**Harvest Service (Full)**

**THEME: LEAVING A LEGACY**

*Please cut ‘n paste, add, enhance etc. to make this service work for your context*

*A full, recorded video of this service is available on the* [*Commitment for Life website*](https://urc.org.uk/commitment-for-life/worship-commitment-for-life.html)

**Call to Worship**

Welcome and blessings to you as we share in this Harvest Service, that centres on the question of our legacy: what is the legacy we leave behind? So, as we go come in from the fields where we have been gathering a harvest for God, let us listen to, and share in, the call to worship from Ps. 65:

You tend the land and water it
**And the earth produces its abundance.**
You crown each year with your bounty,
**and our storehouses overflow with your goodness.**
The mountain meadows are covered with flocks
**and the valleys are filled with corn;**
Your people celebrate your boundless grace
**They shout for joy and sing.**

Let’s join together then and sing our first hymn that reminds us that the true harvest of God… is love

**HYMN**

**God is Love** (R&J 95) *download video of song here*

(*Choose an alternative hymn that best suits your context, congregation etc. This goes for all hymns, prayers, and stories here*)

**Join me in our prayers of approach and adoration**

God of the harvest. You are love. Your legacy is love. Your Legacy is Jesus. You fill us with the good things of the earth. We come now, setting aside all distraction, to adore and thank you for being God of the harvest. We come into your Presence with joy, exhilaration, and anticipation, to come and see what the Lord has done. Amen.

What do apples have to do with legacies, I wonder… Let’s find out!

**Children’s address: John Appleseed**

In Mark, Jesus says the kingdom of God is like seeds. The seed grows night and day. Harvest is a wonderful time. A time when we come to church and reflect on the beauty of God’s creation and say thank you to God for all the good things God has given us, like these apples for example. Do you like apples? When I cut this apple in half, we find pips, which are seeds.

These seeds remind me of a story about a man called John who liked apples so much, that wherever he went he would plant apple trees. Like this one here. Or, he would give away apple seeds, so people could plant their own trees and enjoy the apples as much as he did. Because, of how passionate John was about planting apple trees he became known as John Appleseed.

God wants each of us to be passionate about planting seeds of the Kingdom of God wherever we go. That is not just showing love but having a heart to give. God is a generous giver, just look around you at God’s creation. God holds nothing back, for giving is one of God’s love languages. As we give, we show what God’s heart is like to others.

John probably never got to see or taste the apples on all the trees that the people planted with his seeds, however, the trees and their apples remained long after him. They were his legacy. Legacy is like planting seeds in a garden that you never get to see. It’s about how you touch people’s lives.

Have you thought how you will bless your family, your community, your world when you are not here?

**A Legacy! A song by Roo Stewart** *(available on the* [*Commitment for Life website*](https://urc.org.uk/commitment-for-life/worship-commitment-for-life.html) *or you can download a copy here)*

Our reading is taken from Mark 10 verses 17-28

**Mark 10: 17-28**

*The Rich and the Kingdom of God*

**17**As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

**18**“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. **19**You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother.’[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=mark+10&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24608d)]”

**20**“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

**21**Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

**22**At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

**23**Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

**24**The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=mark+10&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24613e)] to enter the kingdom of God! **25**It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

**26**The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

**27**Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

**28**Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

**SERMON**

Harvest is a time of plenty – a yearly reminder of the goodness and faithfulness of God, and echo of Jesus reminding us to look at the birds of the air who neither sow nor reap, yet the Holy One loves and feeds them. This is a full dress rehearsal for the coming kingdom with its economics of abundance, and not scarcity.

Our reading in Mark 10 sees a man approaching Jesus and making a very bold claim: basically, he says to Jesus, you know: I’m blameless. I’ve kept the law since I was a boy. In fact, his opening line to Jesus is: ‘Good teacher: what must I do to inherit eternal life?’

Now we don’t quite know whether there was something inside the man - a niggling little voice whispering in his ear: not all is well in the state of Denmark; you need to sort out your life… That may be the case, but we suspect that his greeting “good teacher’ is possibly an attempt to flatter Jesus and get an equivalent response: ‘Ah yes, well, you too are very good.” This was the custom of the day, but Jesus does not fall for it. Jesus has a deeper message for him, and that is to tell him just how far away from the kingdom he is. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves!

‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’ asks the man. And Jesus’ answer is not actually straight forward: let’s look at it more closely:

‘You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother.’

Did you spot the discrepancy? Yes, Jesus adds a commandment that is not actually in the original, and that is: you shall not defraud.

All these I have kept since I was a boy,’ replies the man. And he absolutely believes this, at least on the surface, but there’s that niggling little voice saying not all is well in the state of Denmark.

So, Jesus has to reveal to the man the core problem: and that is his wealth. It is more difficult for a wealthy man to enter the kingdom than for a camel to walk through the eye of a needle.

In this encounter and also in a dozens more throughout the gospels, Jesus casts a light on the fundamental injustices of the economic system that was destroying communities across the region. This system was based on debt, interest, hierarchy, inequality, and various forms of slavery. The economics of ‘this world,’ says Jesus, have no place in the kingdom of God. This worldly system pushes wealth to the top. To be wealthy in this system, means that you have automatically exploited the poor.

Many theologians, commentators and pundits in the last 2000 years have tried to tone down the radical nature of Jesus’ attitude towards wealth. But this passage in Mark and a rich man and a camel, is really,

really difficult to explain away. Jesus’ meaning is clear: you cannot be wealthy and be a follower of Jesus at the same time.

And when we suddenly comprehend the meaning of this text, so plainly and clearly, well, I think it’s quite excruciating for those of us who are by all objective measurements, very wealthy. We are like the disciples who look at each other with great uncertainty: if that is the case, Jesus, who on earth can ever be saved?

In Matthew six Jesus confronts the world’s economy that is based on hoarding wealth. Jesus teaches us not to store up for ourselves treasures on earth. Hoarding wealth, he teaches, is allows the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. This system devastates the earth, because nothing remains sacred as everything gets turned into money. The earth and the poor then suffer the consequences of greed, pestilence, and mayhem brought about by the relentless logic of the marketplace.

And Jesus’ solution to the wealthy man is quite straight forward, although certainly not easy. Jesus invites the man to give away his wealth. Only then will he be in a position to be a true follower of Jesus.

That same invitation comes to you and to me today, and it is just as difficult. Not least because there are hundreds of prosperity gospel preachers urging you and me to give away our wealth – not for the benefit of the poor, as Jesus suggested – but to finance their ‘ministry.’

Neither is Jesus suggesting that penury and destitution are routes into God’s kingdom. No. You and I are caught up in the worlds’ economic system, and we have to accept that is very, very difficult to escape.

But the call to give away our wealth is the start of the journey. And, it’s easy for me to compare myself to Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk and think that I am not wealthy at all. But if I compare myself to some of our partners in Bangladesh, Zimbabwe or Nicaragua, then by virtue of living in the UK with all the benefits that accrue to me, not to mention that I exist within a system that privileges me because I am White, then I have to be honest and say, I am the rich man in Jesus’ story.

That means, I must find ways of sharing my wealth: my money, my skills, my advocacy, my influence, my voice to speak up when others have been forcibly silenced. This Harvest, Commitment for Life is encouraging all of us to think about our legacies. Leaving a legacy is one way to honour a lifetime of faithful action for justice. Leaving a gift in your Will is a special way for your values to live on. And so, after remembering your family and friends in your Will, please consider leaving a gift to your local church, to a favourite charity like Christian Aid, Global Justice Now, or to our global justice programme, Commitment for Life. A gift of whatever size will leave a lasting legacy for generations to come.

I hope and pray that during this harvest time, together we will leave a legacy of love for the most vulnerable in the world. Amen!

**Story from Nicaragua**

Angela’s coffee farm used to provide a good living for her family. But now she’s facing a crisis. The changing climate in Nicaragua means her coffee harvests are shrinking every year.

Too much rain and the coffee beans don’t ripen properly. Too much sun and the coffee beans can suffer from diseases. Coffee farmers used to lose only 5% of their crop. Now it is 30%.

Angela explained: ‘With climate change, the coffee suffers from many diseases and pests.

‘The sun has scorched the coffee beans, we cannot sell them and we're losing more every year because of climate change.

By supporting Commitment for Life this Harvest, (alt: By supporting Christian Aid this Harvest) through our prayers, actions, and generosity, we can help leave the world a better place. This change may not happen in our lifetimes, but we put our faith in the God of the unseen. We can think about leaving a gift in our Will. After remembering our family and friends, we can leave a gift in our Wills to make sure that the values we hold dear continue after our lifetime. Just as we act now to stop the climate crisis, so a gift left in our Will could leave a lasting legacy on our world for generations to come.

**Prayers of Intercession**

*God of the Harvest.*

*WE come to you with our prayers of intercession. We look around at our world today, and we notice how the world is dominated by wealthy, White men. Their legacy is the relentless privatisation of your freely given abundance. Their legacy is war and oppression. Their legacy is inequality. Their legacy is the destruction of communities, and the exploitation of the earth. Never have the followers of Jesus faced so many devastating challenges as we do now…*

*And so we pray: send you Spirit to renew the face of the earth. Send your Wisdom that we may find different path. Send your courage that we may leave the land of Egypt. Send your strength that we might rally on the railroad of liberation, that our legacy is not to remain stuck in systems of Empire, but to journey towards your Kingdom of love.* *We pray for our earth, our nations, our towns, our churches, and our families, that together we will harvest a legacy of peace, generosity, kindness, and love.*

*In all the names of the Holy One we pray.*

*Amen*

Join as we sing our final hymn: **For the beauty of the earth**

**Benediction**

May the God of the harvest leave a legacy of love in and through your life, and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now, and evermore. Amen