

Jeff's Reflection – Oct 17 2021

When we pray during a worship service, we offer words to God. We offer to God words of thankfulness, words of concern, words of request.

When we pray, we invite God into our lives and into our world...

But we do so from faith that God is already in our lives and in our world, because our lives and this world are in God.

So in praying, we are simultaneously offering our prayers to God and opening ourselves to receive God's prayer to us. We are discovering that God's dream for the world shapes our prayers and is expressed through our thoughts and words.

Last week and this week are reminders of how in prayer we both offer prayers to God and receive prayers from God.

Last weekend in Canada was Thanksgiving weekend. For many, Thanksgiving is a time usually celebrated around the table, sharing food with family and friends. It is a time for prayers of thankfulness – thankfulness to God for the food we receive, the food that sustains us, the food we enjoy, the food we share: prayers of gratitude for the harvest, for the array of food, for God's creation that produces food.

This weekend, this Saturday, October 16, is World Food Day. World Food Day was initiated by The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations to recognize its founding in Quebec City in 1945. World Food Day raises awareness of the ways food is grown, produced and distributed throughout the world and promotes action to assist people suffering from hunger.

Within one week, we have journeyed from giving thanks for the bounty of food – the world produces enough food to feed every person living on this planet, to prayers for those without enough food, - according to The World Food Program of the United Nations, over 800 million people go hungry every day.

Many people don't have sufficient land to produce food. Most lack financial resources to acquire food. Conflicts, climate change and structural poverty and inequality are main factors in trapping people in hunger and food insecurity.

According to Oxfam, 98 per cent of the world's hungry live in developing countries. Sixty-per-cent of the hungry are women.

The Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada is one avenue for making donations that will support food programs and food development projects throughout the world.

In Canada, The United Church supports community kitchens and meal programs, food

cupboards, shelters, job training programs, community gardens, and healthy food programs. Internationally, the United Church sends food in times of crisis, distributes seeds, funds agricultural training programs and micro-lending programs, and supports projects that help small-scale farmers access equipment they need and, in some instances, build infrastructure so they can transport their food to market. We work with partners like ACT Alliance and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to move beyond the charity model by helping to work toward long-term systemic change through respectful partnerships.

In Winnipeg, we help support the ministry of 1JustCity, whose mandate is to work towards a city where all are cared for, have enough to eat, a place they belong and feel loved.

1JustCity's ministry rests on what it calls its four pillars: Loving the under-loved, working towards reconciliation, growing individual's capacity and building inclusive communities.

The sharing of food was part of Jesus' understanding of what he referred to as 'The kingdom of God.' Access to food was part of the Jewish faith story.

Much of the story of the Jewish people is a story about land – about land that is the source of food, of vines, of life.

God directed the people to care for the land, and to care for those who did not have land. Farmers were to practice gleaning – the practice of not harvesting all of one's crop – of leaving some for those who did not have land and so could not grow their own food.

The prophets spoke of the community's responsibility to care for the poor, for the vulnerable, even for the foreigners who came to their land.

Jesus lived in a time when land was a basis for wealth, when many were squeezed off their land by taxes and debts, forced to become labourers on the land they once owned, or forced to become itinerant workers constantly seeking work. The land became the property of absentee landowners, sometimes of priests in Jerusalem who chose not to follow the commandments regarding land and communal well-being, instead gaining wealth through the acquisition of others' lands.

Biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan suggests that Jesus realized that, under Roman occupation, the land was not going to return to the poor, so he practiced a sacred sharing of food – he told his disciples that when they went from village to village, not to take provisions with them. They were to rely on the generosity of others. God's economy would depend on a sharing of resources. When the crowds were hungry and the disciples said to send them away to find food, Jesus said 'let us break, bless and share' the few loaves and fish that we have, and trust that sharing may produce a miracle of feeding.

One of the prophetic images of the time when the world would be as God dreamed, was the image of what is called the messianic banquet – a feast to which all are invited, a meal in which the world's food is shared for all to eat.

The disciples James and John may have been referring to that hoped for future banquet when they came to Jesus (in today's Gospel reading) and said they wanted him to assure them that when the day of glory came, one of them would be seated at Jesus' right hand and one on his left.

At a banquet, the seats on either side of the host were the seats of honour. Everyone present at a meal knew that the people seated next to the host were the host's favourites, the most deserving.

Jesus, as he often did, plays with the image. He says to them, "you think I will be sitting in the host position at the banquet? No, I have come to be a servant. I will be waiting tables. I will be delivering the food that is to be eaten. If you want to be on my right and my left, then you will be carrying the trays and distributing the food and helping wash the dishes later.

James and John didn't realize it, but what they were asking Jesus to do was to make servers of God's love.

Our prayers draw us into God's pray that all of us contribute to the feeding of all people. Our prayers of thankfulness for the food we receive embrace God's prayer that we share the food received.

We are a thankful people. We are thankful to live as part of God's creation. Let us be thankful people by allowing God to pray through us for a world in which we find ourselves beside Jesus, serving others, sharing God's blessing of food received, and loving others as Jesus has loved us.

Thanks be to God. AMEN