

On this World Communion Sunday

In which we once again for a second year in a row

Will not pass bread

Will not share cup

We are invited in these readings

To ponder our relationship

With resources

And how within ourselves

And our communities

And indeed in our societies

We dance with responses

Of Abundance and Scarcity

Restraint and Accumulation

And of course,

Although literal food is not on the table today

In a world, a nation, and even city

In which food insecurity

Food deserts

Inadequate income

Abounds,

We mustn't allow our reflecting to be purely introspective

For these themes show up in our lives

In a number of ways

How we respond to questions around our time and priorities

Our interactions with others

How and what we will allow to consume (pardon the pun) us and our energies

But as these texts that guide our reflections today

Centre actual hunger and filling

These questions must also be about that ourselves.

So we reflect together

Allowing these things to show us back something about our lives

In hopes we might see our individual, collective and societal selves more clearly

And with that clarity

Be equipped to live more intentionally in line with that which has the potential to emerge

To be beckoned forth

Into this moment.

These are rich passages both of which have appeared in our services

And guided our reflecting in the past months

Exodus and Manna

<https://knoxmetregina.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Sermon-June-13.pdf>

Jesus' Apprentices and Feeding in the wilderness

<https://knoxmetregina.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Sermon-July-18-2021.pdf>

Also if interested, the interplay between the Feeding stories in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Gospel of Mark, is explored in fascinating detail by teacher of the ethical implications of the Christian Scriptures, Ched Myers, of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, with whom I have had the honour of studying at St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon when taking courses on Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

<https://www.bcm-net.org/media/488235-2159602-1090114/bartcast-05-studies-in-mark-iii-sabbath-economics-eucharist-mk-6>

Both of these episodes are set in the wilderness.

And this is important.

Because the wilderness in both

Act as a foil to the Imperial Metropolitan locales

Which form the nexus of power

The Exodus narrative is in the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula

Where the Diaspora of the Hebrew people who have been slaves in Egypt

Are seeking a new home

And it is in this wilderness where they find Manna, bread that is abundantly available

The episode from the Gospel of Mark is also placed in a wilderness.

As is so much of Jesus' teaching

And these wilderness spaces contrast the cities and towns

Which for the first part of Mark's Gospel vividly represent the Imperial presence of Rome

Places like Tiberias, named for the Roman Empire

Which is where the fishing industry of Galilee was controlled

Where fishing licences were sold

Something unheard of one generation prior

And where once subsistence fishing families

Who fed themselves and their communities

Living in response to the rhythms of the seasons and the ebb and flow of the lifecycle of the fish

Suddenly needed to live instead in response to quotas imposed by the Empire

So both of these stories

Can be seen as counter narratives

Where grace, gratitude and abundance offers a possible alternative

To the anxious confines and control that is externally imposed

Upon the people and their relationships with land

A relationship that dances between abundance

And respectful restraint

Often called a Sabbath Economics

The people of Israel take what they need

For themselves and the people of their tent

No more than what they need for the day ahead

No accumulation

No lack

An ethos that will be reflected in Torah – the teachings

In the concept of Jubilee

In which cyclically, debts are forgiven and the land is allowed to rest and renew

So that neither poverty nor economic disparity are inherited

The feeding story on the Galilean hillside

Likewise offers its abundance in a context of thoughtful restraint and communal care

The bread in Exodus is called Manna – literally a word that means – *what is it?*

While the feeding is often called a miracle.

Which can perhaps be read as wry humour on the part of the authoring communities, recognizing how counter to the prevailing culture these ways of being might be seen.

Mark's narrative adds a challenge to the prevailing division within the communities of Jewish Palestine by offering a second feeding narrative.

What we read today from Mark 6 feeds over 5000 and ends with 12 baskets of leftovers.

And a few pages later in our modern published Bibles, Mark 8 sees 4000 fed with 7 leftovers!

Structurally, the first part of Mark's narrative criss-crosses in setting throughout the different parts of Galilee, moving from the predominantly Jewish area into those areas that are predominantly non-Jewish, or Gentile. The descendants of the people who lived in the land before the Hebrew diaspora from Egypt arrives (itself a complicated tale of conquest).

Right after what we read this morning, there will be a crossing from this place, one that is predominantly Jewish, into Tyre, a Gentile space.

In that space, Jesus will encounter a woman of SyroPhoenician ethnic origin. A woman, who though unnamed in the text, is revered as St. Justa the Canaanite in tradition. It is she who will argue that Jesus should show mercy to those not of the Hebrew descent despite his initial reluctance.

Rev. Christa Eidsness offered a wonderful sermon on this topic a few weeks ago, allowing Jesus to not be excused of this troubling response.

<https://knoxmetregina.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/09-05-2021-Sermon.pdf>

It is worth noting, that their argument, used the language of bread and crumbs and questioned who gets to eat first or at all and who has the right to decide.

Interestingly, in the narrative that follows, Jesus, still in this Gentile space

Is involved in that feeding of 4000 this time, with 7 baskets of leftovers.

12 baskets on the Jewish side of the lake, 7 on the Gentile.

Mark's author is nothing if not persistent in use of symbolism to drive home a point.

12 is the number of tribes of Israel

7 is the number of Nations of Cana

So we have this dance of abundance that resists grasping and gripping to what one group believes they might be entitled to keep for themselves

Instead invited to see that they are not diminished by generosity

And a thoughtful ethic of gratitude that respects and honours boundary and limitation

And a receiving that itself leads to increased giving!

A rhythm in harmony with natural workings of land but at the same time contrary to the culture of control.

Continuing with the theme of bread, several weeks ago, we heard a reflection on the oft used term when John's Gospel plays with the feeding narratives, incorporating a name for Jesus as Bread of Life with Rev. Dr. Mathias Ross

https://knoxmetregina.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Sermon_BreadofLife-KM-sermon-Aug-8-Mathias-Ross.pdf

A self-giving that comes from a depth of self-knowledge

Of one's own worth and one's own sufficiency

How often is our over-giving of energy and emotion

Linked to our questions of self

And our anxiety about our own sufficiency.

So we have these wonderful opportunities to wonder

About where we find ourselves anxious and grasping

Where we find ourselves open and confident

Able to move with the ebb and flow

Of gift and grace and gratitude

This inner attitude perhaps gives us a good grounding

To then ask the very necessary temporal questions that these texts reflect

About hunger and access in our moment and place

About actual food.

About having the adequate income to meet one's needs

And about who has the right to label what is what.

<https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/who-controls-the-basic-income-narrative>

Such questions offer up interesting responses.

Community Fridge programs, like the one in Cathedral which was explored in a recent Zoom Coffee time.

One in Heritage supported by many in this community.

Creative responses to reparations and landback movements

<https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/four-case-studies-land-back-in-action>

This season is called a time of emergence

Honouring the natural time of harvest and abundance

And also the human rhythm of this time of year

Being a time when new ideas spring forth

May I end by repeating lines from our opening words...

we will open our hands

to the feast

without shame.

And we will turn

toward each other

without fear.

And we will give up

our appetite

for despair.
And we will taste
and know
of delight.

And we will become bread
for a hungry world.
And we will become drink
for those who thirst.
And the blessed
will become the blessing.
And everywhere
will be the feast.