

## CREATION TIME

### AN ALL AGE SERVICE FOR HARVEST

### THE FESTIVAL OF SHELTERS

## Online Worship: Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October

**Introductory music:** We plough the fields and scatter

### Welcome

Good morning and welcome to our time of worship this morning, shared with the members of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC and those who join us from far and wide as we worship at home, with family or on our own. You are all most welcome.

This is a Harvest service with a difference. Traditionally held in autumn to make us aware of how many good things God has given us, it also makes us aware of how often we fail to take care of the world around us as we come to the end of Creation time. Today, we meet together to celebrate the harvest; we will be thinking about the Festival of Shelters – the festival God instructed his people to hold each year at the end of the fruit harvest.

Let's take a moment, before the celebrations begin, to be still before God and prepare ourselves for worship.

### *Silence*

Prayer: However busy we may be, may there be moments to think, to pray, to hear God's voice and know his presence within and beside each of us, through this and every day. Amen

One of the instructions for the Festival of Shelters was for people to enjoy themselves. Let us begin by joining in together for our call to worship, saying the words in bold with exuberance!

### Call to worship

The land has yielded its harvest: God, our God has blessed us.  
(Psalm 67:6)

Leader: The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it  
**All: Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice**  
(x2)

Our hymn is a traditional Harvest hymn – Come, ye thankful people, come. Some of the images in the hymns are of the harvest gifts collected by the congregations of the two churches. Let's sing this with thankful and joyful voices.

**Hymn:** **Come, ye thankful people, come** *Small Church music*

1. 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.
2. All the world is God's own field,  
Fruit unto His praise to yield;  
Wheat and tares together sown,  
Unto joy or sorrow grown;  
First the blade, and then the ear,  
Then the full corn shall appear:  
Lord of harvest, grant that we  
Wholesome grain and pure may be.
3. For the Lord our God shall come,  
And shall take His harvest home;

From His field shall in that day  
All offences purge away;  
Give His angels charge at last  
In the fire the tares to cast;  
But the fruitful ears to store  
In His garner evermore.

4. Even so, Lord, quickly come,  
Bring Thy final harvest home;  
Gather Thou Thy people in,  
Free from sorrow, free from sin,  
There, forever purified,  
In Thy garner to abide;  
Come, with all Thine angels come,  
Raise the glorious harvest home.

### Prayers of Thanksgiving, confession and Lord's Prayer

We come now to our prayers of thanksgiving & confession and will join in the Lord's prayer together. Let us pray.  
Living God, creator of all that is, and has been, and shall be, we thank you for this glad season and this special day.  
You have blessed us with so much.

We thank you for our world with all its rich and wonderful variety,  
For your gift of life constantly being renewed by your loving hand,  
For all you have made to grow and flourish around us, all that provides our food and clothing, all the bountiful resources of this astonishing planet.  
You have blessed us with so much.

We thank you for those to whom we owe this harvest –  
Workers on farms and in agriculture, sailors and fishermen who risk their lives on the seas,  
Miners and engineers who help supply the raw materials for industry,  
Scientists and technicians who help develop better crops,

Employees in shops and factories who work to satisfy our demands.  
You have blessed us with so much.

Living God, help us to appreciate all so many do to bring us the fruits of creation,  
And teach us the part we must play in ensuring future generations can enjoy it in turn.  
Teach us to use your gifts wisely, responsibly, effectively, so that nothing may be needlessly wasted or foolishly squandered.  
You have blessed us with so much

Help us to remember those who do not share equally in the rewards of harvest –  
The poor, the hungry, the homeless, the oppressed, those overwhelmed by disaster, and those whose crops have failed.  
Save us, we pray, from selfish indulgence, looking to our comforts and ignoring their needs.  
Inspire us to share from our plenty with all who cry out for help.  
You have blessed us with so much.

Gracious God, forgive us when we fail to notice the light of sunrises and sunsets, the healing sounds of flowing water, and the beauty that surrounds us. Stay with us, God, when we fail to listen to your voice, leading and guiding us. May your grace encompass us when we fail to love as you would have us love. Amen.

### Assurance of Pardon

Be assured that God loves you, always has and always will. In that assurance may you find peace.

*Silence*

As followers of Jesus, let us pray with confidence as he taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;**

**thy will be done,  
in earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those that trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen**

Our first reading this morning is from the Book of Leviticus, which gives the instructions for the Festival of Shelters. While this is read to you, do listen out for what the people were asked to do, in addition to being happy.

**Reading: Leviticus 23:33-43**

33The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 34 Speak to the people of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths to the Lord. 35The first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. 36Seven days you shall present the Lord's offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a holy convocation and present the Lord's offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations. 37These are the appointed festivals of the Lord, which you shall celebrate as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the Lord offerings by fire—burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day— 38apart from the sabbaths of the Lord, and apart from your gifts, and apart from all your votive offerings, and apart from all your freewill offerings, which you give to the Lord. 39Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of the Lord, lasting seven days; a complete rest on the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day. 40On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. 41You shall keep it as a festival to the Lord seven

days in the year; you shall keep it in the seventh month as a statute forever throughout your generations. 42You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, 43so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

### **The Festival of Shelters:**

I imagine many of you have slept outside, on camping trips, with family or friends or with uniformed organisations like the Scouts or Guides.

The centre piece of the Festival of Shelters (called Sukkot in Hebrew) is the construction of a simple temporary shelter. Jewish families construct such a shelter outside their homes which stays up for the whole week - long celebration of the Feast. In warmer climates families will live in the shelter for the whole week. By tradition, the roof of the shelter must have gaps so that the stars can be seen. This is intended as a reminder of the promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. We have a more modern shelter here to help us remember God's generosity and how he supplies our needs, which we are going to prepare as if we were a family preparing for the festival.

Let's add the cushions for our family to rest on and a blanket for comfort, for those days of complete rest. And here we have palm branches, hop bines and tree branches to fulfil the instructions given, to decorate the booth. We can string fruits and flowers too. Inside. We'll place a small table inside with, a candle, some bread and wine & more fruit and flowers ready for the family celebrations. We are ready to celebrate and listen together to a poem related to the Festival.

### **Poem: Under the Lemon Tree by Jan Sutch Protchard**

Under the lemon tree  
There is a table spread;  
A place of hospitality and breaking bread.  
From the garden, ripe fruit;

Pomegranate, fig and pear;  
Round the table, friends meet,  
Blessed to be there.  
Fresh olive oil, Soul food,  
Sweet pastries to share;  
O taste and see that God is good;  
Know that God is here.

Our second reading is from the Gospel of John. We give special thanks to the young people from Fleet URC for recording our readings today

### **Reading: John 7:37-39**

37On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,  
38and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" 39Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

### **Celebrating the Feast of Shelters**

'On the last day of the festival, the great day'. The Feast of the Shelters continues to be celebrated by the Jewish community around the world. One of the instructions for the festival was for everyone to enjoy themselves. It's good to think that Jesus, his family and his disciples would have joined in this particular festival and to think of them enjoying its tradition and a time of celebration. And there are 3 'R's( not the ones you might think of – reading, writing and arithmetic!) that come out of the reasons the Festival was held

Rejoice (Leviticus 23:40) This does not mean just being happy, but 'rejoicing before the Lord your God' – being happy with and because of God. In our singing and preparation of the shelter to participate in

this traditional celebration of the harvest, may we be happy with and because of God.

Remember (verses 42-43) The Shelters were to be reminders of the time the Israelites were in the desert moving from place to place. It might seem more like something to forget! But God wanted them to remember where they had begun – in the desert & this bowl of sand is a symbol of that time in the desert. We too remember our first steps in our journey with God.

Rely (verses 42-43) Why should the people remember the time in the desert at harvest festival? When we are comfortable it is easy to give God a lower place in our lives. In the desert the Israelites had to learn that they depended on God for everything they needed to live. We too need to remember that we rely on God for everything. At harvest we especially remember that we rely on him for our food and material needs. Each Communion service we remember what God has done for us in Jesus and that we rely on him for forgiveness and new life.

### **Our Harvest gifts**

The Festival of Shelters follows after the harvesting of fruit through the summer – grapes, olives, dates and figs. Our harvest fruits this year are those collected for the Food Banks, both by the members of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC. Lockdown and the impact of furlough and redundancy have put a real strain on Food banks, so these donations will be invaluable in the work they do. Thank you.

We also have one of the boxes prepared by Bridget Mitchell from contributions of the congregation at Beacon Hill for Link to Hope – a charity we support each year that takes our Shoeboxes for the **Elderly & Family Shoeboxes** of gifts, those who often have to make a choice between buying food or fuel at Christmas time – buying presents is just not a priority. Many of these families do not have running water, heating or electricity. Some live in appalling conditions, often living in just one or two rooms, and life for them is

a real struggle to survive. A shoebox for a family means that everyone receives a gift.

Let's now thank God for the harvest, for the generosity of giving shown here: the fruits of our Festival. Let us pray.

### Dedication of Harvest gifts

We bring before you our modest gifts, like tiny seeds, not knowing what fruits you may bring out of them.

We wait before you, asking that our hands and gifts, offered in your service, will make a difference to the world beyond all our imaginings. In the name of Jesus Amen.

### Prayers of Intercession

There is a response in our Prayers of Intercession this morning when I say: May your peace be in our land;  
Please respond by saying **your presence in our hearts**

We pray to the Lord, saying  
May your peace be in our land; **your presence in our hearts**

At this Harvest Festival, we rejoice in your goodness to us. We pray for those for whom waiting for harvest is a time of tension and anxiety in case the rains don't come; for those whose land is stolen or exploited for the profits of a few or ripped apart by war. As you provided for your wandering people in the desert, so meet the needs of the hungry.

May your peace be in our land; **your presence in our hearts**

At this Harvest Festival your people of Israel build shelters to remember your salvation from Egypt and the hope that is still to come. Grant that both our homes and our church may be places where we remember your salvation in Jesus and grow to be all that you want us to be. We pray for those at this time whose homes know hurt, sadness, poverty or betrayal  
May your peace be in our land; **your presence in our hearts**

At this Harvest Festival we know that we rely on you for all that we have and all that we will be. We rejoice at the fruits you have had the chance to share today. Teach us never to take your gifts for granted nor to turn those gifts into possessions. Grant us the grace to be generous with all you have given to us: our time, talents and our treasure.

We pray for those who are finding it hard to trust at this time or are in difficult circumstances. For those struggling with the restrictions as we try to overcome the impact of the rise in instances of Covid19 worldwide and in this country.

Especially we pray for our young people, and for the sick  
We pray also for those who have lost a loved one at this time.

*Silence*

May your peace be in our land; **your presence in our hearts**  
**Amen**

### Closing Prayer & Blessing:

Today we have remembered that we rely on God for our food and material needs and rejoiced together, in collecting donations for the Food Banks in our communities & celebrating Harvest time during our festival to remember. Let us pray:

Lord of the Harvest, who has given us so much;  
Help us to be generous like you, that the world may know your goodness and blessing.  
And may the blessing of God, Maker, Son and Holy Spirit,  
Remain on us, and be known through us, now and always. **Amen**

**Closing music:** You shall go out with joy (*Worship Cloud*)

Materials adapted from Scripture Union All Age Service Manual vol 4

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