

**Opening Music:** 'Harvest Home'

3 mins 10 sec

**Chalice Lighting: Words by Cliff Reed:**

Placed here by God and evolution,  
We give thanks for this garden- planet,  
Pledging to till it with wisdom  
And to care for it with humility.  
For this we gather, for this we worship.

**Welcome & Opening words**

Good morning and Welcome to our service this morning, whether you are here in the church, joining us on Zoom, or watching the recording at a later time. Welcome whoever you are, and however you are feeling, whatever you carry in your heart, and bring with you: hopes, cares and concerns or celebrations, sadness or joys, you are welcome, especially if you are joining us for the first time.

However we join in, each one of us is part of our community, contributing by being connected in spirit, and all are equally valued. Today is our Harvest Thanksgiving Service, which I hope all will enjoy. If you have brought something to add to the display, there will be an opportunity for this during the service.

Some opening words from an 'Autumn Equinox Ritual' by Kathleen Jenks

"Smoke hangs like haze over harvested fields,  
The gold of stubble, the brown of turned earth  
And you walk under the red light of fall  
The scent of fallen apples, the dust of threshed grain  
The sharp, gentle chill of fall.  
Here as we move into the shadows of autumn  
The night that brings the morning of spring  
Come to us, Lord of Harvest  
Teach us to be thankful for the gifts you bring us ..."

**1<sup>st</sup> Hymn:** Green Book 272 'Harvest Home'

Come, ye thankful people, come.  
Raise the song of harvest-home;  
All is safely gathered in,  
Ere the winter storms begin;  
God, our maker, doth provide  
For our wants to be supplied:  
Come to God's own temple, come,  
Raise the song of harvest-home!

*Tune: 'St. George, Windsor. George Jacob Elves, 1816 – 1893*  
*Words: from Henry Alford, 1810 - 1871*

**Story: The Farmer's seeds**

There once was a farmer who had great fields of corn. He grew the best corn in the area. He won the first prize at the state fair every year, and everyone flocked to his fields in late summer to enjoy his delicious harvest.

One day, a news reporter went to interview the farmer and ask him about his secrets to success. Days of research before the interview revealed to the reporter that the farmer would always share his best-producing seeds with the neighbouring farms.

When it came time for the interview, the reporter asked the farmer a powerful question. The reporter asked, "Tell me, Sir, why do you share your best seeds with your neighbours, knowing that they are also going to enter their corn into the competition against you. Wouldn't this make it difficult for you to win?"

The farmer looked up and took a deep breath before he replied. Then he answered, "During the season when the strong wind comes across the fields, pollen from the ripening corn is swirled from field to field. It is important to understand that if my neighbours grow poor corn, the cross-pollination will ultimately degrade the quality of my own crop. So, if I want to grow great quality corn, I must help my neighbour to grow good corn as well."

In order to live a meaningful and happy life, we must see the importance of enriching the lives of others. True happiness is found when we share with others.

**1st Reading: 1) from Psalm 126 KJV verses 2 – 6 read by Linda**

Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them.

The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.

Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

**Prayers: (1) 'Harvest Thanks giving' adapted from words of Cliff Reed:**

Spirit of Life and Love,

At this celebration of harvest we give thanks:

For the golden grain we saw in our summer field, and for its harvesting.

We give thanks for the fruit of our orchards and vineyards, for the vegetables that swell in the rich earth, or grow green in the sunshine and the rain.

We are so blessed, and yet we take it all for granted. Forgive us.

We hold in our loving thoughts and prayers the people of our one world who suffer the devastation of natural – and not so natural - disasters.

We pray for the lands where the harvest seems one of hatred and of death; where terrorism, cruelty and war raise bitter crops of misery and vengeance.

We give thanks for the harvests of earth and spirit.

We pray that all who are denied them now will soon receive their bounty through the workings of love in human hearts like ours.

We ask this in the spirit of all messengers of love. *A M E N*

**“Harvest Prayer”, John Arlott, 1914 – 1991**

God, whose farm is all creation,  
Take the gratitude we give;  
Take the finest of our harvest,  
Crops we grow that men may live.

Take our ploughing, seeding, reaping,  
Hopes and fears of sun and rain,  
All our thinking, planning, waiting,  
Ripened in this fruit and grain.

All our labour, all our watching,  
All our calendar of care,  
In these crops of your creation,  
Take, O God: they are our prayer.

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Invitation to bring forward Harvest offerings to add to the display at the front

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**2<sup>nd</sup> Hymn:** Purple book 43 ‘Gather the Spirit’

Gather the spirit, harvest the power.  
Our sep’rate fires will kindle one flame.  
Witness the mystery of this hour.  
Our trials in this light appear all the same.  
*Gather in peace, gather in thanks,  
Gather in sympathy now and then.  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.  
Gather to celebrate once again.*

Gather the spirit of heart and mind.  
Seeds for the sowing are laid in store.  
Nurtured in love and conscience refined,  
With body and spirit united once more.  
*Gather in peace, gather in thanks,  
Gather in sympathy now and then.  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.  
Gather to celebrate once again*

Gather the spirit growing in all,  
Drawn by the moon and fed by the sun.  
Winter to spring, and summer to fall,  
The chorus of life resounding as one.  
*Gather in peace, gather in thanks,  
Gather in sympathy now and then.  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.  
Gather to celebrate once again*

**Readings:****1) 'I am Rich Today ' by Gladys Harp**

I am rich today with autumn's gold,  
All that my covetous hands can hold;  
Frost-painted leaves and goldenrod,  
A goldfinch on a milkweed pod,  
Huge golden pumpkins in the field  
With heaps of corn from a bounteous yield,  
Golden apples heavy on the trees  
Rivalling those of Hesperides,  
Golden rays of balmy sunshine spread  
Over all like butter on warm bread;  
And the harvest moon will this night unfold  
The streams running full of molten gold.  
Oh, who could find a dearth of bliss  
With autumn glory such as this!"

**2) "After Apple picking" by Robert Frost 1874 –1963**

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree  
Toward heaven still,  
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill  
Beside it, and there may be two or three  
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.  
But I am done with apple-picking now.

Essence of winter sleep is on the night,  
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.  
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight  
I got from looking through a pane of glass  
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough  
And held against the world of hoary grass.

It melted, and I let it fall and break.  
But I was well  
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,  
And I could tell  
What form my dreaming was about to take.  
Magnified apples appear and disappear,  
Stem end and blossom end,  
And every fleck of russet showing clear.  
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,  
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.  
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.  
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin  
The rumbling sound  
Of load on load of apples coming in.

For I have had too much  
Of apple-picking: I am overtired

Of the great harvest I myself desired.  
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,  
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.  
For all  
That struck the earth,  
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,  
Went surely to the cider-apple heap  
As of no worth.

One can see what will trouble  
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.  
Were he not gone,  
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his  
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,  
Or just some human sleep.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Hymn: Sing Your Faith (Purple Book) 13 'Bring Flowers to our altar '**

Bring flowers to our altar to show nature's beauty,  
the harvest of goodness in earth, sky and sea.  
Bring light to our altar to guide every nation  
from hatred to love and to humanity.  
Bring a dove to our altar its wings ever flying  
in permanent quest for the peace all may share.  
Bring bread to our altar the hungry supplying  
and feeding the poor who depend on our care.

Bring hope to our altar in your gentle dreaming  
of all the good things that will make your heart glad.  
Bring love to our altar, a bright witness beaming  
to all who are burdened, or lonely or sad.  
Bring work to our altar to help every nation  
and celebrate all that's already achieved.  
Come yourself to our altar in true dedication  
to all the ideals we in common believe.

*Music: 'The Ash Grove' Welsh Traditional melody*

*Words: Lena Baxter © Lena Cockcroft. Used by permission*

### **Meditation: 'Within the cycle' Cliff Reed**

Humble and reverent we bow before Creative Mystery;

We give thanks for the universe upon which we depend, the living system of which we are part.

Gratefully, respectfully may we reap a harvest from the earth, members as we are of its great cycle – life, death, re-incarnation, rebirth.

We take of its forests and fields, harvesting fruit and grain, vegetables and timber.

We take of its animals, harvesting milk and meat for food, hides and wool for clothes.

We take of its seas, the harvest of fish and kindred creatures.

We take of its mountains and deep mines, the harvest of minerals, metals and rocks.

We take, but let it be as gentle children from their mother – lovingly, thankfully, sustainably;

Never as robbers and fools, who loot tomorrow's need to gratify today's greed.

We are not strangers here, we cannot stand outside the cycle that governs us and all that dwells on earth.

Help us to know that and to be content

**Reflective music** : 'Autumn' op 67 Petit Adagio by Glazunov

<https://youtu.be/dum-2EKDBtY?si=LvdV9MLeS4TFaMS->

### HARVEST ADDRESS

So, "all is safely gathered in" ~ well, it appears to be from our display here this morning. Thank you all for your contributions, which will be put to good use afterwards, as we will be donating the non perishable goods to the Plymouth Foodbank. I hope they will also be able to make good use of all this beautiful fresh produce – a feast not only for the body, but also for the eyes and the spirit. May our offerings bring some comfort to people going through difficult and anxious times. Since I last led a Harvest Service over 10 years ago, the number of Food banks has grown enormously. Whilst a sad reflection on the times, it is also testimony to the continuing inherent generosity of the vast majority of ordinary people, willing to share what they can with their less fortunate neighbours.

People have celebrated the safe bringing in of the harvest since the dawn of farming some 10,000 years ago. Harvest festivals, thanksgiving celebrations and rituals – call them what you will, were observed by many ancient peoples: as far back as Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and the Hebrews. We find many references to harvest in the bible, as in Linda's reading from psalm 126. *Spoiler alert!* Our closing video is based on this.

The modern form of what we call "Harvest Festival" was first celebrated over 180 years ago. On 1st October 1843, by the Anglican Revd. Robert Stephen Hawker, who was born just a stone's throw from here, in the clergy house of Charles Church, Plymouth, in December 1803. He was a grandson of Robert Hawker, vicar of Charles Church. He invited his parishioners to a special thanksgiving service at his church at Morwenstow in Cornwall. In the communion, he used bread made from the first cutting of that year's corn. From this event grew the tradition of decorating churches with locally grown produce, and the idea soon spread. Special hymns were written just for Harvest time, and readings, linked to the harvest theme, initially from the Bible, were chosen.

Harvest Festival is still a favourite occasion in many denominations, including Unitarians. Our friends in Crewkerne celebrated theirs earlier this month. There are no commemorations for tragic events, nothing bad happens, there is just unbridled joy at the wonder and beauty all around us. Well not quite! We mustn't all doze off in some bucolic haze in the early autumn sunshine. We need to be aware of some important cautionary lessons, more important for our times than ever before.

I'd like to reflect on some of our readings here this morning. In most of them, the celebratory theme is strong, but they are more than mere sentimental wallowings. The poems do indeed celebrate the beauty and bounty of autumn, "Huge golden pumpkins .... heaps of corn from a bounteous yield ..... golden apples heavy on the trees" and images of many foods and drink, aplenty, almost to excess. The apple growers

amongst you will surely agree on the super abundance this year! There are touches of a delicious melancholy which many experience at this time of year - the "golden rays and heaps of corn" as Gladys Harp writes.

There are lessons about caring for the world entrusted to us. They are reflected in our story about the farmer whose crop often won first prize, thanks in part to what we may regard as 'enlightened self interest'. And while being thankful for all the resources and opportunities the world offers us, let's remember they are not infinite, and this planet is not ours to do with as we want. Already we are feeling the effects of Climate Change on farming here in UK. A friend in WU who has an interest in farming, tells me that this year's yield of crops such as wheat and barley was reduced by as much as 20% because the rains came too late to swell the grain. Different crops may have to be found to fill the gaps as this trend continues over successive seasons.

It is our *privilege* to have our time here, on this bountiful planet, to care for and enjoy it, and then to pass it on to our children and their children in a better condition than we found it. That example of the cereal farmers shows we have a long way to go before we can say we are beginning to achieve this, but it is important that each one of us does whatever we can to help – even small actions add up.

There are salutary lessons at harvest about sharing with those less fortunate than ourselves. Speaking personally, I often feel embarrassed by having access to so many of the world's resources, whilst others lack even the most basic necessities, opportunities, and freedoms regarded as the birthright of every human-being. Those who are without often become resentful and bitter, sometimes leading to desperate actions against those they perceive to be better off than themselves.

Spiritual and religious freedom and having a place one can call home, are all important birthrights, but this does not mean forcing one's beliefs upon others, or treating those who seek them with abuse or violence. We are all aware of the appalling slaughter of so many innocent people in several parts of the world, including civilians, journalists, aid workers and even medical staff. The world has been shocked, saddened and disgusted by the images and reports from eye witnesses, via the media and the internet. For the people living in areas threatened by the activities of extremist organizations and for us all, it is a time to take stock, and consider how such events might be prevented in future. How to build respect and tolerance of other's point of view, in a peaceful manner?

We host other faiths here: Sikhs and Hindus hire our premises for their worship and festivals. Our church attends an Interfaith event each autumn, which brings together people of several major faiths to share and enjoy what is best in them, usually ending with sharing food from the different cultures. So we discover how our differences are less than our common ideals; the crops may be different, but they nourish similar hunger for peaceful coexistence amongst us all.

In the fellowship which I hope you find here, we can help each other by sharing the tools of honest and open discussion, spiritual support, wisdom and humour which have seen this congregation through many years in the past, and I hope, for many years to

come. May we reap a bumper harvest of mindfulness, kindness, and the ability to change ourselves for the better, and through those personal changes, to enable changes for better in the wider world.

What I do see, here on this Harvest Table, is evidence of the virtues of *your* generosity, the gratitude and love with which the whole display has been assembled – the sense of delight in this table of Thanksgiving. So let us join in raising our voices in our final hymn of thanksgiving, the hymn no 271 “Give thanks for the corn & the wheat” and may we ever live in a land where we live and worship freely. *AMEN*

**Final Hymn: Green Bk no 271 ‘Give thanks ‘**

Give thanks for the corn and the wheat that are reaped,  
For labour well done and the barns that are heaped,  
For the sun and the dew and the sweet honeycomb,  
For the rose and the song and the harvest brought home.

Give thanks for the commerce and wealth of our land,  
For cunning and strength of the hard working hand,  
For the beauty our artists and poets have wrought,  
For the hope and affection our friendships have brought.

Give thanks for the homes that with kindness are blessed,  
For seasons of plenty and well-deserved rest,  
For our country extending from sea unto sea,  
For the ways that have made it a land for the free.

*Tune: ‘Stowey’ . English Traditional melody, coll. Cecil James Sharp, 1859 – 1924*

*Arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872 - 1958*

*Words: Author unknown*

**Closing words:** adapted from words of Tess Ward, Anglican priest, hospital chaplain and spiritual director

Nurturing spirit, who rests the fields, the orchards and allotments, guard me as I lie down below the sacred harvest moon. Nourish me as I still myself after activities spent under the sun, that I might grow in the dark holding of your love, like a pressed down bulb, tended by the mucked-in wisdom of dirty hands.

Comfort all those who feel fallow within this night.

May your slow and hidden grace nurture all, even when we are unaware of your presence.  
May we be blessed in this season and the next.

Extinguish Chalice

**Closing video ‘Bringing in the Sheaves’** <https://youtu.be/FooC3coc7o0>