

Harvest plus BB/GB Dedication

The owner of the land comes looking for fruit but there was none. Nevertheless the gardener says he should give the tree another chance and he will make a special effort with the tree. He is a hopeful gardener, doing his very best to make the tree produce fruit.

I wonder what you think this story from Jesus is about? Ask for some ideas. Remember to hear and receive all ideas positively.

Jesus' stories are usually about God and God's relationship to us in some way. Perhaps God is coming looking to see whether our lives have produced a good harvest but God is disappointed? Yet this gardener, and therefore God, in love gives us another chance. Before the team is called in to dig us over, God waits a bit longer for the fruit to come!

Let me tell you about three special gardens, which between them hold the clue to how our lives can produce the fruit and the harvest that God is looking for.

There were once three gardens with three very different sorts of crops.
The fruit of the first garden I've got here. Show the bag of apples

I wonder what's your favourite variety of apple? There are so many to choose from nowadays – many from around the world. Some look tasty. Some look rather waxy! Some look as if they may be sweet but turn out rather sharp. Here are some apples to choose from the fruit garden. Invite some children and adults to taste a few of the apples and give their opinions

The second garden is very different. This garden produces olives. Show the bowl of olives. Who likes olives? Invite some children and adults to come and taste them and give their opinions. You may get a mixed response to this!

Well, these olives grow in gardens too and can be eaten. But they can also be crushed to make olive oil, which has many uses. So here are some olives to crush from this fruit garden.

The third garden is very different again. This garden produces grapes. It is a grape garden or vineyard, as it is more usually known. I wonder who likes grapes? Most people do and they are good for our health. They look good. They can be very sweet and tasty. Which is why we sometimes take grapes to people in hospital. Grapes help us get better. Here are grapes to cure. Invite some children and adults to taste the grapes.

So here are the three gardens and their three fruits.
With: apples to choose; olives to crush; grapes to cure.

Now in fact these three gardens all have one rather special gardener to look after them. All these three gardens are in the Bible and God is the faithful gardener.

The three gardens have a message for us for harvest about how God is faithful and how God wants to help us produce a harvest of good things in our lives.

1. The Apple Garden is there right at the beginning of the Bible story. It is the garden of choice...The Garden of Eden. God in love allowed us to choose whether to love him and know him or not, and we chose not to. God never wanted to force love on us and so it meant we chose what was bad for us and for our world. Christians take the mess of the world with its failed harvests and unfair trade seriously and we own up to the truth and it is us who have caused it, not God.

2. But God is faithful and does not leave us in the mess. Here is the olive garden next. It is a real garden in place and time and one where once God, in the form of Jesus, knelt to pray. It's called the Garden of Gethsemane – an olive garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Here Jesus chose to be crushed like the olives in that garden; crushed on the cross in our place for all the mess we caused. Jesus took on himself all the bad that we had brought into the world so we can have the opportunity of a new start, a clean sheet, a fresh beginning.

3. Which leads us on to the last garden, the grape garden. This is the garden Jesus used to describe how we can be different. In this garden Jesus says he is the main trunk of the tree and if we choose to belong to him, we can start producing the good fruit of the Spirit which we can see in Jesus: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control and faithfulness. Jesus described this garden to his disciples on the night before he died (see John 15). As we get linked up to Jesus and this grape garden – this vineyard – this is the way we can be different and produce a harvest of good things that can make us and the world the sort of place God intended it to be all along.