festival and so we should be in God's presence with joy. God is good. We have so much to be thankful for – all of God's blessings, freely and graciously given. God is good. He loves us unconditionally – we can't earn more love, and we can't ever lose it.

God is good, in summer and winter, and springtime and harvest, God is good. All the time. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let's pause and pray for others around the world.

Praying especially for Ukraine and the people of Russia. Israel – Palestine, and also Lebanon. We pray for a de-escalation of all hostilities, for clearer heads to prevail, for those in power and leadership to listen only for the wisdom of God.

Pray for those seeking safety from troubled lands, those who arrive here on the small boats, those who need our help and a place of refuge.

Pray for our government, for compassion and wisdom.

Pray for those who are lonely, ill, grieving, waiting for hospital results, worried about friends or family.

We pray for those who need God the most, and those who *think* they need God the least.

We ask these prayers, in the full confidence of your hearing, Lord our God, in the name of Christ, your son and our saviour. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Hymn StF 130 We plough the fields and scatter

1 We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand.
God sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes, and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.

2 You only are the Maker
of all things near and far.
You paint the wayside flower,
You light the evening star.
The winds and waves obey you,
by you the birds are fed;
much more to us your children,
You give our daily bread.

Refrain:

All good gifts around us are sent from heav'n above.
We thank you, God, we thank you, God, for all your love.

3 We thank you, then, Creator,
for all things bright and good,
the seed-time, and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food.
Accept the gifts we offer
for all your love imparts,
and what you most would welcome:
our humble, thankful hearts. [Refrain]

Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
Be with us all,
Now and evermore.
Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, in the name of Christ. Amen.