

Proper 13
Year C 2016
Luke 12:13-21

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

Thank you!

Thank you for answering the call of our neighbors
who are in extra need of food at this time of the year.

In the Diocese of Colorado
we normally dedicate the last Sunday
in July to Loaves and Fishes.

And normally, our lectionary
tracks a little more closely
with the readings of feeding the crowds from the Gospels.

At this time of year,
food banks or food distribution centers
can experience a serious drought in groceries
for those who come to them in need.

Now, I honestly don't know if this is a God thing
or the church picking up on a communal need over the years.

I tend to think either way it really qualifies as a God thing.

In any event,
the lack of available food at this time of year,
in part, is caused by a greater need for families
whose children receive breakfast and lunch
at school during the school year.

During the 2014 federal fiscal year, more than 21.5 million low-income children received free or reduced-price meals daily through the National School Lunch Program.

Unfortunately, in 2014 fewer than 2.7 million children participated daily in the Summer Food Service Program.

It is not uncommon
for children not to participate
in summer food service programs
for a number of reasons such as access,
transportation, or even knowledge of the program.

In Colorado, this is often the case.

Also, many who contribute to food banks
or food distribution centers
are busy during the summer months
with vacations and travel and their own busy lives
leading to a reduction in the groceries available.

I will say, it seems shocking to me
that in 2016 in the United States
we are still struggling with issues of hunger
in the world's wealthiest nation.

In fact, the U.S. has
one of the highest relative child poverty rates
in the developed world.

As UNICEF reports,
"[Children's] material well-being
is highest in the Netherlands
and in the four Nordic countries
and lowest in Latvia, Lithuania,
Romania and the United States."

Nearly half of all food stamp recipients are children, and they averaged about \$5 a day for their meals before the 2014 farm bill cut \$8.6 billion (over the next ten years) from the food stamp program.

Today, a Coloradan, on average, only receives \$1.40 per meal or \$4.20 per day in food stamp benefits, making it a challenge to put healthy food on the table for themselves and their family.

My friends, that's just not doable.

Certainly not with today's prices for produce, eggs, and milk.

I don't think we can even contemplate access to meat with that budget.

What is it, I wonder, about our nation that we either hide our heads in the sand or turn a blind eye to this insidious state of affairs?

Science and research support the findings that hunger, anywhere in the world, is not because of a lack of food.

In fact, there is plenty of food in the world.

Here, in the US, we have developed an especially disturbing process.

A report published
in the July 13, 2016 edition
of The Guardian states:

*Americans throw away almost as much food
as they eat because of a “cult of perfection”,
deepening hunger and poverty,
and inflicting a heavy toll on the environment.*

*Vast quantities of fresh produce
grown in the US are left in the field to rot,
fed to livestock or hauled directly from the field to landfill,
because of unrealistic and unyielding cosmetic standards,
according to official data and interviews
with dozens of farmers, packers, truckers,
researchers, campaigners and government officials.*

*By one government tally,
about 60m tons of produce
worth about \$160 billion,
is wasted by retailers and consumers every year
- one third of all foodstuffs.*

*Scarred vegetables are regularly abandoned
in the field to save the expense and labour involved in harvest.*

*When added to the retail waste,
it takes the amount of food lost
close to half of all produce grown, experts say.*

The article concludes:

*Food experts say
there is growing awareness that
governments cannot effectively fight hunger,
or climate change, without reducing food waste.*

*Food waste accounts for about 8% of global climate pollution,
more than India or Russia.*

And it seems, this is not just an institutional problem.

In a recent article, *The Atlantic* reports that:

For an American family of four,
the average value of discarded produce
is nearly \$1,600 annually.

In the words of Ecclesiastes: Vanity of vanities!!!

Our actions and inactions, policies,
and adherence to cultural norms
has an effect on our neighbors across the street,
around the country, and throughout the world.

During my first trip to the tiny village of San Pedro, Guatemala
our group was invited into the homes
of some of the students at the school we were helping to build.

The school was the first school
available to the indigenous Mayan children in the village.

We visited one home
where we were very graciously welcomed by a woman
who apologized for not being able to stand to welcome us.

Her home, like most others in the village,
was a one room adobe building
where the entire family slept on mats on the floor.

Some homes had a chair or two but that was pretty much it.

The woman was clearly ill and exhausted
but the interpreter assured us
it was very important to this woman to speak with us.

She thanked us profusely for our help in constructing the school, providing supplies, working with the children, and sponsoring the children so that they could get an education.

An opportunity she never had.

Her husband was a part time teacher at the school and worked the remainder of the time during the harvests for the local coffee and avocado plantations.

The woman was ill because her family cycled in and out of extreme poverty to the point that there often times was not enough food to feed their family.

You see, for many in the world, the daily decision is how to best allocate the meager amount of food a family can gather.

Her husband, as the sole provider of the family, was fed the most so that he could keep up the grueling harvest work.

The children, especially the boys, would be fed next so that they too could have ample strength to gather sticks or assist in the harvests.

Then the girls were fed and then, if there was any food remaining, she would eat.

That was a rare occurrence
and her health was a testament
to the price she paid
as a result of having the least amount of power
in the food distribution chain.

Our group tried valiantly
to remain stoic during this visit
as the interpreter offered each of us
a sip from a can of Coke
that she presented on behalf of the hostess.

In Mayan Guatemala, you see,
no matter how little you have,
you share.

To this day, I hope to God,
that the school or the interpreter
paid for that can of Coke.

We managed to thank this woman,
without weeping in front of her,
for her hospitality and wished her well as we left.

We were only in her home for about twenty minutes and yet,
that visit, that face to face introduction
to the realities of poverty and hunger,
forever changed my life
and the lives of those who visited with me.

The website for Bread for the World states in its FAQ section:

*The studies show that
the cause of hunger in the world is not a shortage of food
but rather access to food.*

My friends, the decision on how to allocate a scarcity of food is one that many of our neighbors make each month.

Our friends at Metro Caring have learned this fact over the 40 plus years they have been on the front lines in the Denver community working to meet the needs of the poor and hungry.

If you are not familiar with Metro Caring, the hunger relief center that will receive the donations you have graciously provided, let me introduce you:

Metro Caring annually receives and redistributes over 2.3 million pounds of nutritious food (72% fresh) - a majority of which would otherwise have gone to waste.

Metro Caring's holistic approach to ending hunger includes a free, fresh-foods market, nutrition and gardening education, and tools for self-sufficiency such as the Seeds for Success job-training program, financial literacy education and state-wide ID procurement.

Metro Caring is leading the local food waste mitigation movement through grocery rescue partnerships and a new collaboration with DIA to retrieve unsold food from their vendors.

Metro Caring then redistributes high quality food to food-insecure families.

This is such an important piece of the approach to ending hunger and food access.

In Denver County, a single-parent with one preschooler needs to earn \$47,914

- more than three times the federal poverty level*
- to make ends meet.*

More than 1 in 4 working families in Colorado do not have enough food to meet their basic needs

Feed America

More than 1 in 7 Colorado seniors struggle with hunger, often leading to choices between food and medication.

Compared to other state participation rates, Colorado ranks 11th in school breakfast participation for low-income students and 45th in SNAP/food stamp access for those eligible.

Hunger Free Colorado

Just as a point of reference,
an individual earning the current Colorado minimum wage earns

\$332.40 per week

\$17,284.80 per year

\$1,440.33 before taxes

CO Dept of Labor

Now I know for some of us,
our weekly grocery bill meets or exceeds \$332.

My brothers and sisters in Christ,
in the United States
we don't even bother to store up our treasures
-- we flat out destroy them.

But lest we despair
in the face of such staggering information,
let us ask ourselves,

Where is God in all of this?

How can we make a difference?

I assure you,
we can make a difference
and we can change the course of events.

How might God be calling us
to engage in stemming the tide
of this frightful, selfish, and destructive process?

First, let's start in our own homes.

Now that our eyes have been opened,
we can dedicate ourselves to diminishing our own food waste.

We can be more conscious when we shop
of what we realistically think we can consume,
we can compost, and we can freeze.

And please, please, please, do not forget,
we can always give away food
if we realize we won't be able to use it.

Likewise, here at SAEC,
we can all actively participate in helping to diminish our food waste.

Let's be mindful in little things.

When we fill our plates at coffee hour,
can we be more realistic
about the amount we believe we will consume?

What about our left overs?

I know Michael Martinez
is especially sensitive to this issue
and I have worked with him
to deliver food to those
who are most happy to have it
after coffee hours on Sundays.

Is this a task you might be willing to help with?

Are you willing to go check out Metro Caring
or another organization
to see if you would like to volunteer
or support their efforts to end hunger?

There are as many ways to respond to this crisis
as there are people gathered here today.

My prayer is that
we do not let the facts and figures I've presented here today
overwhelm us and cause us to freeze with indecision
on how to move forward
but instead
let us move forward
assured in the knowledge that Christ is all in all.

I wonder, dare we go forth from here
willing to show forth our knowledge to the world
that we are rich indeed through the abundance of God?