

Open Table Worship – Leader’s Sheets
Harvest Service – Celebrating Abundance
Written & compiled by Ana Gobledale

Readings: *(full texts are at the end of this document)*

Psalm 72:16

Luke 8:4-8 or Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 --The parable of the sower

Oscar Wilde quotation

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 – dramatized or text

Isaiah 55:10-13 -- optional (if time allows)

Set up:

- Centre piece on each table: harvest-related items, e.g. corn stalks, veggies, grapes and fresh bread (for communion, too)
- If a Harvest Offering will be collected, consider placing marked baskets or collection bags in the center of each table as part of the display, so that donations may be inserted at any time.
- Place a copy of a reading, or a Bible marked at the reading, or printed handouts, in the centre of each table.
- Bible translations: suggested are *The Inclusive Bible: the first Egalitarian Translation 2007* by Priests for Equality; *New Revised Standard Version*; or *The Message*. Ideally, have all three available. NRSV provides the scholarly translation and TM provides an interpretation in modern vernacular. *The Inclusive Bible* provides a ready-to-read inclusive language translation, sometimes quite thought provoking.
- Candles to light (one lit candle to use for lighting others)
- Communion elements: juice – or grapes - and bread to be shared (gluten free and non-alcoholic, so no one is excluded). These might be set out as part of the harvest display: grapes and a loaf of bread or roll on each table.

Coffee & Chat

Look at the items in the centre of your table (harvest items).

Questions for discussion around the tables:

- What memories of harvests past do you have?
- Consider your relationship to the seasons of planting and harvest.
- What is a favourite aspect, for you, of this time of year?

Gathering –

Purpose: *to establish as a group; to each fully arrive, moving from the outside world to being fully present here; to get to know names; to affirm one another as God’s creation.*

Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey you are welcome here at Open Table.

All: We are here. We are who we are.

Introduce yourself using only your first name, then saying either:

‘I am here.’ or ‘I am who I am,’ or both.

If a response is desired, everyone responds with the affirmation:

All: You are who you are, created by God.

Looking into the Bible

Psalm 72:16

Ask someone to read the passage from a Bible on the table, or from their own Bible or from a printout.

Hear the words of the Psalmist:

*May there be abundance of grain in the land;
may it wave on the tops of the mountains;
may its fruit be like Lebanon;
and may people blossom in the cities
like the grass of the field.*

On this Harvest Sunday we celebrate God’s abundance in our lives and in the world.

Sing *a familiar song/hymn on the theme of harvest*

Suggestions: *These hymns do not necessarily use inclusive language.*

Come, ye thankful people come

O Let us spread the Pollen of Peace

For the fruits of all creation

Here in the modern city, we have no fields to plough

© T Presswood and C McBeath, *Crumbs of Hope: Prayers*

from the City, 2006 (Tune: Wir pflügen / We plough the fields and scatter)

Praise and thanksgiving (tune: Morning has broken)

Looking into the Bible

Luke 8:4-8 or Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Use Bibles on tables or printouts; use multiple readers, reading 1-3

verses each.

Our reading is the parable of the sower. Jesus tells this story to a crowd and invites everyone to listen and hear. So, I invite you to listen and hear today. (*The projected images might be used at this time.*)

I am reading from Luke's Gospel, chapter 8, beginning with verse 4.

When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to Jesus, he said in a parable:

'A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.

Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture.

Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it.

Some fell into good soil,

and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.'

As Jesus said this, he called out,

'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'

Here ends the reading. May God bless us with understanding.

Conversations: Questions and responses might be shared in pairs or threes. Assure everyone that there will be no plenary nor feedback time.

- What 4 places are seeds thrown?
- What might the seeds being sown refer to?
- What might the dry rocks, hungry birds, choking thorns and good soil refer to?
- What kinds of 'seeds' do you try to sow in your life? (e.g. kindness, justice, respect, etc.)
- When have you felt frustrated in your attempts to sow seeds?

Reading

"Ordinary riches can be stolen, real riches cannot. In your soul are infinitely precious things that cannot be taken from you."

--Oscar Wilde

Ours is also a spiritual harvest. God blesses us with spiritual abundance or 'riches', and we, in turn, share this spiritual 'richness' and power through compassion and love for the world.

Conversations

- What might the harvest of 'infinitely precious things' in your soul include?
- What does 'spiritual abundance' mean to you?
- When have you experienced a sense of spiritual abundance or spiritual scarcity?
- What seeds or fruits might God be inviting you/us to share from your/our rich and abundant spiritual harvest?

Conversations: going deeper *optional, if time allows*

Consider these questions about harvest:

- When have you experienced a 'poor' harvest in your life, a sense of scarcity, even famine?
- What might it feel like to live spiritually fulfilled, to experience an abundant spiritual harvest?

Looking in the Bible *Deuteronomy 26:1-11 dramatised*

If the group prefers, simply read the text (found on last page)

Our Old Testament reading is from the fifth book of the Torah, the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses is speaking to the Israelites in the Promised Land, urging them to remember their past, telling them not to forget the Eternal One, Yahweh, their creator and liberator.

PRIEST: [*Standing at front, ready to receive gifts*]

NARRATOR 1:

When the people of Israel had settled in the land that God had provided, there was a ritual that they performed every year to remember their story, and to remind themselves that the earth belongs to God.

Every year they take some of the first fruits of all that has been produced from the soil of the land and put them in baskets. They then process together to the sacred gathering place.

ISRAELITES: [*walk toward front with baskets*]

NARRATOR 1: When they arrive at the sacred gathering place, the Israelites say these words before the priest:

ISRAELITE ONE: A wandering, landless Aramean was my ancestor who with all my ancestors went down into Egypt and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. *Set basket before priest.*

ISRAELITE TWO: But the Egyptians treated us badly and made us suffer, making us work hard. [*Set basket before priest*]

ISRAELITE THREE: Then we cried out to the God of our ancestors, who heard our voice and saw our misery, toil, and oppression.

God rescued us and brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with great and wonderful signs and miracles. *cont./*
God brought us to this place – this beautiful land, a land flowing with milk and honey. [*Set basket before priest*]

ISRAELITE FOUR: Now we bring the first fruits of the soil that you, O God, have provided. [*Set basket before priest*]

NARRATOR 1: Then the Israelites feast. They party! Think of our own [*name of local lively annual event*] Festival!

Israelites smile and party!

NARRATOR 1:

Everyone is invited – even the refugees, the immigrants, the unclean, the homeless and the strangers who live in God’s land together. All rejoice in the good things that God provides.

ALL ISRAELITES (together): Thanks be to God!

NARRATOR 1: And so they rejoice in the good things God provides.

NARRATOR 2: So, we, too, rejoice in the good things God provides in our lives, sharing from our abundance and gratitude.

Conversations

Our Christian practice invites us to meditate on these things, to look both inward and outward at our purpose for being, for living.

- When in your life have you been treated badly as the Israelites were by the Egyptians?
- When have you been more like the Egyptians in the story and mistreated others?

- When have you felt liberated like the Israelites?
- Where is God calling you/us to share from your/our ‘abundance and gratitude’?

If a special Harvest Offering is being collected:

NARRATOR 2: So, we, too, rejoice in the good things God provides in our lives. And in gratitude we give. Today’s special offering, our [*annual Harvest offering / local offering*], supports _____. This organization [*insert name*] demonstrates the Christian message of loving God by loving our neighbours through prayer, action, and financial support. Let us give generously with grateful hearts. As the ancient Israelites brought their gifts, we bring our gifts today.

Collect the Harvest Offering at this time. This might be done easily by placing baskets or collection bags in the center of the table as part of the display, so that donations may be inserted at any time.

Sharing & Caring – Bringing light into our world

- As we meditate upon our lives and our world, if you would like to light a candle, to either celebrate an area of abundance, an area of joy, or to express concern about an area of scarcity or how people are responding to it, please do so at this time.
- If you would like to share your joy or your concern, feel free to share with the group, or you may light a candle in silence.

Time for quiet reflection

The Lord’s Prayer

A song to lead into communion

a familiar reflective song/hymn on the theme of communion

Invitation to Communion:

The table is set for our special meal. The bread and juice, prepared and presented, are ready to be served and shared. Just as the Israelites invited everyone to celebrate the harvest, everyone is invited to this celebration.

We remember Jesus sharing a meal like this with his disciples, his friends. He includes everyone, those he can trust and those he can not trust. Today we are his disciples, his friends. Each one of us is welcome. How amazing it is to be loved and wanted even when we have not been perfect. How wonderful it is to be included as we are. The bread is gluten free and the juice is non-alcoholic so that all may partake freely. No one is excluded from this meal.

Prayer of confession (optional)

As we approach this meal of mystery in the hope and promise of reconciliation, we admit our shortcomings and failures. Pray with me.

God of abundance, we confess that we sometimes find ourselves, like the seeds of the sower, on dry ground or choked by thorns. We feel parched or withered and unable to be the best person you want us to be. Remind us you do not expect us to be perfect. We look to Jesus remembering his difficulties with family members and friends.

When our moans and groans of self-pity reverberate, forgive us. Remind us of the abundance of your love and acceptance.

When we feel ungrateful, shake us gently with reminders of others to whom we can direct our compassion and generosity.

Help us find nurturing soil in which to flourish. Open our eyes and our hearts to see your spirit in everyone and to share out of our abundance. Amen.

Words of Assurance (optional)

Be assured that God, watches over us all, rejoicing when we are found and restored to wholeness, generously forgiving a repentant heart. Receive God's healing mercy.

Words of Remembrance: the communion story

When Jesus shared the bread with his friends, he explained that he is the Bread of Life. Like bread, Jesus nourishes and strengthens us so that we can know right and wrong and not be confused. When we eat the bread together, we are strengthened as a community to remember Jesus and to do the things Jesus would do in our world.

Jesus also used a cup of the fruit of grapes to teach his disciples. He compared the red juice to blood, to help us remember the suffering and bloodshed in the world. Drinking the juice together helps us remember that we are all part of a special agreement, a covenant, with God.

God loves us so much that when we make mistakes, or when we make bad choices, God has agreed to forgive us and grants us a second chance, every time.

This is ordinary bread and ordinary juice. But when we eat the bread together and drink the juice together, something extraordinary happens which brings us closer to Jesus and to one another. We become the 'Body of Christ.' which means that our eyes and ears see and hear what Jesus would see in our world. And our arms and hands do Jesus's work to help others. May this shared meal of mystery and awe manifest for us the very essence of the risen Christ in our midst.

Prayer of Thanks

God of abundant life, for this time together around this table, we give thanks. For the power of this meal, this simple bread and juice, to unite us as the Body of Christ, we give thanks. Amen.

Breaking of the Bread *Break bread as words are spoken:*

Although the bread is broken like Jesus' body, by sharing it, we are made one.

Pouring of the cup *Pour our juice as words are spoken:*

Although the cup represents blood spilled, by sharing it, we are healed with God and one another.

Blessing of the Bread and Juice

Pray with me. Come Holy Spirit, come. Fill this bread and these cups with your spirit that we might feel your nourishment, making us one spiritual body, one family, united with one another and all peoples of all nations, that we may worthily serve the world, sowing seeds of peace and justice in your name. Amen.

Ministering to you in Christ's name, all things are ready.

Sharing the bread

When you take a piece of bread, please hold it until everyone has a piece. Then we will all eat together. [or: Please eat the bread as you receive it.]

When everyone has bread:

Although the bread is broken like Jesus's body, we are made one. Eat of the Bread of Life.

Sharing the juice

When you take a cup of juice, please hold it until everyone has been served. Then we will all drink together.

When everyone has a cup:

Although the cup represents blood spilled, we are healed, reconciled with God and one another. Drink of the Cup of Forgiveness.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Pray with me. Gracious God, thank you for your presence in our lives, today and each day. Thank you for uniting us through this meal, with the bread of life. Amen.

If time allows...one last Bible Reading and Conversation; otherwise proceed directly to the song.

Looking in the Bible one last time *Isaiah 55:10-13*

(The projected images might be used at this time.)

Our final reading comes from the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures, from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 55, beginning with verse 10.

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

*For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

*Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Eternal One for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

Here ends the reading. May our hearing lead to understanding.

Conversation

- What shall NOT come back empty?

Sing *a familiar uplifting song/hymn*
--on the theme of harvest, abundance or thanksgiving

Closing Prayer

God, sower of the seeds of life, make us truly grateful this Harvest Sunday, for the abundance of all that is good in our lives. Thank you for making us who we are, and bringing us together today. Amen.

Going into the world *(choose from two options)*

Option 1

Let us go from here to sow the seed of justice, mercy and love and to share the bounty of God's harvest. Amen.

Option 2

As we journey on,
may God sow in us the seeds of discontent and change,
till all may eat their fill,
and the seeds of gratitude, contentment and hope,
as together we reap in joy. Amen.

Closing act

*Have another cuppa?
Shake hands?
Slip away quietly?
Whatever is comfortable for the group and for the individuals.*

Full texts of reading follow on the next page...

To be inclusive in their language, the Bible passages have been slightly altered from the New Revised Standard Version.

Psalm 72:16

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may it wave on the tops of the mountains;
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like the grass of the field.

Luke 8:4-8

When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to Jesus, he said in a parable:
‘A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.
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Oscar Wilde

“Ordinary riches can be stolen, real riches cannot. In your soul are infinitely precious things that cannot be taken from you.”

Isaiah 55:10-13

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Eternal One for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Deuteronomy 26:1–11

When you have come into the land that Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that Yahweh your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Yahweh your God will choose as a dwelling for the name of the Eternal One.

You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to the priest, "Today I declare to Yahweh your God that I have come into the land that the Eternal One swore to our ancestors to give us."

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of Yahweh your God, you shall make this response before Yahweh your God:

"A wandering Aramean was my ancestor who went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number.

And there they became a great nation, mighty and populous.

When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to Yahweh, the God of our ancestors; Yahweh heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and Yahweh brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, Eternal One, have given me." You shall set it down before Yahweh your God and bow down before Yahweh your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that Yahweh your God has given to you and to your house.