



**More Than Enough for Everyone**  
By Bill Lawson

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God has provided more than enough food for everyone in the world to have plenty every day, and yet world hunger is a persistent issue. It doesn't matter how much food is available if those who control the distribution refuse to allow it to be shared fairly. What if we think about sharing the world's food resources as being sacramental, perhaps as an extension of the Sacrament of Holy Communion?

**Everyone is invited to come to the proverbial waters and receive the grace and mercy of God.**

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and [they] that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. (*Isaiah 55:1 KJV*)

Through the prophet Isaiah, God extends this one of many invitations in the Bible for everyone to come and get what they need "without money and without price."

John Wesley wrote in his *Explanatory Notes* about this verse:

Procure or receive that which is freely offered. All gospel blessings; in particular, that peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, which are better than wine, and that love of God which nourishes the soul, as milk does the body.<sup>1</sup>

No one is excluded from this or any other invitation in the Bible. The final invitation on the last page of the Bible is:

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let [them] that heareth say, Come. And let [them] that [are] athirst come. And whosoever will, let [them] take the water of life freely.<sup>2</sup>

This invitation is always, but not only, a metaphor for spiritual provision and nourishment. It also has *social* holiness connotations, as evidenced throughout the Old and New Testaments, and the whole history of the Church. The Feedings of the Multitudes recorded in the Gospels may or may not be the only occasions for such events, and several passages record many of the other meals Jesus shared in a variety of situations. As we say in our Communion liturgy, "He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners."<sup>3</sup>

**We each have a part in addressing world hunger.**

But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. (*Matthew 14:16 KJV*)

Jesus fed people for the same reason he healed people -- because he *cared* about people. His actions were also signs, but they only *became* signs because they were outward manifestations of his inward love and grace. It is hard to imagine that he would expect anything less of the Church.

Food is one of the most basic needs of every living creature on earth. The World Central Kitchen, whose motto is "Food is a Universal Human Right," has served over 300 million meals

in war and natural disaster zones. The keynote speaker for Cole Wyatt's White Coat Ceremony at the University of Louisville School of Medicine<sup>4</sup> last Sunday emphasized the need for proper nutrition in order for the physical body to function properly, and she highlighted the health impact of social structures on access to food. According to the United Nations World Food Program, the six "Biggest Drivers of Hunger"<sup>5</sup> are

1. Conflict
2. Climate Change
3. Gender Inequality
4. Food Waste
5. Covid-19
6. Extreme Poverty

There is an argument, though, made under the guise of Biblical teaching and based on a distortion of what Paul wrote in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians, "if any would not work, neither should [they] eat."<sup>6</sup> This was an admonition by Paul to those who thought that since Christ was coming soon anyway, they would just quit their jobs and watch for the Second Coming, mooching off of everyone else in the meantime. It never was meant to justify stinginess and has never been used by the Church at large to withhold the necessities of life from those in need – especially those who, for whatever reasons, were unable to adequately provide for themselves or their families.

The whole miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand began when Jesus told his disciples not to send the multitude away, but to provide food for them. All four Gospels record the Feeding of the Five Thousand with five loaves and two fishes in the Jewish region around Tabgah by the Sea of Galilee. Two of the Gospels also record the additional Feeding of Four Thousand with seven loaves "and a few small fish"<sup>7</sup> in the Gentile region around Gergasa on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Note that the patriarchal rendering of these narratives about the Feeding of the Multitudes counts only the men, then adds the phrase "beside women and children"<sup>8</sup> to account for perhaps an additional five to fifteen thousand people. For perspective, just think about an estimated ten thousand participants at the Fancy Farm Picnic yesterday, where the good people of St. Jerome Catholic Church served 19,000 pounds of BBQ plus all the fixings and deserts.<sup>9</sup> They didn't say how much was left over, but there were reported leftovers at the feedings of the five thousand and the four thousand, respectively, of twelve and seven baskets.

The distribution of the food is an interesting aspect of the miracle. Oleg Kostyuk, in his dissertation "The Function of Military Language in the Feeding of the Five Thousand Narrative" researched comparisons in the Old Testament militia passages with the way Jesus organized the people to receive their shares of the bread and fish.<sup>10</sup> I'd never imagined it to be that well structured, but in some fashion, everyone sat on the ground in somewhat manageable groups. However formal or informal the event unfolded, there is a remarkable similarity to the general administration of Holy Communion. The gifts were brought and blessed, then given to the disciples to minister to the people. The people received the food that had been blessed for them. It must have been a festive event, filled with wonder and celebration mingled with reverence and awe. And there was more than enough for everyone.

**All blessings come from God, regardless of how they are distributed.**

The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. (*Psalm 145:15-16 KJV*)

All the blessings of God are for all the creatures of the earth, including but not exclusively our species. God's blessings are to be shared equitably, that is, fairly. This is the old-timey Bible way. Clear back in the Book of Exodus, when the children of Israel were wandering in the Wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, God provided manna for them to gather and eat. Each day the people would gather what they needed for their households for that day. The Bible says in the Good News Translation:

When they measured it, those who gathered much did not have too much, and those who gathered less did not have too little. Each had gathered just what [they] needed.<sup>11</sup>

Every Sunday worship service includes an offertory moment of praise and thanksgiving to God for all the ways God provides for our spiritual and temporal needs. During this time, we encourage each other to return a portion of those blessings, with, as we say in our Baptismal Covenant, "our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness."<sup>12</sup> Then we sing,

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise [God], all creatures here below;  
Praise [God] above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.<sup>13</sup>

With the Psalmist, we celebrate God's open-hand policy. Our United Methodist denomination shares the aspirational motto "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors."<sup>14</sup> We seek to reflect God's open invitation and God's open-handed generosity. Charles Spurgeon wrote in his commentary on this verse,

Living things have needs, and these create desires; the living God has suitable supplies at hand, and these [God] gives till inward satisfaction is produced, and the creature sighs no longer. In spiritual things, when God has raised a desire, [God] always gratifies it; hence the longing is prophetic of the blessing. In no case is the desire of the living thing excited to produce distress, but in order that it may seek and find satisfaction.<sup>15</sup>

Our sharing should reflect the generosity of our loving, compassionate God, not the stinginess of the selfish and fearful. With Jesus, we pray for ourselves and for the whole world, especially those who are having a hard time making ends meet, and most especially for those who are suffering from inadequate food and nutrition, "Give us this day our daily bread."<sup>16</sup>

**We are gathered into the faith community and then sent into the world.**

Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the [parents], and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. (*Romans 9:4-5 KJV*)

According to the entire allegorical narrative of the Old Testament, God formed the Israelites as a sacramental nation through which all God's promises were to be received, shared, and distributed to the rest of the world. In this passage, Paul lamented that so many of his own kin were not interested in fulfilling this sacred role, but he celebrated that "spirit of adoption" he had described earlier in this letter, whereby *everyone* is invited to participate.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, some people distorted that invitation into a kind of racially supremacist notion, as apparently, some people are always finding ways to do. Reginald Fuller wrote in reference to the issues this passage raises,

There are centuries of anti-Semitism for which the Church must repent, and it has probably lost the right today to seek to "convert" the Jews. The credibility gap is far too great, and it is the Church's own sin that this is so.<sup>18</sup>

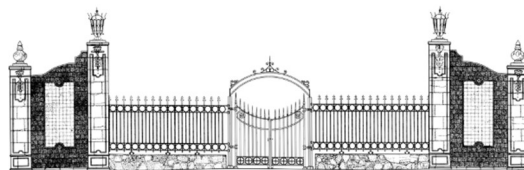
We are all called into a universal fellowship of love as the family of God. In our Communion liturgy, we pray not only that the Spirit will "make us one with Christ," and not only that she will "make us one with each other," but that she will also "make us one in ministry to all the world."<sup>19</sup> The gifts we receive from God are intended to be distributed by us to the world like the bread and fish were distributed to all the people in the Feeding of the Multitude. And if we get our part right, there should be more than enough for everyone.

### *Conclusion*

World hunger is, and never ceases to be, a spiritual issue. It only becomes political when it is used as leverage to deprive people of their fair share of the world's nutritional resources. In the Judgement of the Nations in Matthew 25, the nations are gathered and divided according to how they have treated their most vulnerable populations. The pronouncement of the One sitting on the throne of glory begins as phrased in the New Revised Standard Version:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who 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.'<sup>20</sup>

In the Name of Jesus, Amen.



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## More Than Enough for Everyone

Manuscript of the sermon preached by Rev. Bill Lawson on August 6, 2023, at Briensburg UMC  
Bible Readings for the 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Revised Common Lectionary  
Isaiah 55:1-5, Psalm 145:8-9 & 14-21, Romans 9:1-5, Matthew 14:13-21

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### Acknowledgments

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### Bible Quotations

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Revelation 22:17 (KJV).

<sup>3</sup> The United Methodist Church. "Service of Word and Table I." *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 37. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992. Print.

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations World Food Program. "The Biggest Drivers of Hunger." *UN World Food Program USA*. [www.wfpusa.org/drivers-of-hunger/](http://www.wfpusa.org/drivers-of-hunger/) Accessed 5 August 2023.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 14:34 (NRSV).

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 14:21 (KJV).

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<sup>11</sup> Exodus 16:18 (GNT).

<sup>12</sup> The United Methodist Church. "The Baptismal Covenant I." *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 94. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992. Print.

<sup>13</sup> The United Methodist Church. "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow." *The United Methodist Hymnal*, No. 95. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989. Print.

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon. "Commentary on Psalm 145." *The Treasury of David*.  
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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 6:11 (KJV).

<sup>17</sup> Romans 8:15-17.

<sup>18</sup> Reginald H. Fuller. "Nineteenth Sunday of the Year." *Preaching the Lectionary*, p.157. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1984. Print.

<sup>19</sup> The United Methodist Church. "Service of Word and Table I." *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 38. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992. Print.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 25:24-35 (NRSV).



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