



Preaching Harvest

Generosity and gratitude

The lectionary provides a number of reading options for a harvest thanksgiving service, to be held at an appropriate moment in the church's year. These notes provide ideas and input which could be adapted for your context - a 5 minute reflection, or quotes and illustrations for a longer sermon. Liturgical resources for Holy Communion or a Service of the Word are provided here.



Deuteronomy 8.7-18 ~ Psalm 65 ~ Luke 12.16-30 ~ 2 Corinthians 9.6-15
Deuteronomy 28.1-14 ~ Luke 17.11-19

What does a fruitful day look like for you?

Our congregations will be full of people who live and work in a variety of different contexts, paid and unpaid. Some may work in agriculture, or be keen gardeners, and a fruitful day will come in the form of harvest. Others will have different answers. A teacher, parent or carer sows seeds of patient, empathetic sharing, and their harvest is a child's delighted face of understanding or accomplishment. An accountant's investment of careful, diligent work on a spreadsheet yields wise decisions in a meeting. A sportsperson's hard early morning training sessions bear fruit in strength, speed and agility when it counts.

Starting a conversation with a diverse congregation about what harvest means to them brings the celebration up-to-date and down-to-earth, true to your context. It can also invite grateful reflection on what we have each received, and how God invites us to partner with Him, sowing and reaping, bearing fruit for His kingdom.

Jesus' questions

Jesus tells parables in order to activate His listener's engagement – sometimes through laughter, sometimes through puzzlement, sometimes through surprise. In the parable in Luke 12.16-30 He asks a couple of questions that could spark the imagination of those who hear.

The first question is asked by a rich man following a bumper harvest. “**What shall I do?**” he asks himself. “I don't have anywhere to store all my crops”. **Preachers could pause at this question** – perhaps Jesus did – and see if anyone has any ideas to answer the rich man.

You might even want to arrange a visual illustration – two volunteers, one being loaded up with more and more things to carry, and the second empty handed. Does anyone in the congregation have any suggestions about what the first volunteer might do?



Jesus is speaking to a crowd of thousands here, as well as one discontented questioner. There would have been many subsistence farmers among them. A practical response – “storage!” – makes a lot of sense. Perhaps many of us would have the same instinct.

But, as is so often the case, there’s a twist in the tale that Jesus is telling. And there’s another question, which gives His listeners pause. God asks the rich man “**who will get what you have prepared for yourself?**”

The economy of Jesus’ kingdom is different from that of the world. God holds eternity in His hands, and in His reign, there is always enough. An earthly mindset of scarcity leads to an instinct to hoarding, like the rich man. It can lead to conflict and envy, like that of the questioner who provoked Jesus’ story. But the generosity of God means we’re invited to live with a mindset of confidence in God’s abundance – so our instincts turn naturally towards giving and sharing.

This five minute video from the Bible Project sets out a picture of God’s kingdom as a party, with God as the generous host.

It makes the good point that Jesus himself lived with the reality of poverty and oppression. He didn’t have rose-tinted spectacles about the realities of life on earth. But his fundamental orientation was to trust in God the Father. So he told stories like this one, which invite open-handed gratitude and generosity in response to all that God has given in creation.



So how else might we answer Jesus’ first question today? In response to all that God has given us, all the fruit we celebrate at harvest, **what shall we do?**

The reading from Deuteronomy 8 offers one suggestion: “when you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you” (Deut 8.10).

Gratitude points back to the Lord of the Harvest, the One from whom all good things come. In the narrative in Luke 17, a Samaritan, healed of leprosy, is the only one of ten men who return to Jesus to give thanks. Jesus tells him “your faith has made you well”. This is faith revealed and fuelled by gratitude.

Gratitude in good times is an antidote to pride, cheerfully celebrating the God who gives generously to all. **Gratitude in hard times is an antidote to despair**, a reminder of the faithfulness of God to His promises. It checks the worry that Jesus counsels against in Luke 12.22, cultivating trust and hope. **Gratitude throughout life is an antidote to forgetfulness** – “remember the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 8.18) – fuelling faith in God’s generosity and character.



What does it look like to be rich towards God? (verse 21)

I’ve recently noticed an advertisement with the strapline ‘shop like a billionaire’. The advertisers are asking me to imagine shopping with a billionaire’s freedom from worry, able to say yes to every impulse! Perhaps not the healthiest attitude to shopping - but how might I be like a billionaire to God? Saying yes to every nudge from His Spirit? Non-anxiously offering generosity and hospitality, knowing it is His faithfulness I lean on? Offering my time, talents, and treasures without concern about running out?



This harvest resource from the Bible Reading Fellowship offers households and families a fun way of bringing together generosity and gratitude. Counting items in the house and giving in proportion to what you find fills a week with a practice of giving and thanksgiving.

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”

The reading from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians comes in the context of a longer story. The Corinthian church had apparently begun a regular practice of setting aside some money for the poorer, Jerusalem church – a practice of both love and unity. However, it seems they’d got out of the habit, and Paul writes to encourage them in what he calls “this grace of giving” (8v7). He encourages them not by emphasising the need of the receiving church, but by pointing to what he sees as the real fruit of generosity – an overflow of thanksgiving and praise (9v12-13), and a growth of loving relationship between churches in very different communities (v14).

Sam Wells writes: “From Benedict we learn that money is never fundamentally a device for avoiding dependence on one another, but should always be ultimately a means for discovering our need of one another... Resurrection economics mean using money to make relationships, not using relationships to make money.”* This seems to be the spirit with which Paul was encouraging the Corinthian church.

Money, brought into the rule and reign of Jesus, is creative, here building a relationship. Willie James Jennings writes “Money not placed under the reign of God does not stay neutral for very long”**. John Wesley said something similar “The problem is not possessing wealth, but possessing more than is employed according to God’s will.”***



Paul also doesn’t write to motivate the church by guilt. Instead, he is making an invitation based on confidence in God. “God is able!” he says in v8. He overflows with thanksgiving: “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (v15)

As many commentators note, where Paul encourages the church that “God loves a cheerful giver” (9v7), the word translated ‘cheerful’ is “hilaros”, from which the English “hilarious” comes. What spirit of confidence and faith could encourage our ‘hilarious’ giving? Studies show that generosity makes the giver happier – so this is a self-fulfilling prophecy! As one commentator notes, *planned* giving frees up cheerfulness – worry is caused by anxious, last minute scrabbling around for what is left over. You might want to refer to the ways in which your church enables planned, regular giving - through the Parish Giving Scheme, standing orders, or envelopes.

Similarly, as Raymond Adams notes, perhaps the phrase “fundraising efforts” is not a surprising one - these projects can feel exhausting and the exact opposite of cheerful giving! He notes from this passage that giving should be personal (“each of you”), private (“not under compulsion”), planned (“what you have decided”) and prayerful.****

An enacted confession from givinggrace.org

Invite people to hold out both hands as if receiving something:

Dear God, thank you for giving us so much to enjoy in our lives and in our church.

Forgive us when we are ungrateful and when we complain.

Invite people to clasp both hands together tightly:

Dear God, sometimes we want to hold very tightly to all the things we have.

Forgive us when we are greedy and when we are mean.

Invite people to turn hands towards the floor and open as if letting go of something:

Dear God, we want to use all that we have to help other people.

Forgive us when we are selfish and when we forget to care.

* Wells, Sam (2009) ‘The Resurrection of Economics’, preached at Duke University. <https://chapel-archives.oit.duke.edu/documents/sermons/April19TheResurrectionofEconomics.pdf>

** Jennings, William James (2017), *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

*** Wesley, John (1872) ‘Sermon 87: The Danger of Riches’. <http://wbbm.org/john-wesley-sermons/serm-087.htm>

**** Find Raymond Adam’s series of short videos, and more, at <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/building-generous-church/webinars-and-training/generosity-learning-hub>

Some all age and visual ideas



Tasting challenge!

Invite volunteers to taste a variety of foods (check for dietary restrictions first!) and guess the seeds that made them:

- Wheat that made bread.
- Rice that made rice cakes.
- Corn that made popcorn.
- Chocolate that came from cocoa beans!

Ask - what might grow from seeds of generosity and gratitude?

The four corners of God's love

From Revd Ally Barrett



Start with a large square or rectangular piece of paper, and announce that this is the four corners of God's love. Say, 'It's my piece of paper, so it's the four corners of God's love for me.' Count them out to make sure.

Ask, 'What would happen if I cut off one of my corners and gave it away? I have four, but if I gave one away, how many would I have?' You may get the answer, 'three'.

Cut off one corner, give it to someone in the congregation, and count your corners again. You have five! You had four, you gave one away, and you have five. And the other person has three. That's eight whole corners of God's love!

Try it again with another corner. And get one of the recipients to try it with one of their corners etc. Keep counting up the new total of corners until everyone loses count.

Reflect on generosity, abundance, giving, God's providence, blessings given and received....

Encourage everyone to take their 'corner' home as a reminder.

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Telling the story together

This QR code links to a script from the BRF for a creative retelling of this parable in the style of This is the House that Jack Built...

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...



HARVEST words



This QR code links to an idea from Daisy Barnes, at Roots on the Web, to use the seven letters HARVEST to form a series of shorter words. The congregation is at the end encouraged to find the word SHARE.