

## “Feeding the Hungry”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, September 11, 2016  
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Readings from Scripture: Romans 12:15-21 and Matthew 25:31-46

*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

*Romans 12:15-21*

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

*Matthew 25:31-46*

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take the words that each of us carry within, the words we have offered in song and in prayer, the words that we’ve heard read from scripture as well as the words that you have laid upon my heart this morning to share. Trusting in your Spirit transform all of these words into the living word of Jesus Christ our Lord, and let that word do its work within us, among us and through us into a hurting, broken and needy world. We ask this in Christ’s faithful name. Amen.

Fifteen years seems like a long chunk of time. A child born 15 years ago has gone from diapers to waiting for their driver’s permit. A person who recently retired 15 years ago is turning 80 and starting to

wonder what might be next, if they still have the ability to wonder. But September 11th 15 years ago seems like it was yesterday. I remember standing with my wife in the front yard of the house we were renting watching fighter jets scream low across the Sound and the Seattle skyline, the only planes in the sky that day--fighter jets circling Seattle. I remember walking into the front room later that day, going up to the television and simply shutting it off. I said out loud, "I think we've seen this enough." I remember feeling that gurgling sense of pride in being an American, and wanting to wear, as a stole the next Sunday, the flag that had draped my grandfather's coffin. I remember heading to church and thinking, we need to cancel Session tonight and open the sanctuary, light some candles and simply create silence so people can come and pray. But don't worry, I was only the Associate, and the Senior Minister who had been a Presbyterian his whole life said, "We don't cancel Session." And so we didn't. Instead, the elders gathered in a circle with a candle and when it came time to do business, nobody said a word.

It took a long time, but a few years ago I had the privilege of finally visiting the 9/11 memorial. This was just before the museum opened. We could see in but we couldn't go in. Walking around those two massive black granite squares with the water falling into nowhere in the middle of a massive emptiness, the names of loved ones and strangers carved in the black granite, people walking around, crying, remembering. As I stood there I had the urge to take off my shoes. It felt like sacred and holy ground. And then, nearby, very close, over my right shoulder I heard a noise. I turned to see construction cranes lifting huge panes of glass as they sought to finish a new tower, One World Trade Center, which was under construction. I watched as that glass rose what seemed like to the sky, thinking if it fell it would do damage. And I also remember thinking that there is something peculiarly American about this act--about a defiant commitment to rebuild after a terror attack. And then the thought, *wait, this isn't rebuilding because we have preserved this sacred ground while at the same time we are building, defiantly, nearby.* I realized that whomever organized and coordinated the building of the 9/11 memorial and One World Trade Center had gotten it profoundly right. Honor the loss and build for the future. The fact that One World Trade Center stands at 1,776 feet tall, the tallest building in the western hemisphere, honors the spirit of all those who gathered in Philadelphia in 1776 to birth forth a new nation.

It was only later, after getting involved with disaster work, that I realized the desire to rebuild after destruction was not exclusively an American trait, but a fundamental part of what it means to be human. After floods and earthquakes in faraway lands, people rebuild. After war and famine and political strife, people rebuild. And as we know, after terror attacks people rebuild. But since 15 years still feels like yesterday, I invite you all to join me in a moment of silence.

In my work with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, I've seen another desire or trait that gets lived out beside that of rebuilding. I've seen that people across the world have a desire to help out after a disaster strikes. After a flood, a hurricane, a tornado, a shooting, a terrorist attack, a car accident, a recently diagnosed illness--whatever the situation may be--people reach out to help, one human helping another, the trait of human compassion and decency being embodied to help out total strangers. This is who we are as the family of humans and as people of faith.

From the Gospel of Matthew, we learn the first trait of an authentic Christian community--feed the hungry. When we feed those whom the passage calls "the least of these", we are feeding the family of God. When we feed the hungry in body and spirit, we are attempting to feed the needs and desires of the Lord. When we feed others, we are feeding Christ's presence in our world. This is why we do stewardship every year, to invite each of us to participate in feeding the hungry in body and spirit. We invite each of us to increase our pledge of financial support so that together we can continue to feed the hungry in body and spirit, whether it's here in our own community through Kirk Care or around the world through Stop Hunger Now. We ask for your financial participation in the ongoing mission and ministry of Jesus Christ so that we can simply continue to do what Christ calls us to do.

I don't know if you are aware of it, but I actually get paid a salary by you. Karen doesn't work for free. Hear that sound, that blower sound that's running to get the organ ready to play, the organ that we heard about? That takes electricity. Anybody live in Kirkwood and get an electric bill? It's not cheap. You a little too warm today? No, because the air conditioning is working. It's free, right?

Giving to the church is not paying dues or leasing your way into heaven. In fact, you do not actually give to the church, you give as the church. Through our stewardship we are the church giving what we can in order to provide for our neighbors in need. We are the church giving what we can in order to serve those who are hungry and thirsty and imprisoned and sick and who need to know that they are loved and cared for and not abandoned by our God. We are a giving and generous church in order to make our prayers come true, the prayer that we offer every Sunday--*thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven*. Our giving is one way, only one way, we embody the love and justice of Jesus Christ for all people. Giving is one way we feed the hungry in body and spirit, but it is not the only way. Right now there are people out in the Gathering Space wearing funny hair nets. They are putting rice and protein and spices into a bag that is being sealed, packaged and will be shipped off. Stop Hunger Now has sent millions of meals across the globe--1,423,656 to North Korea, 9,092,000 to Liberia in Africa, and somewhat shockingly, 13,500,000 to the Dominican Republic. *13,500,000 packaged meals to the Dominican Republic*. Guess what? To host a Stop Hunger Now event--that's not free either. It takes \$3,207.08 to host that event that will produce over 10,000 meals--\$3,207.08 to help us embody the love and grace of Jesus Christ--\$3207.08 that comes from what you give through your financial support of this congregation.

To put that into perspective, I want to offer just a bit of a contrast, not a commentary or judgment, just a contrast. Again 13,500,000 meals to the Dominican Republic. I thought about surprising my wife with a little trip mid-October and taking her to Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic. They have really nice, all inclusive resorts there, the kind where you don't have to do anything but eat and sleep and lie on the beach and go, "I'll take another, thank you very much." For the two of us to go for a week, it would cost \$4,526--for a week to feed two--\$4,526. What we are doing out in the Gathering Space is about \$1300 less and we will be feeding so many more. This is why we invite you to give your tithes, your offerings and your pledges. This is why we invite you, year after year, to increase what you give, so that we can build up our staff, hire more people, deepen our programs and increase our outreach. And you have always been generous and faithful.

So I took a little bit of fun with a different passage from Matthew just to put this all in context for us. *Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd and he had compassion for them and he cured their sick. When it was evening, the logical, orderly, prudent, Presbyterian came to Jesus and said, 'This is a deserted place and hour is now late. Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away. You give them something to eat.' But the Presbyterian replied, 'Wait. What? We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish. We can't possibly share what we have and feed so many other people. If we do that, we won't have enough for ourselves to eat in the days ahead. Surely you aren't asking us to give what we have in order to feed those who probably are able to take care of themselves.' But Jesus said, 'Bring what you Presbyterians have here to me.' Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish. He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, gave it to the Presbyterians and they gave it to the crowds and all people ate and were filled and they took up what was left over from the broken pieces--12 baskets full. Those who ate were about 5000 men besides women and children.*

Let's make this year's stewardship effort the best that this congregation has ever had. Collectively if each of us could increase our pledges, we could contribute over \$1,000,000 in adult pledges. With that money we could hire more staff, deepen our programming here and expand our outreach and service to this community and the world. If each of us cultivates the compassion that Jesus shows us in this story of feeding the 5000, and if we hear the mandate in the Gospel of Matthew to feed the hungry in this season of stewardship, we will be able to feed even more who are hungry in body and in spirit. Amen.