

Discipleship: Ministry to the Hungry
by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Pentecost Litany based on Psalm 8

Leader: When I look at your heavens,

All: the work of your fingers,

Leader: the moon and the stars,

All: which you have set in place,

Leader: what is man that you are mindful of him,

All: and the son of man that you care for him?

Leader: We worship you, Lord, In the name of the Father and The Son and The Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 55:1-5

"Come, all you who are thirsty,

come to the waters;

and you who have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.

³ Give ear and come to me;
listen, that you may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.

⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
a ruler and commander of the peoples.

⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not,
and nations you do not know will come running to you,
because of the Lord your God,

the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendor.”

Matthew 14:13-21 ¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

¹⁶ Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

¹⁷ “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

¹⁸ “Bring them here to me,” he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

...You give them something to eat. – Matthew 13:52

Jesus is tired. He needed nothing else but some time alone after hearing about the death of John the Baptist. He is grieving? We grieve. We have lost loved ones. Some of us have lost a sibling, a spouse, a cousin our own age. Jesus is grieving not just the loss but how it happened. The ever-present misuse of power entrusted, by God, to those who should know better. When will his children have compassion for each other?

Jesus is tired. The disciples are tired. We have been there. Jesus maybe doing the healing, but someone must organize the crowd. 5,000 people with no tables or chairs, no building, no bulletin or entertainment... oh and the caterer didn't show up. Can you imagine?

It is a great opportunity. They get to do the follow-up with people whose lives have been changed. People hungry to know more about Jesus and the Kingdom. They get to share their faith again and again... and again and again. Exciting. Meaningful. But it is still exhausting.

Jesus says the same thing to our crowded schedules and exhaustion that He said to the disciples at the end of a very long day.

...You give them something to eat. – Matthew 13:52

We all know exactly what Jesus is asking of us. We know there are homeless and malnourished kids in our neighborhoods, much less in the world. We know the spiritually hungry people in our lives. We may even have the confidence that we will have the right words when the opportunities present themselves. We will share our faith. However, you are not the only person in this room to feel overwhelmed when you hear Jesus say ... 'You. Feed my sheep.'

It is only natural to argue with such a command. After all we are limited human beings, with limited resources. You are not the only one to make up a reason in your mind that this command does not apply to you.

But it does. And what first comes as an overwhelming burden, Christ magnifies and multiplies into a blessed promise.

Jesus is here speaking to our own exhaustion and hunger. His words bring us past ourselves and back to Him. ‘You can’t even imagine all the ways in which I have and I will use you to feed my sheep. My abundant provision is greater than your limits!’

God provides. This is the point of the feeding miracles. Mana and loaves. God provides daily what you need.

There is more than enough food produced throughout the world to feed every person every day, multiple meals a day. Good unprocessed, nutrient packed meals.

The problem is distribution. How do we get the food to the people who need it. There are more than enough airplanes and trucks to move the food. The logistic problem is not limited by resources; it is limited by human compassion.

There are dictators and governments, to be sure, which stand in the way of our good intentions. But there is an unpleasant, inconvenient truth that we all bear. Hunger is not a logistics problem it is a behavioral problem. The limiting factor in every economy is human sin and greed. We may not be the manipulative power hungry Herod like dictator, but we certainly are complacent.

So, then it would seem that the answer would be to make the system more efficient. We have the technology, we have the resources, we just need to use them differently. Right?

The biggest contributing factors to food waste in the world for poorer nations are poor storage facilities, supply chain losses,

unreliable transportation, and limited access to markets, causing much of the harvest to spoil before it ever reaches consumers.*

In wealthy nations the largest contributing factor to food waste is consumer habits. Consumer habits like over-purchasing, improper food handling at home and discarding food that is still safe to eat.*

So, let's just change our market system. Control how people get fed. Improve the infrastructure of poorer countries. If we could just make the system 10% more efficient imagine how many mouths could be fed.

We have the resources and technology. We could fix the problem, if we wanted to. And the 'if' in that statement Damns us all.

The nation with the 6th highest food waste per capita is the Dominican Republic. A country we have literally been to and fed children.

There is something other than inefficiency causing poverty, malnourishment and hunger.

So, what is the solution? Hunger is preventable, isn't it?

How is it that God would have you think and feel about hunger? What is God's answer to dictators like Herod who have no compassion? What is God's response to the exhausted and complacent over consumer in us?

Again, it is something along the lines of - 'You can't even imagine all the ways in which I have and I will use you to feed my sheep. My abundant provision is greater than your limits!'

We are limited. Human beings, in spite our best intentions, do not know what we need or how to provide for each other. The number of hungry in the world is still increasing.

However, there is a greater reality that stands in the face of our stark limitedness.

God provides! When it comes to hunger it is enough to trust in God's daily provision from field, to truck, to you. The single greatest impact on your involuntary overconsumption is the reality of daily bread.

God has and He will provide all that you need to consume. He knows what you need. In that promise, and only in that promise, will humanity ever be able to address the hunger of the world.

However, the feeding of the 5,000 has nothing to do with physical hunger and malnourishment. Jesus makes this clear later when He accuses the crowds of following their bellies and not their hearts. The root of the problem is spiritual, not physical.

In a world that is spiritually hungry. Malnourished on the junk food of our cultures and our tribes. God has proven time and again that His abundant provision is greater than our limits.

The stark reality is that humanity has invested far more time and energy into physical hunger than into the Spiritual needs of our own families and neighbors. This is no surprise to God, it is in our nature. We are fallen. We are limited we do not know what we need.

And yet God provides.

It is our temptation to fix our spiritual issues in the same way we might logically fix world hunger. However, our faith is not something to perfect. Efficiency and convivence are the opposite of faith. You can't store up faith and save it for a rainy day.

Faith is a daily bread given when it's needed. There has always been enough, because God's mysterious provision is enough. Wherever there are 2 or 3 gathered in His name – God is present.

God's Kingdom, unlike the world, is functioning exactly as He intends.

There is more than enough faith produced throughout the world to feed every person every day, multiple meals a day. And the reality is that faith is given everyday, multiple times a day in ways we can predict or control, or imagine.

This is your ministry. You have been doing it your whole life.

Jesus is here speaking to our own exhaustion and hunger. His words bring us past ourselves and back to Him. You cannot even comprehend or imagine the ways God is using you to feed His sheep.



*The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes (La multiplication des pains)
James Tissot

Highlighted Countries (total and per capita food waste, 2024)

China

The gross amount of food waste in China exceeds 108 million tons annually, as of 2024. The large quantities of food waste reported by China, while considerable, probably shouldn't be too much of a surprise for the world's most populous country. Per capita, about 76 kg of food is wasted each year.

India

The gross amount of food waste for India exceeds 78 million tons. Much like China, India's sheer population numbers unsurprisingly result in larger amounts of unused food. About 54 kg of food is wasted per Indian annually.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, almost 31 million tons of food was wasted in the year 2024. Per capita, Pakistanis waste as much food as Chinese and Indians combined, at 122 kg in a year.

Nigeria

Nigeria wasted 24.8 million tons of food in 2024. That was about 106 kg per capita. The biggest reasons for food waste in Nigeria are poor storage facilities, inefficient transportation, and limited access to markets, causing much of the harvest to spoil before it ever reaches consumers.

United States

The gross amount of food waste in the US exceeds 24 million tons per year. That's about 71 kg per capita. While other countries can cite population numbers as the inherent reason for food waste, the US can't make that claim. For the most powerful nation on earth, food waste is a result of being the world's largest consumer of food.

Brazil

The gross amount of food waste in Brazil exceeds 20 million tons. The per capita amount is about 95 kg per year. In Brazil, most food waste happens during harvesting, storage, and transportation, where infrastructure gaps and handling losses cause large amounts of food to spoil before reaching store shelves.

Egypt

In Egypt, the gross amount of food waste exceeds 18 million tons. That is about 155 kg per capita, placing Egypt as one of the top food wasting countries per capita in the world.

Indonesia

The gross amount of food waste in Indonesia is almost 15 million tons. The amount per capita is almost 52 kg. In Indonesia, food waste is driven largely by inefficient supply chains, poor storage practices, and consumer habits like over-purchasing and improper food handling at home.

Bangladesh

The gross amount of food waste in Bangladesh is just over 4 million tons annually. Per capita, that is about 82 kg per year. In Bangladesh, food waste is mainly caused by outdated farming methods, lack of cold storage, and spoilage during transportation to crowded urban markets.

Mexico

The gross amount of food waste in Mexico is about 13.4 million tons. Per capita, this amounts to 102 kg of food wasted each year. In Mexico, food waste is largely the result of inefficient distribution networks, supply chain losses, and

* Food Waste Index Report 2024 - Environment Assembly – UNEP

consumer habits like over-purchasing and improper food handling at home consumer practices like discarding food that is still safe to eat.