

**World Food Day                      October 17, 2021**  
**Highlighting Mission & Service**

**Gathering Thought**

In John 4:34 Jesus says, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.”

Food is the source of our energy. What Jesus was saying is that the will of God energizes him to live out his mission. As we pray, we turn to God to replenish our sense of call and purpose.

**Call to Worship**

One: We gather on sacred ground

**All: On the rich earth that nourishes us**

One: Under the great awning of sky that replenishes us

**All: To once again listen to the voice**

One: That warms our hearts say,

**All: “Come, follow me.”**

**Opening Prayer**

**God, the stories of our faith remind us that you are manna from heaven and water from rock.**

**You are the miracle of the loaves and fish.**

**You are our Bread of Life.**

**In this time, fill us up with your Holy Word. Energize us with your songs.**

**Make us thankful, aware, and inspired:**

**thankful for the universe that feeds us,**

**aware that food is a sacred gift given to all**

**and yet still withheld from many,**

**and inspired enough to make a difference.**

**Amen.**

**Ancient Words**

*The first reading for today is from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. He reminds people who have turned away from God’s intentions what God really cares about.*

**Isaiah 58:9b–11**

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and

make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

*Jesus lived in a country where many people were farmers. He told stories about seeds and growing things. This is one of his stories about what it means to share the good news about God's way of justice, compassion and peace.*

### **Scripture: Matthew 13:1–9**

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

May we be inspired by this reading from sacred Scripture. Amen.

### **Reflection: Live Your Mission**

Do you know what it's like to put every ounce of ability and energy into something and have it flop miserably? Do you know what it's like to do your best and find that your best just isn't good enough? Do you know what it's like to wait for something good in your life to grow and then wait...and wait...and wait some more?

That day when Jesus was sitting in the boat in the middle of the sea, he was speaking to a worn-out crowd that probably felt just like that. His followers had been working hard—really hard—to share the good news, but the message wasn't sinking in. Here they were, going from town to town, sharing Jesus' life-saving message that justice is attainable, that there are key values like kindness and generosity that could save the world if we all lived them. Yet despite their important message, everywhere they went, they brushed up against people who were too preoccupied, too bored, too self-centred, or too stressed to listen. Each time a door slammed in their face, their discouragement ramped up. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

Even though Jesus was sitting in the middle of the sea, it's like he could see into the very hearts of those gathered that day. And in that calm, reassuring voice of his, he told them stories to help them understand themselves and make sense of their life. One of them was the parable of the sower:

Some seeds will fall on the path, Jesus said, and the birds will eat them. Some will fall on rock and the sun will scorch them. Some will fall on thorns and be choked out. But some will fall on good soil and bear an unbelievable crop!

The Parable of the Sower was a pep talk of sorts. It wasn't the kind you would hear in a locker room, though. It wasn't about how great Jesus' followers were or how they would succeed at every turn. It was realistic: Some of the work you do is going to feel like a waste of time. Some of it will even be sabotaged. But keep going. Because there will be success. *Trust me*, says Jesus. Live your mission.

This is a millennia-old message we still need to hear. Especially on World Food Sunday.

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 Nature; the problem lies in the choices we make as humans on this planet.

Poverty, land grabbing, climate change, making food and water a commodity to sell to those who can afford it, rather than a human right, 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.

It's like we are standing on that shore right along with Jesus' disciples and there are problems as big as the sea itself in front of us.

And even Jesus is sitting there admitting that doing God's work isn't easy. He doesn't sugar-coat the outcome: some seeds just aren't going to land where we need them to or create the results we want.

But, he says, some seeds will fall on good soil and the result will be phenomenal. So we need to keep living our mission.

Jesus got in the boat that day and rowed into the sea so he could look at the whole crowd at once, so his voice would carry across the water to each and every one of them, so they would take his parable to heart and hear him say: Live your mission. Friends, one of the ways we live our mission as a United Church is by sharing what we have through our collective Mission & Service.

As a United Church we support what's called "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 all over Canada, our collective 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 even help 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. Some of those partnerships go back decades – and some are new, developing out of emerging needs.

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. As the number of givers in the United Church of Canada have gone down, some of those programs cannot be supported any longer, and that's a huge source of concern for all who know how much those programs matter. What is remarkable – and makes me so glad to be part of this amazing group of people we call the United Church – is that as the number of givers have gone down, the amount given per person has gone up! That's amazing! And it truly does make a difference.

You might remember a story the United Church's Philanthropy Unit shared not long ago about a [young Canadian named Jesse](#). When he was 12 years old, Jesse had a traumatic brain injury. His life instantly changed because his brain didn't function the way it once did. By the time he was 17, Jesse had been hospitalized 32 times. Through the ups and downs, his mother took care of him. She was his rock. And then, sadly, three years ago she died of cancer. Without his mother, Jesse's life spiralled out of control. Two years ago, he survived the painfully cold winter sleeping in a storage unit. Then he went to Stella's Circle, a Mission & Service partner, where he was fed, received help to find a home, and is now completing a greenhouse technician college program. Today, [Jesse is leading a new social enterprise](#) that grows food for sale. This, friends, is what happens when seeds of generosity fall on good soil.

You'll find the link to another story – this one stretching from Canada to Japan to Kenya – in your announcements sheets and on Facebook – about a man named Emmanuelle Baya. And if you go to the United Church's YouTube channel, you'll find more such stories.

690,000,000 people may be going hungry tonight. But Jesse and Emmanuel and all the people in their communities that they support and the thousands of people that Mission & Service partners help aren't among them.

That's because they are amazing people, and they are supported by amazing people

like you. You have heard the call of God to generosity and justice, and you have made a difference.

This is what happens when we live our mission.

Living God's mission is like planting seeds—each seed contains the basic material needed to pull off a miracle. And like Jesus says, when they hit good dirt, miracles grow.

Thank you for your mission and service. Thank you for taking Jesus' stories into your heart and letting them transform your lives. Thank you for standing on the shoreline like disciples have for millennia listening to the Parable of the Sower.

Now, let's get to work planting seeds. Let's live our mission.  
Amen.

---

© 2021 The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca>. Any copy must include this notice. Adapted by Rev. Heidi Koschzeck for Gordon United Church, October 17, 2021.

## **Respond**

**Offering Invitation, Prayer and Blessing** – *including a special collection for Mission and Service*

**Generous God, we offer our gifts in response to your call to care. We offer them with gratitude and love, trusting that you will use them to feed bodies, minds, and hearts. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.**