



On your marks

It seems that there is a God-given instinct to express gratitude deep in all of us. It is an echo of the likeness of God in which we were created. No wonder that the festival of Harvest Thanksgiving is consistently so popular, even among the most casual of church-goers. It is a corporate moment to be grateful for every plateful! And, indeed, in the western world, our plates are usually full, even unnecessarily so at times. However, recent developments in the UK, such as the need for food banks which are supported by many churches now, have reminded us that even in our country there can be hunger and need. In this context, gratitude and generosity should go hand in hand at harvest time, as we recognise both how much God has blessed us and as we look for opportunities to share that blessing with others.

Get set

The following idea is an outline for a simple, short celebration at harvest time. It could be used in an all-age service or as part of a Messy Church celebration; for a Sunday or midweek group; or even, with suitable adaptation, for a collective worship in a school. The outline includes Bible links, a way into the story, a way to tell the story together, some suggestions for songs and a prayer activity.

Go!

Bible links

- The Bible story for this short harvest celebration is Luke 12:13-21.

The rich man, in the parable Jesus tells, certainly has more than enough but he has forgotten to share it with others. His attitude is a challenge to some of us who have enough to eat and a reminder that God's plan is always that blessings should be passed on.

A way into the story

Explain you have been shopping, just for some simple items for a snack meal, but it has been so complicated!

- You wanted some tasty biscuits, but which sort should you choose? Reel off as long a list as you can of the many different types of biscuit available. Ask people to cheer or raise their hands whenever a brand is mentioned that they particularly like.
- You also wanted some coffee to drink with your biscuits, but which type should you buy? Again, reel off as long a list as you can of the many different coffee types, and ask people to cheer or raise their hands if you mention one they like too.
- And you wanted some juice for later, but which flavour? As before, reel off a long list of all the different varieties of exotic flavours, encouraging people to cheer or raise their hands when you mention a flavour they like.



- Finally, you wanted some butter to make some sandwiches for later. Once again, reel off a long list of choices as before and...

(You could continue on like this with milk for your coffee and/or some fruit for afters, mentioning a wide variety from all round the world.)

So much choice! There are shelves full of every single item! It's such a bewildering array and one guaranteed to dismay many of those from other parts of the world where there's barely one brand of every type and therefore no choice at all. Supermarkets are certainly full of the harvest and it seems we need to keep building more and more shelves to accommodate it all.

Jesus once told a story about all this. He told it to two brothers who were arguing over money that had been left to them. 'Slow down,' says Jesus. 'Don't you realise that having lots of things - having more and more choices - isn't going to save you! Listen.'

A way to tell the story together

Here is a version of the story that you can use to get everyone to join in. It goes to the template of 'This is the house that Jack built'. Assign some simple actions to each new line of the story.

This is the rich farmer who owned lots of land

This is the seed that belonged to the rich farmer, who owned lots of land

This is the harvest of wheat, grown from the seed that belonged to the rich farmer, who owned lots of land

These are the small barns that tried to store, the harvest of wheat, grown from the seed that belonged to the rich farmer, who owned lots of land

These are the larger barns, built instead of the small barns that tried to store, the harvest of wheat, grown from the seed that belonged to the rich farmer, who owned lots of land

And these are the truly massive barns, put up to take the place of the larger barns, built instead of the small barns that tried to store, the harvest of wheat, grown from the seed that belonged to the rich farmer, who owned lots of land

This is the sound of the all-night party in the big house, not far from the truly massive barns, put up to take the place of the larger barns, built instead of the small barns that tried to store, the harvest of wheat, grown from the seed that belonged to the rich farmer, who owned lots of land

But this is the sound of the silence... after death interrupted the sound of the all-night party in the big house, not far from the truly massive barns, put up to take the place of the larger barns, built instead of the small barns that tried to store, the harvest of wheat, grown from the seed that belonged to the rich farmer, who owned lots of land...



... who had forgotten that the most important thing in life was to be rich in the sight of God.

The end of the story must have silenced the two brothers and the crowds!

- So, what really is important and makes us rich in God's eyes?
- If all our supermarket choices were taken away, what would really matter in the end?
- If you had to leave your house in a hurry because there was a fire, what would you grab as important to you? Probably not a particular brand of coffee, biscuit or butter mentioned earlier.

Harvest is a time to say a big 'thank you' to God for all we have to eat and drink... and also perhaps a 'big sorry' for not having shared it very well both in this country and across the world. Learning how to share and to bless others is one way to be rich in God's sight

Some song suggestions

- 'Thank you Lord for... [this fine day]' (change the last words to include items from the harvest)
- 'Harvest time' (*Kidsource, Volume 1*, Kevin Mayhew, 1999)
- 'The vegetable song' (*A Combined Harvest*, Out of the Ark Ltd)

A prayer idea

Gather a number of full cereal boxes and put them together to create a bigger and bigger building rather like the barns that the rich man built. Then, use the names on the cereal packets as a prompt for prayer together. Invite people to come up and shake the appropriate packets as each prayer is said. For example:

Krave - Help us, Lord, not just to crave more and more but to want to give as much as we get.

Cherrios - Help all those working to put an end to hunger in the world.

Alpen - May we always be quick to help those in trouble.

Ready Brek/Shreddies - May we always be ready to bless those who are less well off than ourselves.

Special K - We pray in the name of our special king - Jesus.