



On your marks

Even though in the Western world we have the privilege of an all-year-round supply of all sorts of foods, harvest continues to be an important moment to stop and celebrate God's provision of the amazing variety of fruits and vegetables we can enjoy. Many children and their families still come to church for Harvest Thanksgiving, and so it is an opportunity to remind us all that God is the one who gives us these good things. What is more, this same God loves us and offers us the even more wonderful gift of Jesus, so we can experience a harvest of grace in our lives. The following outline uses some of the fruit that may have been brought up as part of the service, along with a few new ones, to lead into a simple presentation of the good news of the Christian faith.

Get set

You will need a large basket, which you can fill with fruit – some of these may have already been brought up as gifts in the service, so use them. Make sure you include at least one of each of the following: orange, apple, pear, mango, tin of lychees, bunch of grapes, star fruit, jar of olives, plums, berries (of any sort), passion fruit, grapefruit and peach

Go!

1. There is such a great variety of foods available in the world today. Play a game with the congregation to see if they can name different fruits for each letter of the alphabet.

apricot, banana, cherry, damson, elderberry, fig, guava, honeydew melon, ..., jackfruit, kumquat, lemon, mandarin, nectarine, olive, papaya, quince, raspberry, satsuma, tangerine, ugli fruit, ..., water melon, ..., yucca, zucchini... any offers for I, V and X?

2. Ask people which their favourite fruits are. Has anyone tried some strange fruits from another part of the world? Have some unusual fruits for people to try.
3. We're here today to say a massive 'thank you' to God for giving us such an amazingly fruitful world. It is indeed a tasty world and God wants us to enjoy it! But there is an even greater 'fruit' that God has for us all, if we are ready to 'taste and see' (Psalm 34:8). Maybe the fruits I've got in this basket can help us discover that.
4. Weave the Bible story around the following pieces of fruit as you pick out one at a time.
 - An orange: God has given us the gift of this world. He is its creator and he has said it is good. He put us in charge of this world, to look after it.
 - An apple: and God gave us the gift of choice. He did not force us to love him, but wanted us to decide to do so of our own free will. It was a risk and in fact we chose to go our own way.
 - A pear: in the story we have in the Bible, it was the first pair/pear—the first couple, Adam and Eve—who made that choice; but it is a choice that we have all made down the ages. We have chosen our own way and not God's. And what was the result?
 - A mango: Man goes/mangos from bad to worse (like the puns!) All that is destructive and

painful began to spoil this world.

- A tin of lychees: to help us, God gave us guidance in the ten commandments, to show us the best way to live; the way to stop the ly-ing and cheat-ing—the *ly-chee*-ting that hurt each other.
 - A bunch of grapes: again and again God spoke to us and showed us his love. There were the stories of individuals touched by that love and the people of God who God rescued again and again; but God's vineyard produced grapes that were sour and rotten, just as Isaiah sang about (5:1-7). God planned a way both to get rid of the bad and start all over again, because God still loved us.
 - A star fruit: the sign of that way was the star that hung over the manger when Jesus was born. God's gift to the world was his only Son, who came to show us the sort of people we should be and to provide the way for us to start again.
 - A jar of olives: like an olive, Jesus allowed himself to be crushed by all the bad that was spoiling our world.
 - A plum: Jesus went right down to the depths of all the pain and suffering in the world, taking it into himself, plum-ing its depths out of love for us.
 - A berry: and he experienced death and they buried/berried him in a tomb. And on the third day, he rose again.
 - A passion fruit: he was alive in a new Easter sort of way. There was a new beginning possible out of his passion... the fruit of his passion is the new life that he offers to us.
 - A grapefruit: now those grapes don't have to be rotten, but they can bear great-fruit/ grapefruit, as his love works in our lives. But it depends on one thing...
 - A peach: ... whether we say 'yes' to God. It is up to (p)each of us to make our response. Not just a 'thank you' at harvest time but a 'thank you' for God's grace for all time, so we might become the best we are meant to be; part of the first fruits of the new creation Jesus has made possible for us all (see Romans 8:23).
5. You might like to end this by linking the various fruits you have now talked about in a positive way to the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23) that can grow in our lives as we welcome Jesus to be our Lord and Saviour.