

Harvest Festival



Readings:

Isaiah 55. 1-11	An Invitation to Abundant Life
Psalms 104. 1-16	God the Creator and Provider
Colossians 3. 12-17	Clothe yourselves with love... and be thankful
John 4. 7-15	A spring of water, gushing up to Eternal Life

Introduction

Harvest is an opportunity to give thanks to God for the goodness of creation and the generosity of God's provision. It allows us to acknowledge our dependency on God – and also on the expertise and endeavours of those who produce and supply our food, both locally and globally.

In British culture, rain is often viewed rather negatively. 'Unfortunately there will be heavy showers across the whole country tomorrow' intones the weather forecaster. This is a mystery for many from drier climes for whom the arrival of rain is the cause of much rejoicing. Water symbolizes life and indeed without it there is no life.

WaterAid (www.wateraid.org/uk) is an international non governmental organisation. Its mission is to transform lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities. Visit WaterAid's website to discover more about its work and the water issues facing the global community today.

According to WaterAid, 884 million people in the world do not have clean water. That's about one in every six people. 1.4 million children die every year as a result of diseases caused by unclean water and poor sanitation. This is about 4,000 deaths a day. Countless farmers and growers around the world struggle to produce food and rear livestock in increasingly arid conditions. And what are the water issues facing us in this country? How carefully do we use this vital resource?

These worship resources focus on celebrating harvest and, in part, on this most precious commodity – water. They are for use by congregations, groups or individuals and can be amended to suit the purpose and context.

Opening Responses

God of life and love

We rejoice in your abundant gifts

God of all peoples and all places

We celebrate your generosity and grace

God of the earth and the heavens

We praise you for your provision

You visit the earth and water it

Softening it with showers and blessing its growth

You make springs gush forth in the valleys

From your lofty abode you water the mountains

God of life and love

We bless your holy name

Confession

Gracious and generous God,
we confess our lack of gratitude,
our careless attitude towards others
and our wastefulness.

We confess our greed and selfishness,
our apathy towards those who struggle
and our ignorance and hard-heartedness.

We confess our abuse of the environment,
our reckless exploitation of the earth's resources
and our lack of respect for creation.

Silence

Gracious and generous God,
we are truly sorry.

Forgive us, renew us and set us free,
in the name of Christ.

Amen.

Collect

Creator God,
your abundant love sustains all that you have made.
Grant us the wisdom of your Son
and the fruit of your Spirit,
that we may live generous and thankful lives,
carefully collaborating
and sharing with you in the purposes of heaven;
and to you be glory and praise, now and forever.

Amen

Children & Young People – the importance of water

How many uses of water can we think of?

(e.g. drinking, growing, baking, washing, heating, cooling, transporting, generating...)

Illustrate some examples – glass of water, plant, loaf of bread, flannel...

Water is precious – and without water there is no harvest.

Sermon Notes

The invitation to share in God's abundant life is often framed as an invitation to a feast; the reading from Isaiah 55 is one such example. The feast is an image of celebration, friendship, sharing, joy and love.

Another image for the life that God offers is that of 'living water' – a spring of water that will quench the fiercest of thirsts – and do so for eternity. In John 4 this image is developed by Jesus, though understood a little too literally by the Samaritan woman.

Water, bread, food and feasting – all lie at the heart of the human experience – and from them we are given glimpses into the very life of God. By reflecting on these very tangible, everyday things we can learn about God. Spend time considering water or bread or food – how it is produced, supplied, grown – its importance, significance and value – challenges that need to be faced. How informed are we about the issues related to these matters? And how grateful are we – to God – and to those who supply these basics of life? Are we 'clothed with love and thankful' as in the reading from Colossians?

Give some consideration to the idea of feasting – something that lies at the heart of the Christian story and the life of the Church – and of course Harvest is a 'feast/festival' to be celebrated!

Thanksgiving

God of life and love,

we offer you our thanks and praise in this season of Harvest.

We thank you that you are Creator and Provider,
the source of all goodness.

We thank you for the sunshine and the rain,
for the land and the soil.

We thank you for the miracle of fertility and growth,
for the rhythm of nature and life.

We thank you for crops and livestock, farmers and growers.

We thank you for our calling to be co-creators with you
and we pray especially for all who share with you
in the task of growing and supplying the food we eat.

God of life and love,

we offer you our thanks and praise.

Amen.

Intercessions

Loving God

The countryside is often presented in an unrealistic fashion; a rural idyll of a green and pleasant land; a place of relative affluence, to which people can escape for leisure and recreation; where a strong sense of community prevails and life is lived at a gentler pace.

We pray for those who live with a reality which is very different

- the 20% of the population in this country living on or below the poverty line

- those who suffer from the lack of appropriate, affordable housing
- for farmers expected to produce more food in a more efficient and sustainable way – and in particular those experiencing considerable pressure, especially in dairying and uplands livestock production, or struggling with Bovine TB, or wrestling with the complexities and inefficiencies of the current system of support payments

We pray for policy makers and those with influence

- for the imaginative, creative, tailored and possibly costly solutions which are required to maintain a vibrant and sustainable countryside
- for the new team of Ministers at DEFRA
- for the process of reforming the Common Agricultural Policy

We pray for those people of faith engaged in the countryside

- for the work of the Arthur Rank Centre - the churches' rural resources centre and a partnership between the Royal Agricultural Society of England, the Rank Foundation and the churches
- for the ecumenical networks of Rural Officers and Agricultural Chaplains working through the Districts, Dioceses and Synods of the churches
- for all churches and clergy situated in rural communities

We pray for issues around the food we buy and eat

- for supermarkets and those with power in the food chain, that it may be exercised fairly and justly
- for an increased awareness of the ethical choices we make whenever we purchase food
- for food production which is sustainable and good for the environment

We pray for the global challenges of water provision

- for those denied access to clean and safe water
- for farmers and growers struggling to produce food and rear livestock in arid and difficult conditions
- for those communities suffering the destructive forces of flooding
- for our own appreciation of the importance and value of water

We pray for the Church in every land, every community – and in this place...

We pray for those known to us who are in particular need at this time...

We pray for ourselves and for those dear to us...

Loving God, hear our prayers and, with the help of our being and doing, may our prayers be answered.

Amen

Closing Responses

God of life and love

Clothe us with love and make us thankful

God of all peoples and all places

Satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst

God of the earth and the heavens

Bless us in our living and loving

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer

Amen.

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