

“THE NEED TO FEED”

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Ezekiel 34:1-10 , I Cor 11:17-26, MT 25:31-46

Today’s readings may have seemed a bit harsh. The oracle of Ezekiel, in which he lambasts the kings of Israel for not properly shepherding the people, sounds a lot like the last part of the Matthew passage where the condemned goats have been separated from the sheep. Ezekiel wrote: “You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them.” Sounds a lot like Matthew’s “I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,” and so on.

Then there’s Paul, in I Corinthians, “when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. . . . When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.” Paul’s criticism of excess and self-indulgence among the Christians at Corinth sound a little like another part of Ezekiel’s oracle: “You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep.”

Harsh words.

But that’s not what I bring to you today. We preachers are always supposed to look for the Good News in the passage we’ve chosen to preach on. And in this case, it’s not that hard. For this congregation has a strong ministry of feeding the hungry. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.”

Do we see Christ in the faces of those we feed? I know I don’t always. Sometimes I’m a little annoyed at being interrupted by a knock at the door. Sometimes I think judgmental thoughts, forgetting that God has claimed the sole right to judge. Sometimes I get antsy listening to a hard-luck story that sounds soooo familiar.

But when I hear the stories that you tell me — stories, for instance, of the “Bread of Life Mission Meals” ministry to motel residents — I believe that you often do see the face of Christ in the faces of those folk who accept a meal with gratitude — folk who carry a shred of hope while enduring hardship I can’t even imagine — folk who despair at having enough money or food to feed their children. You not only reflect the face of Christ in your re-telling of your experience, but you do so willingly, without coercion, month after month.

I’m not sure everyone here knows what the “Bread of Life Mission Meals” are. So I’m going to ask our Mission Committee chair to give us a little background: Anne Reilly, could you be a roving reporter and help us out here?

Anne: Karen, how many people work on the mission meal the last Sunday of each month?

Anne: Let's invite everyone in the congregation this morning to stand up if they have ever participated in the mission meal in any way.

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Anne: How many meals are prepared each time?

Anne: Let's see...there are about 50 people here in worship this morning. (I will have somebody take a quick count early in the service) So the meals prepared could feed everyone here twice?

Anne: Who are the people who receive the mission meals?

Anne: How many years have we been involved?

“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.’”

The Good News in today's sermon is that this faith community, collectively, is fulfilling a portion of the description of the righteous in Matthew 25. That is not license to rest on our laurels. But it is an opportunity to examine our ministries and to learn from each other's experience. Today you're invited to ask any one of these folk who have participated, what it feels like to prepare or deliver a meal to one of the least of these members of Christ's family. Maybe you can also share something you're doing that is ministry of another sort. After all, we're called to share our time, talent, and treasure. Maybe you give time tutoring a student or helping maintain the yard of an older neighbor. Maybe your talent is in teaching our children in church school or reading to someone who is homebound or whose sight is diminishing. Maybe your calling is to share your treasure . . . helping with One Great Hour of Sharing, or offering a camp scholarship. And one thing we can all do is to share in praying for ourselves and others. As long as we can breathe, we can whisper, “Hear us, Good Lord”. And those prayers buoy those who face surgery or separation, confinement or loss.

This congregation is said to have “The Need to Feed”, and surely the community has the need to be fed. Bread of Life meals are a wonderful ministry. Maybe today's dialog between Anne and Karen is nudging you, maybe you feel God calling you, in Jesus' words at the feeding of the 5000: “You give them something to eat.” (Luke 9:13) Or maybe you're called to some other action, some place where you see the face of Christ in another human being in need.

As we gather around the Lord's Table later in this service, center yourself. Consider what you may be hearing a calling to . . . maybe something you have been putting off until “just the right time” . . . maybe something that dawns on you “out of the blue” . . . maybe something that one of your neighbors in the pew has talked about that helps you say, “I can do that!”

And as we gather, let us continue to share our time, our talent, and our treasure freely. It would be a shame to come to this table as Paul saw some in Corinth . . . coming to claim the highest seat, the largest portion, the greatest blessing. Let us come to this table in humility.

For you see, at this table we all have the need . . . *to be fed.*