**Hungry for Servant Leadership**

**October 17, 2021 Pentecost 21**

Mark 10: 35-45 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Today is The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and World Food Day. 690,000,000 people will go to bed hungry tonight. Think about that. 690,000,000 people aren’t asking, “What will we eat for dinner?” No. 690,000,000 people are asking, “Will we eat dinner?” And they ask that question night after night. Hunger is so pervasive you’d think that the whole earth was made of dust. That no crops could grow anywhere. But we know there’s nothing wrong with Mother Nature; the problem lies in the choices we make for her. Poverty, land grabbing, climate change, the commodification of food and water, conflict and political instability…. The causes of hunger are so complex, so intertwined, so systemic, it’s natural to wonder how you and I are really ever going to make a difference.

According to Jesus, in our scripture reading today, the difference is about servant leadership. Once again, the disciples, after hearing Jesus tell them he was going to be handed over to be tortured and die, and rise again, seemed more focused on greatness. James and John ask Jesus to give them whatever they ask, which is to be seated at his right and left, in glory. Jesus asks them if they can drink the cup he has to drink and be baptized with the baptism he will be baptized with and they respond a little too quickly they are able. They probably did not understand what Jesus was asking of them, but he knew they would suffer and die as well. The other disciples, catching wind of this conversation were upset, not so much that they were talking about greatness, after Jesus’ previous challenges on the topic, but because James and John presumed to be the ones beside Jesus and not them. Jesus challenged them all, reminding them that for the Gentiles, the Romans, their rulers lord it over them and are tyrants, but that in order to become great, they must be servants or even a slave of all.

So how do we serve, to address hunger and poverty? One way we do is supporting the Mission and Service work of the church that serves many where we can’t.

As a United Church we endorse the principles of food sovereignty: the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. We believe food is a sacred gift from God. Manna from heaven. No one should go hungry.

That’s why from coast to coast to coast in Canada, our generosity supports community kitchens and meal programs, food cupboards, shelters, job training programs, community gardens, and healthy food programs. Internationally, we send food in times of crisis, distribute seeds, fund agricultural training programs and micro-lending programs, and support projects that help small-scale farmers access equipment they need and, in some instances, build infrastructure so they can transport their food to market. We work with partners like ACT Alliance and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to move beyond the charity model by helping to work toward long-term systemic change through respectful partnerships.

It’s true that we aren’t going to solve all the problems in the world, but for some people our support means the world.

Here’s a story, this one stretching from Canada to Japan and then on to Kenya: In Kenya, more than 850,000 children have been orphaned due to HIV/AIDS. Some estimates are even higher. [Emmanuel Baya](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFB1OKVhTjg), a farmer living in Magarini, Kenya, lost his parents when he was a child. So, when he saw children looking for food under the cashew trees on his property, he felt a tug on his heart strings. To make a long story short, he opened a children’s centre and school for orphans. But he didn’t want to just nourish their bodies and minds, he also wanted them to be able to one day sustain themselves. And he knew he needed more skills to help. So he flew to the Asian Rural Institute in Japan, ARI for short. ARI is an agricultural training institute that teaches organic farming techniques and leadership skills and it is supported through your Mission & Service gifts. When he graduated from the program there, Emmanuel returned home and started an organic demonstration farm next to his school. Today, not only are the 287 children in his care learning how to grow food, but the farm is also serving seven neighbouring communities. Volunteers at the farm are also receiving agricultural training at ARI thanks to your support.

This, friends, is what happens when servant leadership works with others and empowers someone to make a difference.

We have servant leadership in our midst as well. We support those who are hungry in our partnerships with Indigenous Christian Fellowship, ICF and their food programs - we have a team of volunteers helping with Breakfast once a month before the pandemic and now making lunches, including cookie baking, during the pandemic. In our partnership with Glen Elm School, people serve by helping make lunches and now we deliver food that is donated to children who come to school without lunch. We have just started up this donation program again, and could use drivers to deliver it. There are others in the congregation serving others in food programs unrelated to the church or as individuals, supporting those who they have gotten to know who are hungry.

We have been hearing a lot this past few weeks about the homeless crisis in Regina, which is directly connected with issues of food security. I have had a few conversations with folk about what can we do, and one thing I wondered about was the possibility of building Tiny Homes for people who need housing. Knowing that it has been done elsewhere, is this not something that could be done here? I know that John Robinson designs tiny houses and was pleased to see him post an article about a [tiny homes](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/fredericton-housing-council-1.6208865?__vfz=medium%3Dsharebar&fbclid=IwAR0em5IIV7TK0NLnsAaiGZ_wmCJyZ8hf4NpTHAsMHSgjkY2uHdftNLVJvqY) project in Fredericton as affordable housing. I reached out to John and we plan to meet to discuss this idea this week. People’s food security increases if they have stable housing, and the financial resources to support themselves.

690,000,000 may be going hungry tonight, but there are people in our communities and communities supported by Mission and Service who aren’t among them. That’s because they are amazing people and they are supported by amazing people like you. May we continue to serve the best we can to support those in need. May we offer a different kind of leadership that builds community and serves others, knowing that God’s love works through us, and empowers us to face the challenges.