



On your marks

Harvest Festival or Harvest Thanksgiving is one of the most attended services in the year. It is also a service in which there are large numbers of children present with their families and indeed often families who do not regularly come to church. It is an important opportunity to showcase how we can worship together with all ages successfully, as well as being a moment to share something more of our Christian story more clearly with those of may not know it. The following outline suggests some ideas for worship with children present for Harvest Thanksgiving including an interactive talk, some prayers, useful links and music suggestions.

Get set

There are a variety of ideas in the following piece, some of which will need simple visuals. For the special confessional prayer, you will need lots of small envelopes from stationers (they come in packs of 50 usually) into each of which you will need to put one (edible) seed. You also need to buy some apples, olives and grapes in order to illustrate the talk and of course there should be enough to share around the congregation afterwards!

Go!

1. Welcome and introduction to the theme

Welcome to our Harvest Thanksgiving. Now, those who lead all-age or family services like this are often worried about finding appropriate pictures and visual aids. However, this is the **one** service where the leader or speaker doesn't have to worry too much, because it's **you** who bring the visual aids!

Harvest Thanksgiving is an opportunity to thank God for the crops and the fruit of the ground, upon which, despite all our clever technological advances, we are still dependent. It's a big thank-you for the food we can eat and for its variety.

There is the story about old lady who was very poor. She had nothing. No shelter, no food, no proper clothes. She prayed to God and God gave her 10 apples. This was wonderful. 'Now I can get the things I need,' she said. She was so hungry of course that she ate the first three apples and so was full. The next three apples she traded to rent some modest shelter so that she could be safe from the rain and the sun. She exchanged the next three apples for some new clothes, so she was no longer cold at night and would look smart during the day. But there was then one apple left over. 'Why did you give me one apple more than I needed?' she asked God. 'So you can have something with which to say thank-you to me,' replied God. God gives us enough to say thank-you.

2. An opening prayer adapted from a collect for Harvest Thanksgiving

Father God, whose idea it was that seeds should grow and produce crops and fruits,



we want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your goodness and care, and for giving us enough to eat in the harvest of the land.

Lord God, please also give us wisdom and good sense to use this harvest well, to honor you to meet our needs and to help those who are not so well off.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

3. Possible songs and hymns:

Great is thy faithfulness; O give thanks to the Lord, for his love will never end; God who made the earth; O give thanks to the Lord, all you his people; Now thank we all our God; Stand up, clap hands, shout thank-you Lord; We really want to thank-you Lord; For the fruits of his creation

4. Prayer of confession

See: [Harvest - Seed Confession](#) in the Christian Year Ideas

5. What a great variety of Harvest goods there are on display. We are really spoiled for choice nowadays. It seems that the supermarket shelves just grow heavier and longer with the different possibilities of types of this food or that. It can be quite bewildering! But the question that many people are asking today of course is 'Are these foods organic and are they GM products or not?'

Well actually, the truth is that as far as Christians are concerned, all foods **are** GM products! Why? Because they are **God Made** and that's why we are giving thanks today.

6. Have a large blow-up globe available. Use it to illustrate the following three worlds:

a. A World of Amazing Harvests

Toss the globe to adults and children, who can name different sorts of foods and vegetables that come from around the world. Some of these fruits and vegetables may be on display already

b. A World of Terrible Hurts and Hunger

Toss the globe to adults and children who can name some of the bad 'harvests' of the world in terms of war, famine and distress

c. A World of Hope

Toss the globe to adults and children who can name some of the good things that are happening around God's world, as the harvest of his good work through people's lives is made real

Turn this into some short thank-you and please-help prayers

7. Bible reading

Luke 13:6-9

Here is a story of a gardener coming to look for fruit (figs) on his fruit tree

This gardener comes looking for fruit but there was none. Nevertheless the gardener gives the tree another chance. He is a hopeful gardener, doing his very best to make the tree produce fruit.



I wonder what you think this story from Jesus is about? Ask for some ideas. Remember to hear and receive **all** ideas positively.

Jesus' stories are usually about God and God's relationship to us in some way. Perhaps God is coming looking to see whether our lives have produced a good harvest but God is disappointed? Yet this gardener, and therefore God, in love gives us another chance. Before the Ground Force team is called in to dig us over, God waits a bit longer for the fruit to come!

8. Possible outline for a talk

You will need a bag of apples, a bowl of olives and a bunch of grapes.

Let me tell you about three special gardens, which between them hold the clue how our lives can produce the fruit and the harvest that God is looking for.

There were once three gardens with three very different sorts of crops.

The fruit of the first garden I've got here. *Show the bag of apples*

I wonder what's your favorite variety of apple? There are so many to choose from nowadays - many from around the world. Some look tasty. Some look rather waxy! Some look as if they may be sweet but turn out rather sharp. Here are some **apples to choose** from the fruit garden. Invite some children and adults to taste a few of the apples and give their opinions

The second garden is very different. This garden produces olives. *Show the bowl of olives* Who likes olives? Invite some children and adults to come and taste them and give their opinions. You may get a mixed response to this!

Well, these olives grow in gardens too and can be eaten. But they can also be crushed to make olive oil, which has many uses. So here are some **olives to crush** from this fruit garden.

The third garden is very different again. This garden produces grapes. It is a grape garden or vineyard, as it is more usually known. I wonder who likes grapes? Most people do and they are good for our health. They look good. They can be very sweet and tasty. Which is why we sometimes take grapes to people in hospital. Grapes help us get better. Here are **grapes to cure**. Invite some children and adults to taste the grapes.

So here are the three gardens and their three fruits.

With: **apples to choose; olives to crush; grapes to cure**.

Now in fact these three gardens all have one rather special gardener to look after them. All these three gardens are in the Bible and **God is the faithful gardener**.

The three gardens have a message for us for harvest about how God is faithful and how God wants to help us produce a harvest of good things in our lives.

a. The Apple Garden is there right at the beginning of the Bible story. It is the garden of choice...The Garden of Eden. God in love allowed us to choose whether to love him and know him or not, and we chose not to. God never wanted to force love on us and so it meant we chose what was bad for us



and for our world. Christians take the mess of the world with its failed harvests and unfair trade seriously and we own up to the truth and it is us who have caused it, not God.

b. But God is faithful and does not leave us in the mess. Here is the olive garden next. It is a real garden in place and time and one where once God, in the form of Jesus, knelt to pray. It's called the Garden of Gethsemane - an olive garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Here Jesus chose to be crushed like the olives in that garden; crushed on the cross in our place for all the mess we caused. Jesus took on himself all the bad that we had brought into the world so we can have the opportunity of a new start, a clean sheet, a fresh beginning.

c. Which leads us on to the last garden, the grape garden. This is the garden Jesus used to describe how we **can** be different. In this garden Jesus says he is the main trunk of the tree and if we choose to belong to him, we can start producing the good fruit of the Spirit which we can see in Jesus: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control and faithfulness. Jesus described this garden to his disciples on the night before he died (see John 15). As we get linked up to Jesus and this grape garden - this vineyard - this is the way we can be different and produce a harvest of good things that can make us and the world the sort of place God intended it to be all along.

Prayer:

Father God thank-you for these three gardens, which show us how you have been faithful and long to be faithful to each one of us. As we face up to our wrong choices and as we accept that Jesus was crushed in our place, help us to be linked up to you so that our lives will produce a bumper harvest.

9. A special verse as a blessing for today from Isaiah 58:11

The Lord will guide you continually
And satisfy your desire with good things
And make your bones strong.
You shall be like a watered garden
And like a spring of water whose waters will never run dry.