

Opening Music: 'Gathering the Harvest' sung

<https://youtu.be/qEoNpmQcStE?si=66wuYdVDVvyl8W7J>

Chalice Lighting**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 by Dora Read Goodale

'The Feast-time of the Year'

This is the feast-time of the year,
When plenty pours her wine of cheer,
And even humble boards may spare
To poorer poor a kindly share.
While bursting barns and granaries know
A richer, fuller overflow.
And they who dwell in golden ease
Blest without toil, yet toil to please.

1st Hymn: 272 "Come, ye Thankful People, Come"

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 Elvès, 1816 – 1893

Words: from Henry Alford, 1810 - 1871

Prayer: 'A Harvest Prayer', by Rev Laura Dobson

Spirit of Life, Ground of Our Being,
at this harvest-time, we give thanks for the gifts of nature, freely given.

For the abundance and beauty of this earth, we give thanks.
For fertile soils, ripening crops and fruiting hedgerows, we give thanks.

For bracing breezes and misty mornings, we give thanks.
For cool evenings and spectacular sunsets, we give thanks.
For dew glistening on spiders' webs, we give thanks.

For the sumptuous scent of fallen leaves on damp earth, we give thanks.

For the circling seasons, the dance of light and dark, we give thanks.

For all the gifts of nature, freely given, we give thanks.

For the fruits of love and the gifts of friendship we harvest here in our beloved community, we give thanks.

For the joys of sharing and growing and flourishing together, we give thanks.

For the promise of harvest that lies in the seed, the huge oak tree in the tiny acorn, the sweet apple in the bitter pip, we give thanks.

For all the promise, potentiality and possibilities of our lives, we give thanks.

Spirit of Life, Ground of Our Being, at this harvest-time, we think of all those around the world who hunger because their harvests have failed.

May we learn to share the harvests of the world fairly and justly.

We think of all those around the world who are fleeing conflict and persecution, who have been forced to abandon their harvests.

May they find sanctuary here.

We think of those close to home who do not know abundance, who must rely on food banks to feed their families.

May we share our harvest with all those in need.

Spirit of Life, Ground of Our Being, may we be like fruit trees –
deep rooted, strong, bountiful –giving shelter to the lost,
support to the lonely, and nourishment to the hungry

Story: The Farmer's Last Harvest – An Inspiring Story

One tear dropped on the dry soil. It was from Raju, a farmer who had worked on his land for 20 years. His son Rohan told him, "Papa, stop farming. Come to the city. These fields are not dreams anymore, they are a burden."

Raju looked at his hands, shaped by the soil. For him, the land was like a mother, full of love and memories. But his son wanted him to leave it.

With a heavy heart, Raju prayed to God and said to his son, "Let me grow one last crop. After that, I'll come with you."

Raju gave his soul to that final harvest. People laughed, but he worked day and night. Then heavy rains came. Everyone thought the crop would be destroyed, but Raju's soil absorbed the water like magic.

When the harvest was ready, the fields were full of grain. Traders were shocked by the huge yield. Rohan finally understood—the land was not just soil, it was a priceless legacy of love and hard work.

He left his city job and joined his father. Together, they started an organic farm, inspiring many others.

Moral of the Story

True success is not in money, but in loving your work and respecting your roots. When you give your heart to something, success will always follow.

1st Readings:

1 from Psalm 126 KJV verses 2 – 6

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.

‘Singing, the reapers homeward come’ Poem by Anon

Singing, the reapers homeward come, lo! lo!
Merrily singing the harvest home, lo! lo!
Along the field, along the road,
Where autumn is scattering leaves abroad,
Homeward cometh the ripe last load, lo! lo!

Singers are filling the twilight dim
With cheerful song, lo! lo!
The spirit of song ascends to Him
Who causeth the corn to grow.
He freely sent the gentle rain,
The summer sun glorified hill and plain,
To golden perfection brought the grain, lo! lo!

Silently, nightly, fell the dew,
Gently the rain, lo! lo!
But who can tell how the green corn grew,
Or who beheld it grow?
Oh! God the good, in sun and rain,
He looked on the flourishing fields and grain,
Till they all appeared on hill and plain
Like living gold, lo! lo!

Invitation to bring forward Harvest offerings

If you have anything you'd like to offer, please bring it up and add it to the display on the stage now...For our friends online, maybe you would like to donate to your own local foodbank after the service.

2nd Hymn P 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

Prayer: "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.

3rd Hymn: Green Book 273 'Not by Bread alone'

In the spring we ploughed our furrows.
Planted well the fertile seeds;
Now we gather in at harvest
Food to meet the body's needs.

Shining pebbles n the sea-shore,
Sunsets in the western skies,
Autumn leaves and winter snowflakes
Bring a harvest for the eyes.

Science widens our horizons
Till we marvel at each find,
And the ripened fruits of knowledge
Bring a harvest for the mind.

All the arts we strive to master
With perfection as our goal,
And the times of prayer and worship
Bring a harvest for the soul.

Tune: 'Gott Will's Machen' J.L.Steiner, 1688 – 1761

Words: Rev John Andrew Storey Used by permission

2nd Readings:

'Apples' by Gillian Clarke, National Poet of Wales from 2008 - 2016

They fill with heat, dewfall, a night of rain.
In a week they have reddened, the seed gone black
in each star-heart. Soft thud of fruit
in the deepening heat of the day.
Out of the delicate petals of secret skin
and that irreversible moment when the fruit set,
such a hard harvest, so cold and sharp on the tongue.

They look up from the grass, too many to save.
A lapful of windfalls with worms in their hearts,
under my thumb the pulse of original sin,
flesh going brown as the skin curls over my knife.
I drown them in water and wine, pushing them under,
then breathe apples simmering in sugar and spice,
fermenting under the tree in sacs of juice
so swollen they'd burst under a wasp's foot

"I am rich today" by Gladys Harp, a modern writer

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
Rivaling 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!"

Meditative Reading: 'Harvest Grace' by Jasmine Cooray

When the table is full, the grain sacks heaving,
The counters sticky with jam,
and our faces still light brightly at dusk
with light that is starting to soften,
turning itself toward rest,
let's pause. Who made all this?

Not just our own hands, though each has
played their part. What if each bee,
each fly, each moth, joined us at the table -
we might bow to each one.

What if the light and the rain sent
their delegates, with shimmering cloaks?
Which song should we sing?

And the workers of the soil - the slugs
and worms, tendrils of fungi,
this huge team, taking the wish
of each seed and working it
into life.

I say 'God and Goddess'-,
I know they are lead singers -
I know it's the whole ensemble

who fill my belly this day.
May I remember always the invisible
work of others, give thanks as it spreads
across my tongue, like a pinkening sky.

A short silence

Reflective music : Maddy Prior 'Harvest Home'
(<https://youtu.be/ciH9609omh8?si=TGw3rsmU9PCzDQRP>)

4mins 6 secs

HARVEST ADDRESS

"All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin" ~ well, so 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. Or maybe the Red Cross, who cook in our kitchen every Monday for refugees and asylum seekers. Either way, be assured, your generosity will bring some comfort to people going through difficult and anxious times.

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: including Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and the Hebrews. We find many references to harvest in the bible, as in this morning's reading from psalm 126.

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 literally 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. Rev Robert the younger, invited his parishioners to a special thanksgiving service at his church at Morwenstow in Cornwall in 1843. This was in thankful response to a better harvest than in previous years, for the early 1840's had been a difficult time of deprivation, when many of his parishioners went hungry. In the communion, he used bread made from the first cutting of that year's corn. Out of this event grew the tradition of decorating churches with locally grown produce, and the idea soon spread further afield. Special hymns were written just for Harvest time, and readings, linked to the harvest theme, initially from the Bible, were chosen. Traditionally, Harvest festivals and services of Harvest Thanksgiving were held on the Sunday closest to the Harvest Moon, the Full Moon nearest to the Autumn Equinox. This year, Harvest Moon was last night, just 3 days after the Equinox, and was a glorious sight if any of you were lucky enough to see it.

Harvest Festival is still a favourite occasion in many denominations, including Unitarians. There are no commemorations of tragic events, nothing bad happens, there is just unbridled joy at the wonder and beauty and bounty 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 this morning's readings. In some of them, the celebratory theme is strong, but they are more than mere sentimental wallowings. They give us food for thought too. Sure, they celebrate the beauty and bounty of autumn, with images of many foods and drink, aplenty, almost to excess, as in the poem Gill read... "Huge golden pumpkins heaps of corn from a bounteous yield golden apples heavy on the trees".

In 'Apples' Delphine reads about windfalls, as being too many to save, and in the poem Margaret read, 'The Reapers' by Anon, that most prolific of writers (!) they are merrily singing their thanks for the summer sun and the freely sent rain and the last ripe load of grain brought to 'golden

perfection'. This year, however, there was maybe a little too much sun and too little rain, resulting in reduced yields of not only apples, but also in other crops, especially the grain harvest, up to 25% reduction.

That is similar to last year, when the rains came too late to swell the grain of wheat and barley. Already we are feeling the effects of Climate Change and different crops may have to be found to fill the gaps as this trend continues over successive seasons.

There are lessons about caring for the world entrusted to us. In the story Stephen read, about Raju the farmer, his city dweller son wanted him to stop farming and move to the city because he saw his father's fields, his land, as a burden. The old man asks for one last chance and his love for the land, shown in his hard work and perseverance, shines through, resulting in a wondrous crop, winning his son round. The moral is: True success is not in money, but in loving your work and respecting your roots. When you give your heart to something, success will always follow.

So, 'Harvest Festival UK' if you like, is far more than just a seasonal celebration — it's a reflection of deep-rooted traditions, communal gratitude, and the enduring relationship between people and the land. Whether marked with a hymn in a rural church, or an inner city one, a basket of donations in a school hallway, or a quiet homemade supper with loved ones, the harvest festival remains a powerful reminder of the value of sharing, the joy of community, and the rhythms of nature that continue to guide us.

By honouring these customs, we not only pay tribute to those who came before us but also build stronger, more compassionate communities for the future.

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. 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!

We know what to do, let's do it! If each one of us, as a member of this Eco Church, can do a few small things, like being more careful in our use of energy and water- I'm **not** saying don't use what you need, just don't waste it! Reducing our use of plastics, recycling, reusing. Composting our food waste, or put it in the local council food waste bins – thank you PCC for introducing this after many years of campaigning! Think globally, act locally. Little actions add up, especially if you persuade your friends and neighbours to do likewise.

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 appalling events in many places, where innocent people: civilians, journalists, aid workers and even medical staff have been injured or killed. 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, and we now host regular small interfaith gatherings. These grew out of the larger 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. Eating food is one of the few things common to all human experience. What type of food we eat and how readily available it is to us may vary widely. But we all eat. 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 our society, the meals on our table have arrived through the contribution of many different people, working in a variety of environments. The food chain involves farmers or fishermen, processors, retailers and those who purchase and prepare the food we eat. It is important that we reconnect ourselves with these realities. Food production and matters of justice in agriculture are global issues.

For us all, harvest is a reminder of the basic humble elements of soil, water and grain on which we all depend, and the fruits of which we should share with those less fortunate not only at this time, but throughout the year. Harvest is also a wonderful opportunity to connect in people's minds the growing focus in our society on environment, health and food with our spiritual lives. It gives us a wonderful opportunity to talk about the production and consumption of local food. It is an opportunity to give thanks for all the wonderful gifts of creation and to reconnect with our place as stewards of that creation. It is also an opportunity to pray for and with the farming community, many of whom are struggling to make a living in today's global economic climate.

Third world and Fair Trade issues at harvest time appeal to our sense of justice. They make rational sense and rightly pull on our heart-strings. In our service on Fair Trade last week, we saw how our support in buying FT goods, can help our far away neighbours to live better lives, whatever time of year their harvests may be. Quite a few times in our display today are FT, including tea, coffee and some of the beautiful flowers on the table, kindly bought by Gill. We are ***sharing some of our worldly wealth*** to help others..

And 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 our 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: Gn 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: “As autumn returns to earth's northern hemisphere”
From ‘Autumn Lore’ by Kathleen Jenks**

As autumn returns to earth's northern hemisphere,
and day and night are briefly,
but perfectly,
balanced at the equinox,
may we remember anew how fragile life is ----
human life, surely,
but also the lives of all other creatures,
trees and plants,
waters and winds.

May we make wise choices in how and what we harvest,
may earth's weather turn kinder,
may there be enough food for all creatures,
may the diminishing light in our daytime skies
be met by an increasing compassion and tolerance
in our hearts

Extinguish Chalice

Closing video Closing video: ‘Harvest of Old’

<https://youtu.be/RUyItIR7jL0?si=ceW8Gsi9OApGU0R7>