

## The First Potluck?

There is a saying: The church always gathers at the table, either the Lord's table (with communion) or the kitchen table. We enjoy fellowship – being together to connect with one another. Connecting over food and drink is especially important to us, as social beings.

COVID took many things from us, one thing especially was coffee hour, parish lunches and Community suppers. Now that COVID has moved from Pandemic to Endemic, meaning we are aware that COVID is in the community, and there will always be a threat of the disease, we are learning to cope and amend our lives to live with the threat.

Thus, we will be enjoying fellowship after Worship. Now, this is brand new and we'll figure things out as we go. If you are interested in hosting Coffee Hour, please connect with Ev Cutts or Jeanne Parker. Another ministry I'd like to see happening is a Ministry of Hospitality where we gather, as a parish, for potluck suppers, games nights, sing alongs, coffee houses and those sorts of events.

I need someone to be Team Leader for this ministry, as I don't have time to do this myself. I'm feeling like a broken record, but there you have it. As a strong introvert myself, I don't often feel the need to be with people. And I know that makes me a bit of a weirdo, which I embrace.

Today's reading is about the miracle of the Feeding of the 5,000 from John's Gospel. If this reading is taken literally, which it should not be, it appears to be that Jesus took five barley loaves and two fish and multiplied it within sight of the apostles and the crowd of 5,000 which had gathered. That would have been a spectacular sight.

More likely, what happened was the boy's lunch was used to encourage people to share what they had. In those days, if you were going to be traveling all day, you would most likely carry a day's food, which the five loaves and two fish would have been.

Please keep in mind that the barley loaves were not the size of a loaf of bread we would use today – most likely they were the size of a large dinner roll.

The crowd was bearing down on Jesus to hear his message of love and challenge the status quo. Jesus was about the collective rather than the individual. It is quite likely that Jesus held up the loaf, broke it and shared as he would do again just prior to his death.

He likely did the same with the fish which encouraged those around him to share what they had brought so nobody would be left to go hungry. Collecting the baskets of leftovers with enough to feed the crowd again is also spectacular, even a miracle in its own right.

We are told that God ensured all believers that they would not go hungry. The Israelites were fed with manna from heaven to ensure they would not go hungry. Meals were basic and nutritious. There would not have been coffee or chocolate in those days. But there would have been wine and possibly even beer.

Instead of the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000; could we rename the feeding of the 5,000, the first potluck lunch? Maybe.

According to Action Against Hunger –  
HUNGER FAST FACTS

- There is more than enough food produced in the world to feed everyone on the planet.
- As many as 829 million people worldwide go to bed hungry each night.
- Small farmers, herders, and fishermen produce about 70 percent of the global food supply, yet they are especially vulnerable to food insecurity – poverty and hunger are most acute among rural populations.
- Conflict is a cause and consequence of hunger. In 2020, conflict was the primary driver of hunger for 99.1 million people in 23 countries
- An estimated 14 million children under the age of five worldwide suffer from severe acute malnutrition, also known as severe wasting, yet only 25 percent of acutely malnourished children have access to lifesaving treatment.

That is astounding. There is more than enough food produced in the world to feed everyone on the planet.

And yet –

- 48 million people in 30 countries are at risk of starvation.
- Globally, 1 in 9 people goes to bed hungry every night.
- Wealthy countries throw out 222 million tonnes of food each year.
- Up to 2.2 million tonnes of household food goes to waste, which costs Canadians about \$17 billion.

Did you know –

- Food wastage in Canada causes 56.6 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent emissions.
- Up to 690 million people today are hungry, while 3 billion people can't afford a healthy diet.
- Supermarkets handle 10% of the total food waste in the US.
- 45% of all produced fruits and vegetables are wasted.
- Canada loses up to 4.82 million tonnes of food in the manufacturing processes.
- Around 1.4 million Canadian kids don't have access to healthy food.
- Every day, each Canadian generates around 2.7 kilograms of garbage.

My parents were children during WWII and having been raised in England with rationing, food waste was practically non-existent. My Mam cooked just enough food for each meal, everything was portioned on the plate, and nothing was ever left over. As my brother and I grew up and left home, Mam did not learn to cook for two people for a great many years. Unused to left overs, often food would spoil and then get thrown away.

Cooking for one is a challenge. I buy bagged salad because I'm far more likely to eat it, if it's ready to go, then having to buy the individual components, ie lettuce, cabbage, carrots, celery, etc., which generates waste from the outer leaves, peelings, etc. and spoiling before I have a chance to consume it.

Food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.

According to a 2021 study by Stats Can, Alberta has the highest level of food insecurity of any province at 20.3%, whereas Quebec has the lowest level of food insecurity at just 13.1%. Data from the Territories was not yet available from this study.

According to the Borgen Project, Non-Indigenous Canadians experience an average of 9% food insecurity, whereas off reserve Indigenous, Métis and Inuit communities experience 33% food insecurity. Some of the biggest factors leading to this are physical and geographic isolation, transportation costs, low income, household infrastructure and overcrowding; and access to transport, storage and cooking facilities.

And here's some more good news (insert sarcasm font)

Canada's Food Price Report 2022 forecasts an overall food price increase of 5% to 7% for the coming year, the highest predicted increase in food prices since the inception of the report twelve years ago.

Not to mention shrinkflation - which is the reduction of product size while keeping the price the same. Rather than raise the price of a bag of potatoes, the bag goes from 7 lbs to 6 lbs and the price stays the same. Increased fuel costs and transportation charges also add up on the average grocery bill.

Climate change is also a contributing factor to food insecurity in the far north. Where ice bridges were once used to transport food in the winter time, the rising temperatures means that the bridges are not built at all during the winter or for a much shorter time of year. This means the cost of transportation increases as everything must travel by air instead of by ground.

Imagine all the people affected by the war in the Ukraine who were food insecure before? Supply lines have been affected, many dispersed persons are unaccounted for. Aid agencies are having difficulty getting aid where it is needed.

And so, where is the good news in this? What can we do?

We can financially assist agencies such as PWRDF and Mission & Service who provide support to communities affected by both food and water insecurity.

Locally we can take a page out of Mary Cosman's book and support the "[Local Store](#)". In person and online the Local store on Second Avenue provides a market for local producers to provide meat, spices, coffee, vegetables, home goods, and much more. Similar to the Mountain Market, local artisans and farmers offer their wares helping Fernites and those from the Elk Valley to shop locally.

Speaking of Mary Cosman, she was recently honoured as recipient of the 2022 [Year of the Garden Hero](#) award. She has been saving seeds, growing food and teaching others for many years. If you want to know how to get started in growing your own food or saving seeds, please speak to Mary.

The world can seem like a dark and scary place these days. It is easy to be inundated with corruption, global pollution, food insecurity, legislative failures and global conflict. We cannot control anyone else's opinions or reactions except our own. Choose to be involved. Choose to pray. Choose to volunteer. Choose to donate.

Every one of us can do our part to reduce our own food waste. Reduce our dependence on single-use plastics. Try reusable sandwich bags instead of disposable plastic ones. Make your own cleaner with vinegar and water, instead of store-bought and potentially toxic products. Sort through what you have in your cupboards. You'll likely find a box of stuff you don't need that could be used better elsewhere.

When grocery shopping, if something is on sale, consider purchasing extra to give to the local food bank. When baking at home, consider giving some to a neighbour or shut-in. When batch cooking, consider giving some to the new family or the single parent with kids to feed.

Support local growers, Support your local food bank. Look for the good in others and especially in yourself.

And remember, whether the feeding of the 5,000 was a miracle of the world's very first potluck lunch, remember that it wouldn't have happened without Jesus. And as we return to coffee hour, may we remember to be aware of people's comfort levels as far as close proximity and touching.

May we also remember who we are, and whose we are. May we strive to see the best in everyone. And whenever possible, may we be considerate and helpful to those who have less than we do.

Giving thanks to God from whom all blessings flow, may the Church say,  
AMEN!

The Reverend Canon Andrea L. Brennan, Incumbent  
Elk Valley Ecumenical Shared Ministry  
Fernie Knox United Church & Christ Church Anglican  
Regional Dean of East Kootenay Region  
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Sermon for World Food Sunday, Sunday 16 October 2022  
Scripture - John 6.1-15