

Sunday, October 16, 2022 Pentecost 19 *“Buying without Price”*

Isaiah 55:1-3 James 2:14-17

Have you tired of your turkey and vegetable leftovers yet? For many people, last week was a day to enjoy a good wholesome meal with meat and vegetables and desserts. And of course there is often leftovers! The clever person is the one who can reuse the leftovers and make something taste incredible! We all know how important it is to use up the food due to the cost of everything right now and most of all not to waste the good food for which we are so grateful. We love food and as a church we really enjoy sharing in food and drinks and of course sweets and treats because of the friendships that develop over a timed share of eating. Often what is eaten is not important per se but the company shared is priceless!

Today is October 16 and in 1945, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization named this date as World Food Day. The goal of WFD is to free humanity from hunger and malnutrition and to effectively manage the global food system. However, there are many hurdles to do this and to do this well. As the pandemic still plays out in some countries in the world, what global leaders have learned is how interconnected our economies and lives really are- we truly are a global village! Another point learned is that on the road to recover pre pandemic economic times, too many people are being left behind and are unable to benefit equally from innovation and prosperity or even obtaining the basics for living.

We know that around the world there are people who are able to buy and eat the best of foods without worry. But global hunger is at a new high. It is estimated that 3.1 billion people around the world cannot afford a healthy diet. What is ironic that two out of three people living in poverty live in rural settings and mostly rely on agriculture for their livelihood, yet cannot afford to purchase what they produce in the transformed state. There are also people living in famine conditions due to climate challenges of drought and there are many going hungry because of floods and other losses. In other areas of the world there are people who are dying from starvation or from malnutrition because they cannot afford to buy food or are unable to produce it for themselves.

In North America the problem is not a lack of food choices but the ability to buy good healthy food including fresh vegetables and fruit as well as being able to pay rent and other costs associated with everyday living. Food Banks Canada statistics show that 1 in 5 Canadians reported going hungry between March 2020 and March 2022. The biggest barrier is rising housing costs. We also know that in these last months the cost of food and food products has risen significantly causing us to wonder what is to come in the rest of 2022 and 2023.

Our Reading from Isaiah 55 draws us in with these words: Everyone who thirsts come to the waters; you who have no money, come buy and eat—but without price!” How do you buy without price? How does one eat without price? What does the prophet Isaiah mean that one can buy without price? Isaiah was a person way ahead of his time. He imagined a system where all of the essentials are available equally for everyone. But right now that is not the case!

In these verses, the prophet is addressing the Israelite people who have been displaced and deported to Babylon when Jerusalem was destroyed. Everything about their lives was turned upside down. IN these words, God is offering water, wine, bread, milk; all the essential goods of the promised land for free! The invitation to eat and drink is open- come!

Just think about the last time you had an invitation out for dinner? What did it mean to you? What did you say? Thanks but no thanks? Or did you ask, what might I bring to share? Or the best question I like to ask is ‘what are we having’? Just in case what is offered is something up really do not like or might give you digestive problems. What happens next is that you are offered a time to come and enjoy the company of others and you feel great because the invitation has been given to you.

In this passage from Isaiah, God offers invitations to come,=to the water, buy and eat. Isaiah also writes—Listen, Call upon Him, Seek the Lord..not as harsh orders but again invitations to everyone act and respond to God’s presence. But do we respond and how?

Maybe this has happened to you: you have your groceries on the checkout lane and the cashier notices that there is no price on some produce. What do they do? Call another person to go and search the price and everyone in line glares at you for wasting their time. Wouldn’t it

be great if there was no price—because it is free? We all like to get free stuff or items at a discount don't we? But then others would wonder what they could get free too?

Food equity food security and shortages of food have led to more people wondering the meaning of 'buying without price.' But how are we responding to this need? Locally and across Canada there are many food banks to meet immediate needs and serve good healthy meals to those in need. In fact the Halloween Spooktacular happening on Friday is a means by which we are hoping to receive donations to the Downtown Mission. Around the world, through the United Church's Mission and Service Fund "Women for Change" in Zambia is a partnership started in 1992 which mobilizes communities to share ideas and best practises including food sustainability. Over 1500 community groups meet regularly to save and share seed, what will grow and general knowledge on how they can increase food production. This is a partnership because the United Church offers support and teaching so that this group can continue to share with others and grow the food needed where they are.

But what is it that we are called to do as we learn of the needs of others around the world and our neighbours, too? We have faith that we or even one person can make a difference because our faith is in God who makes all things. But is our faith alive?

Our reading from James 2 asks questions about faith and our understanding of works. "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?" James bluntly answers his own question by stating, "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17)—as dead as someone in desperate need of food who receives only empty words of well-wishing from his neighbor. He takes it for granted that believing in Christ and trusting in God will move you to feel compassion for and act to help someone in need.

And this is what we are called to do. There are many people looking for help but when we reflect on their needs from where does the problem stem? We can try to put the blame on the world or the individuals themselves but it does not matter. The problem is systemic for the world. What does matter is combatting the problem of food insecurity and getting healthy nutritious food to people on a regular basis in order that they may come to know and understand that life is worth living and not totally filled with problems. For when people's basic

needs are being met- including food and water, shelter and clothing, new thoughts may unfold and there is hope for a better day to come.

As we look to Isaiah's prophetic words are we willing to seek answers to the problems we see around us? God calls us to come, drink eat and buy without price. For when we give to others and fulfill their needs we must do with dignity and compassion. This is how Christ taught us to love and he showed his love as he fed thousands.

On this World Food Day we must ask the question is your faith alive? How do you know? Just what are we called to do as we live out our faith in Jesus and to tell others of the gift of salvation and hope. We are to have faith and to trust God to help us as we help others.

Let us rejoice in this knowing that we are not alone as we seek to fulfill Isaiah's vision. It is huge, but if we are committed to doing our part, we can make it a reality!

PRAYER

God of grace and hope we hear the statistics of food inequity and we pray that there come a change. Help us to hear your call to come, share and buy without price. Help us also to share this call with others who are in need. As we put our faith into action, enable us to offer our praise and thanksgiving as we seek you and draw closer to you. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.