

A HARVEST SERVICE

(a service adapted from "Ruth's Harvest" by Tim Alred, Wild Goose Pubs, www.ionabooks.com)

Gathering Music

Welcome/Announcements

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Holy Spirit of God,

All: WE INVITE YOU AMONG US.

Leader: As we come to celebrate your harvest and to pray for your justice,

All: WE ASK YOU TO BRING YOUR PEACE.

Leader: So that the quiet place inside us may speak,

All: IN STILLNESS MAY WE BE AT ONE WITH YOU. AMEN

(Silence)

Leader: As we prepare for worship now, our lives may be tangled with thorns,
Thorns of failure and sadness, Tangles of studies and demands of church.

**All: LORD, CUT AWAY THE THORNS THAT WOUND AND CHOKE.
FREE US TO LIVE AND TO GROW IN YOUR LIGHT.**

***OPENING HYMN (UMH) 139 "Praise to the Lord"**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Leader: God's world is an island of life and beauty – warmed by the sun.

Below us lies melting rock, above us stretches the universe.

We live on this small space of soil, water and air,

In which we share our lives together, and is alive with the Holy Spirit,

Upon which Jesus lived, died and rose again,

From which God's harvest comes.

All: GOD, WE THANK YOU FOR OUR HOME ON EARTH.

WE THANK YOU FOR OUR LIVES TOGETHER.

WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR LOVE AND CARE.

WE THANK YOU FOR THE HARVEST.

ANTIPHONAL READING: WHAT IS HARVEST?

Left side: What is harvest? Harvest is a time of hope:

We have bread, warmth and shelter, enough for tomorrow.

Right side: What is harvest? Harvest is a time of fear:

Our crops have failed, jobs are lost, a hard winter is ahead.

Left side: What is harvest? Harvest is a time of plenty:

We receive with joy the gifts from God.

Right side: What is harvest? Harvest is a time of empty shelves:

We work the fields and factories but now go without what we need to survive.

Left side: What is God's harvest? Plough the fields and scatter the seed:

Scraps on the table and a tin of beans for charity?

Right side: What is God's harvest? God's harvest is justice lived out with joy:

Food and fairness, enough for today and tomorrow.

**All: FOR GOOD HARVESTS, WE BLESS YOU, LORD.
WHERE HARVESTS FAIL, WE CRY OUT TO YOU, LORD.
WHEN WE ARE FULL, INSPIRE US TO ACT.
WHEN WE ARE EMPTY, FILL US WITH YOUR HOLY SPIRIT.**

SCRIPTURE READING: Ruth 1:8–18

A HARVEST STORY

(based on the Book of Ruth, this drama can be acted or read straight through, or different verses could be read from each chapter or a Hymn...)

3 Readers: Boaz: a man of means;

Naomi: an older widow; Ruth: a young foreign widow

This reading uses verses of UMH 694 “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come”

CHAPTER 1 (voices come from within the congregation) ...

Ruth: She didn't want me to come, she made that clear. But where would I go? Back to my parents? Another mouth to feed; soiled goods for the marriage market. Besides, I made my vow. She is my mother now, and I am her daughter.

UMH 694 (verse 1) “Come, ye thankful people, come...”

CHAPTER 2 ... (readings end with Naomi's voice)

Naomi: She was gone so long ... from dawn till dusk she was gone. But she came back with thirteen kilos of barley! Enough to keep us both for a few weeks. But this hand-to-mouth life is no life. Is this our lot until we die?

UMH 694 (verse 2) “All the world is God's own field...”

CHAPTER 3 ... (readings end with Naomi)

Naomi: It is a risk, and hard on Ruth. But I have to make a hard choice. We can't live on handouts much longer.

UMH 694 (verse 3) “For the Lord our God shall come...”

CHAPTER 4 ... (ends with Ruth) ...

Ruth: That was the harvest: that God welcomed me to a new home.

UMH 694 (verse 4) “Even so, Lord, quickly come...”

[READ: The story of Ruth is a Harvest story. Naomi and her daughters in law, Orpah and Ruth, face problems because of their gender and because they are poor. Boaz faces problems for offering protection to a foreign woman.

Both Boaz and Naomi show concern and reach out to Ruth. Her poverty means that she has no choice but to do work that puts her at risk. Even today people living in poverty have very few choices.

The story of Ruth draws our attention to the rights of poor people. Even today their right to fair treatment is not always met with respect. Many times they are blamed for being poor and judged for their inability to resolve their situation.

Ruth, Naomi and Boaz respond in different ways to what they face. In Ruth's story, we see the realities of poverty, the calls of duty and responsibility, and great acts of compassion and love. Both Ruth and Boaz link their actions to their faith. The question for us to ponder is how do we respond to need or injustice, what inspires or motivates us to action? What kind of support do we need in order to respond to the rights of oppressed people?

It is harvest time - what does that mean for us? What is God's harvest and how do we show our thanks?

What are some of your own examples of what God's harvest is about? For me 'God's harvest is justice and peace'; What does God's harvest mean to you?

WAIT FOR RESPONSES ... 'God's harvest is an end to sadness']

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION: WHAT IS GOD'S HARVEST?

Ruth, Naomi and Orpah were destitute, in need of refuge:

We pray for refugees and an end to poverty.

MERCY FILLED GOD, BRING US YOUR HARVEST OF JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Ruth was a foreigner, of the 'wrong' religion and race:

We pray for an end to war and the hatred that feeds it.

BRING US YOUR HARVEST OF JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Ruth, Naomi and Orpah were women, with fewer rights than men.

We pray for an end to discrimination and the violence it feeds.

BRING US YOUR HARVEST OF JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Boaz had power – land, money and authority:

We pray for all who hold power in our complex world.

BRING US YOUR HARVEST OF JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Ruth, Naomi and Orpah were grieving: We pray for an end to suffering.

BRING US YOUR HARVEST OF JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Ruth found a home with Naomi and Boaz:

May we find community between us and a home with you.

LORD, WE LONG FOR YOUR HARVEST.

WE ARE READY TO WORK IN YOUR FIELDS,

BRING US YOUR HARVEST OF JUSTICE AND PEACE,

AND MAKE YOUR HARVEST GROW. AMEN

HYMN (UMH) 131 "We Gather Together"

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

Leader: With our prayers, we commit ourselves to the service of God and all people, in the words Ruth said to Naomi:

All: Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people.

Leader: When I am stripped of power,

When I am grieving, when I am poor, when I am a refugee:

All: May I trust in your promise, may I know your joy,

May I meet you in others and learn that your harvest is for all.

Leader: When I am powerful, when I am celebrating,

When I am at home, when I am rewarded:

All: May I trust in your promise, may I know your joy,

May I meet you in others, may I show that your harvest is for all.

**CLOSING HYMN UMH 102 "Now Thank We All Our God"*

**BLESSING*

May the love we have for God
Become ever deeper and wider
May the busyness of our lives and the cares of our hearts
Give way to the light of God
May God's harvest come home with us as soon as we finish these classes and write these papers.

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A HARVEST STORY

(based on the Book of Ruth, this can be acted or read straight through, or different chapters could be interspersed in a service or workshop)

3 readers: Boaz: a man of means;

Naomi: an older widow; Ruth: a young foreign widow

With verses of UMH 694 "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come"

CHAPTER 1: A village near Bethlehem, over three thousand years ago ...

Boaz: I'm starting the harvest tomorrow. I've got large fields, so I've hired in men to help out. The barley looks good! I'll be fine for the winter, and I'll have plenty to sell.

Naomi: Naomi means 'beautiful' – did you know that? Can you believe it? I was beautiful once, I suppose, but then my man died, and then my sons. Me and their barren, heathen widows left to fend for ourselves. Crawling back here to our old shack with my tail between my legs, and an enemy in tow – yes, I know what they say in the village. 'Bitter' is more like it. Yes, call me 'Bitter', that's a better name.

Ruth: She didn't want me to come, she made that clear. But where would I go? Back to my parents? Another mouth to feed; soiled goods for the marriage market. Besides, I made my vow. She is my mother now, and I am her daughter.

UMH 694 (verse 1) "Come, ye thankful people, come..."

CHAPTER 2

Boaz: The sun is up, the grain is ripe. A good choice for a harvest day!

Naomi: I've got our old plot, but it's overgrown with thorns. No time to plant before harvest, even if I had money for seed. If we're to get through winter I'll have to sell up. There's no choice.

Ruth: Naomi says the poor can take what the reapers leave behind – I must do it, I'm young, I can work. But I'm afraid of the men. I've seen the way they look at me; I've heard the cat calls: fair game, they're thinking. But no harvesting, no food. There's no choice.

Boaz: I've heard about this one at the tavern – I should have guessed Naomi would send her to glean. She's got some guts, that one, doing her duty by Naomi, coming right into the lion's den – no way back to her people now. Not much welcome for foreigners round here; memories are long.

Ruth: He warned off the labourers who were eyeing me up, and let me work in safety with the women. He let me share the food at lunchtime, and even called on his God – my God now, I suppose – to bless me. But something else happened today. Just for a moment, I didn't feel like a foreigner.

Naomi: She was gone so long ... from dawn till dusk she was gone. But she came back with

thirteen kilos of barley! Enough to keep us both for a few weeks. But this hand-to-mouth life is no life. Is this our lot until we die?

UMH 694 (verse 2) "All the world is God's own field..."

CHAPTER 3

Boaz: All is safely gathered in! And we had a good party to celebrate. They need to let off some steam I guess. What happens on the threshing floor stays on the threshing floor ...

Ruth: I don't want to go to the threshing floor. I know what it makes me look like. A young widow coming in the night to where the men are sleeping off the booze.

Naomi: It is a risk, and hard on Ruth. But I have to make a hard choice. We can't live on handouts much longer.

UMH 694 (verse 3) "For the Lord our God shall come..."

CHAPTER 4

Reflecting, looking back after a period of time ...

Ruth: I know now that Naomi should have gone to plead our case: he's her relative, his duty was to her. Naomi told me to give myself to him there and then, but when he woke, I couldn't do it.

Boaz: I knew what she had come for. Or, I thought I did. But I was wrong. She asked for her rights. She claimed her rights to protection under God's law. I'd given her charity before, but now she asked for justice.

Naomi: I thought all men were the same. But I had misjudged him – he did his duty and more.

Ruth: He did not begrudge us justice, but delivered it with joy and wedded it to kindness.

Boaz: That was the harvest: that God brought me a new family.

Naomi: That was the harvest: that God reconciled me to my people.

Ruth: That was the harvest: that God welcomed me to a new home.

UMH 694 (verse 4) "Even so, Lord, quickly come..."