

Leviticus 19:9-16
1 John 3:16-24

St. John's Presbyterian Church
Devon, Pennsylvania
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First Sunday in Lent
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“Is It Not to Share Your Bread?”

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyards bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien:
I am the Lord your God. *Leviticus 19:9-10*

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help.
1 John 3:1.

Toward the end of our service today each of us will be offered a piece of bread. It symbolizes the broken body of Jesus, a body made whole and indestructible through the resurrection. Which means that as we take that bread into ourselves we too take on Jesus' indestructibility, through our faith in him.

Somewhere, to make that bread, a farmer plowed the land and sowed the seed. In God's providence, rain fell in just the right amount to nourish the grain and bring it to harvest. Wind-born, rain-born and earth-born elements like carbon, nitrogen and magnesium built each complex stem and kernel, spikelet and beard of wheat. Sunlight, in just the right proportion, fell upon the maturing grain. The great mechanical sickle of the harvester gathered it in and separated what we can use from what would be returned to mother earth. The miller processed the grain, the baker made it into bread. Others packaged and loaded and shipped and set it out on a shelf. Still others process what we throw away.

Now think of Jesus, the giver of bread, who is one with God the creator. The one who was planted in the womb of Mary, grew to maturity, was cut down, his life ground out under the millwheel of human hatred. Dead, buried, infused with the yeast of God's Spirit to rise and become a life giving nourishment to us.

When we take even a small piece of bread we hold up a microcosm of God's goodness, of life and the human community. Say a prayer when you eat bread.

Say a prayer for those who dream of the banquet of what we leave and discard. One third of the earth is well fed. One third is under fed and stays mostly hungry. One third is starving and dying. Of these one dies of hunger every 8 seconds—almost three hundred since we spoke our call to worship. If their deaths were here, by the end of March the entire Mainline would be wiped out. Hunger is more deadly worldwide than AIDS, malaria, and TB combined.

I cannot ever remember being deprived of food. Over the years I have fasted occasionally, but even then the knowledge that food awaited me at the end of my fast couldn't compare to the prospect of not anticipating anything to eat. In fact, the very act of fasting, with prayer, would lead me into a different zone of deeper spiritual awareness. Yet never have I experienced gnawing, relentless hunger. I suspect most of us have not.

So this places a different sort of challenge on me if I'm to be in solidarity with my very human brothers and sisters in the world who daily are starving. First I need to educate myself to the crisis. It begins by my understanding that while gas prices have dropped by over a third in

recent months, food prices in the un- and underdeveloped world have tripled. Largely this is because increasing amounts of grain product are being diverted to make biofuel supplements for us in the West. Just this last week, World Bank President Robert Zoellick said that if left unchecked, global food shortages could set the world back seven years in the fight against extreme poverty and global disease. I don't know what the implications of the recession are for those who have virtually nothing, but losing 1/3 or more of nothing sounds very scary indeed.

So I ask myself, what could I do?

- I could cut a picture out that works on my soul of someone desperate for food, and put it in a prominent place to remind myself regularly. Then I can also pray for that person. God knows that child.
- When I have an impulse to buy something—a book, for instance, I could forgo the purchase until I've finished reading two of the books I already have. I could donate \$10 to hunger relief, a part of what I've saved by not buying another. That sound like a good way to start Lent.
- I could donate the recyclables I currently give to a for profit company, especially aluminum cans and bottles.
- I could donate our old cell phones to a food relief agency that resells them.
- From the vegetable garden Jane and I plan for this spring, we plan to take a portion to Philabundance in the city, or to a local food bank that takes fresh produce.
- I can cut out one meal a week on a regular basis, and donate the \$8 toward hunger relief.
- I could volunteer in a food bank or soup kitchen.
- I could support or help create a local community garden that pledges a portion of its produce for the poor.
- I could solicit pledges from friends and family for every mile I walk, and give the proceeds toward hunger relief. I might call it "Nickel and dime them for life!"
- I could write a letter supporting legislation aimed at eradicating hunger.

Why should I do any of these things? Because I share the same humanity with everyone on earth. Every starving child, every hungering widowed mother, every father dying of aids, is a child of God, like me, born of the same breath of God. We are all kin, a human family. I must get involved because the unnecessarily wretched human suffering causes God to suffer, and so should cause me. I must get involved as surely it if one in need were my own Jane, or Carolyn or Katherine, or baby Ellie.

I must get involved because that's how God gets things done, through ordinary people like you and me. Gandhi once said, "To the millions who have to go without two meals a day, the only acceptable way in which God dare appear to them is food."

I must get involved because hunger is a justice issue more than an economic one. There is enough food to go around, it just doesn't get where it needs to go. Economists like Barbara Ward, some years ago, calculated that if development spending were to be increased by merely 5 percent of military spending, within ten years the basic food needs of all people on the planet could be met.

I must get involved because God placed the capacity for compassion in our hearts.

I must get involved because it serves Jesus, and his expectation of me: "Insofar as you did it to the least of these, you did it unto me." (Matthew ...).

I must get involved because I can. And if I were the one starving, I would expect a brother or sister who could, not to ignore me as my life drained away.

I must get involved because I am about to eat and drink at the table of the Lord. And not to share what I receive from Jesus, like the feeding of the 5,000, would be unconscionable.

Amen.