

Faith That Feeds – Dr Catherine Cavanagh

Wall Street United Church, World Food Sunday — October 19, 2025.

Scriptures: James 2:15–17; Acts 11:27–30

The air smells like autumn these days, doesn't it? Crisp and sweet! There are pumpkins on porches, trees blazing red and gold, maybe some pumpkin muffins cooling on a counter. And if you're like me, you might have had one too many — (strictly for quality control of course!) It's the season of harvest and gratitude.

But just across town, someone is standing in line at the Food Bank. Someone else is counting coins at the grocery store, trying to stretch what's left in their wallet. Someone is choosing between heat and food this week. In Brockville.

In 2024, according to the latest statistics, ***one in every thirteen Brockville residents received support from the Food Bank.*** That's insane! That's not a statistic from far away — that's here!! That's our neighbours. That's some of us.

So today, on World Food Sunday, we need to ask ourselves what faith and discipleship look like in a hungry world — and in our own backyard.

We heard the readings for today. James doesn't sugarcoat anything:

“If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs — what good is that? Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

James is saying: *‘Don't just **say** grace — **be** grace!’*

Grace energizes our faith. It is the ability given by the Holy Spirit to understand, forgive, accept, be courageous and encouraging, and care for others. Sometimes we hear faith spoken of as just an inner feeling — something we think or believe privately. But in scripture, *faith is trust made visible.* It's the shape our love takes in the world.

Here in this church we see grace come alive every Friday morning, when we serve a free breakfast, and every time a Sunday supper is held. We see that grace when people like Michel, Laura and so many others work to combat food insecurity

across this city. We'll see that grace in the donations that will be given from those of us here to the Food Bank today. And if you can't give, remember that's okay — you still live grace. Food is about community too, and you build our community just by being here. The second reading from the Book of Acts emphasizes that in a crisis, the early disciples each gave "according to his or her ability". We all live in different circumstances, and those change during our lives ... so it's okay.

Now the book of Acts is interesting, because it is written by the same person who wrote the Gospel according to Luke.

Luke was a Greek-speaking physician. So really, he's Dr Luke! His first volume is the Gospel, which tells us about Jesus' life and teachings, which we've been reflecting on over these past months. In Luke's gospel he tells us over and over again about Jesus' emphasis on the importance of gathering together to eat, and the fact that all should be welcome at the table.

The second volume of Dr. Luke's writing, from which our reading came today, is called more formally *The Acts of the Apostles*. And it is precisely that: a record of what the Apostles and early disciples do after Jesus' ascension, as they strive to follow Christ's teachings through many adventures and challenges. They struggle at times. They seek grace. These early disciples can serve as an example to us as we today continue to try to live as Christ calls us.

In today's story the disciples hear about an impending famine, and they send food and relief to Judea. They remember the ancient teaching from the Book of Genesis that **'all are created in the image of God'** so it doesn't matter that these are strangers. They remember Christ's great teachings to *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"*. They remember that He said, *"Whatsoever you do to the least of my own, you do to me"*. So this thing they do, they do in memory of Christ, just as he asked them to at the last supper. Jesus said, **"Do this in memory of me"**.

Discipleship is more than an emotional or intellectual activity. In the book of Acts, the disciples weren't just thinking and talking about Jesus — they were also trying to live out his teachings. Disciples, after all, are different from fans.

Jesus wasn't looking for fans — he's not Taylor Swift! Jesus doesn't want an audience. He wants disciples. Not admirers, but imitators. Not consumers of a message, but co-creators of a movement.

He doesn't want us to just celebrate his miracles; he wants us to continue them.

It's okay if we fail sometimes, we just pick ourselves up and try to do better.

When he said, "**Feed my sheep,**" (John 21:15-17) he meant literally, *feed people*.

When he said, "**I am the Bread of Life,**" (John 6) he wasn't being superficial.

In his world, like ours sadly, food was precarious. Bread was survival.

Jesus chose the image of bread because it spoke to the deepest human truth: *food is life*. It spoke of the connection between humanity and God's good creation. We need this world. We need food. We need each other. And we need God.

The readings we heard today from James and Acts won't let us forget that. Faith and food belong together. Worship and justice for the world belong together.

We belong together. The way we act and the way we pray are part of the same story.

When a family here in Brockville can't afford groceries even though both parents are working full-time, we are not just facing an economic problem — we are facing a moral and spiritual one.

And now I'm going to throw some more numbers at you. (And if you're not a numbers person, that's okay, there won't be a test, so let them wash over you!) Did you know that according to the health unit the living wage in Leeds and Grenville is **\$21.50 per hour** per individual for someone working full time with no dependents — **but minimum wage is \$17.60**.

(<https://tinyurl.com/bt2vwbx9>). That's a *\$4 an hour shortfall* even if you can get full time!

And God help people if they're not employed, because the maximum amount an individual can get on Ontario Works (what used to be called Welfare) is \$733 per month. Same as it was in 2018 — no inflation adjustment! That's barely enough to rent a room in Brockville, let alone Toronto or Ottawa. There's nothing left for food with that amount. So you need to choose — food, or shelter?

If people rely on the food bank then, it's not a reflection of personal failure — it's societal failure and a sign of a system out of balance. It's a sign of a fracturing of

community and relationship — a sign that, sadly, things aren't so different from what they were 2000 years ago.

What does this mean for discipleship? In Jesus' world, as in ours, food wasn't just nourishment either — it was also relationship.

To eat with someone was to say, "*You belong.*"

To withhold food was to exclude, to say, "*You don't.*"

That's why Jesus' meals caused such a stir. He ate with everyone — tax collectors, Pharisees, outcasts, strangers. Every meal was a living sermon. Every loaf broken was a sign of God's inclusive love.

To not share food, then or now, is to break relationship — with our neighbours and with God. And that is contrary to our call to discipleship. Which is another reason why the Food Bank's work in which we cooperate, and the meals prepared by this congregation are so important. It's *holy work!*

That requires advocacy for justice too, because the situation here, despite the generosity of this community, is out of control as far as food security is concerned. This past July, the Food Bank helped prompt our local city council to send a letter to Prime Minister Mark Carney — highlighting the growing crisis here, and pushing for action. That letter was also sent to Premier Doug Ford and other political leaders. You can find a copy of the letter on the Food Bank's website.

Advocacy for justice takes us beyond our own borders too. After all, today is *World Food Sunday*. In today's scripture, we hear one of the first recorded stories of international aid in the Christian era!

We cannot only be concerned for our own local community, we must also care for the global community. There are many places in the world where, because of war or environmental degradation, there simply aren't the local resources to feed people. Some of the places I would include in that list today are **Sudan**, which is being ripped apart by a conflict over gold; **Chad**, which is facing a huge drought and still taking in refugees from Sudan, **Malawi**, which faces environmental degradation and poverty, and of course **Gaza**, where war and the refusal to let food aid in has created dire conditions.

As Christians, as disciples, what is our responsibility in situations like that? What does faith require of us? The Prophet Micah says to “*Do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.*” Christ calls us to respond as those early disciples did, to act as we can “according to our ability” .

We can't go there and stop the wars. But neither can we ignore them. Fortunately, we have choices and we have voices.

We can learn what's going on in foreign places.

We can for this month participate in the thirty-day vigil for Gaza just called by the Moderator of the United Church of Canada. (What's her name again? For those who don't know, she is our beloved former pastor Rev.Dr. Kimberly Heath!). Every Wednesday this month, she is inviting us to participate in a vigil online at 11am and consider ways we can speak out about Palestine and show our solidarity.

And again, according to our ability, we can send funds for food for our brothers and sisters in other places in the world. The Canadian Foodgrains Bank will gratefully accept donations (as many of you know), and they are booked to visit us again this May.

Remember that even small things — small acts of showing up, small donations — turn into big things when we do them with millions of people all over the world. Just as we heard in last week's sermon on “*The Feeding of the 5000*”, Christ can take small things and make them big, especially if we all participate.

The thing about statistics is that they often record the *bad* things, not the good ones! So despite the fact that this has been a heavy topic, do not despair. We don't know the exact number of how many millions of people all over the world are sharing food. We don't know how many volunteers are logging hours, or even how many donations are coming in.

But we do know it's happening all over the world, and a lot of it is coming from churches. Millions of people are following in the footsteps of the early disciples. And we certainly know it's happening here, every single day.

God worked through those early disciples through the Grace of the Holy Spirit. And that's still how God works today — *through us*. The ability to transform the world isn't about what we have; it's about who we are:

People of resurrection.

People of hope.

Disciples who still believe that love can change the story!

So let's keep writing that story — one prayer, one meal, one act of grace at a time.

Amen.