



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

November 25, 2010
Thanksgiving Day
Barbara Green

RCL: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 100; Philippians 4:4-9; John 6:25-35
LM: Deuteronomy 8:7-18 or 1 Kings 8:55-61 or Sirach 50:22-24 or Daniel 6:12-28;
Psalm 113:1-8 or Psalm 138:1-5; Colossians 3:12-17 or 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 or 1 Timothy
6:6-11, 17-19; Mark 5:18-20 or Luke 12:15-21 or Luke 17:11-19 or Luke 21:20-28

It can be tough to address the issue of hunger in a Thanksgiving service without sounding like a holiday-spoiler or guilt-tripper. If ever a day cried out for humble gratitude for daily bread, it is Thanksgiving Day. The day is set aside for family, for celebration, for parades and football, for food. A Thanksgiving worship service should be centered on the purpose of the day, that is, expressing gratitude.

A seminary student from an African country reports that Thanksgiving is a difficult holiday for him. The problem is not loneliness on an empty campus. U.S. friends invite him to their home for the day, and they are generous in sharing their Thanksgiving feast and customs with him. A fourth-Thursday-in-November style Thanksgiving is not indigenous to his home country, so he doesn't feel homesickness for such traditions. What's painful and problematic for him is seeing the bountiful repast itself on the table. Over-consumption at a Thanksgiving table in this country is a constant reminder of the scarcity back home.

Too much—too little. Economic disparities are what we, as Christians, must always work against, to move the world closer to justice. The Hebrew Bible lesson calls us to return to God the firstfruits of our harvest. We are called to a perpetual attitude of gratitude for whatever bounty we receive. The story reminds us that our harvest, our food, is given within the context of the long span of God's salvation history. Our engagement with issues of hunger and poverty comes from and is fed by that perpetual attitude of gratitude.

The passage from the letter to the Philippians is one of the most joyous in the Bible, often used for weddings or special occasions. Paul loved the Philippians; their congregation was dearest of all to his heart. So his letter to them overflows with love, excitement, and enthusiasm for them and for the Gospel they share. They are not to worry but to take everything with thanksgiving to God in prayer.



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John's gospel passage takes place immediately after the feeding of the five thousand and the story of Jesus' walking on water, both of which offer tempting material for addressing hunger issues. Wherever Jesus turns up, not only are five thousand hungry people miraculously fed, but enough boats miraculously turn up to transport the crowd with him. Now the crowd is enthusiastic, demanding, wanting another sign. They demand that Jesus make manna from heaven as Moses did for their ancestors. But Jesus replies that it was not Moses who sent the manna, but God. And the bread of heaven that God is already sending them is Jesus himself, through whom salvation is promised. The real miracle is that Jesus is who he is, not the things he does every once in a while.

This is a challenge for Thanksgiving Day, one that takes us beyond the need to satisfy material hunger to the need to satisfy spiritual hunger with the Bread of Life. It reminds us that as important as physical hunger is, it is not the whole meaning of life. Bertolt Brecht once wrote, "First, eating. Then, morals." Physical sustenance comes first. Every person has a right to it; no one can live without it. Only after persons are no longer hungry can moral restraints and moral direction be expected of them. But satisfying one's own physical hunger does not provide meaning to life. That comes from engaging in the struggle for justice and equitable distribution, from helping others, from accepting Jesus as the soul-sustenance sent from heaven. As usual in John, the people do not understand the real message. They are impressed by the signs, but they don't get the fact that Jesus is the "sign" incarnate.

Children's Time [Larry Hollar]

Ask the children what their favorite part of Thanksgiving dinner is. Which dish do they like the most? Do they usually eat too much? Ask them to imagine what it would feel like to never have enough to eat, to always feel hungry. Would they cry a lot? Would they feel angry?

Tell them that there are many poor children around the world who go to bed hungry every night. Being thankful at Thanksgiving means not only being thankful for one's own food but also remembering those who are hungry and working to make their lives better. That means getting together in groups like Bread for the World, which works to make more money and more food available to people who need them.

Related Resources [Larry Hollar]

Order Bread for the World Sunday materials (see www.bread.org) to highlight one way people can respond to hunger in our world. Encourage joining Bread for the World's work in advocating for poor and hungry people as part of a Thanksgiving celebration.



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Musical Suggestions [Larry Hollar]

Come, Ye Thankful People, Come—PH 551

We Gather Together—PH 559

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year A

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