



Creation Season

Proper 22, Year A, October 5, 2008

*Special Recognition of the Place of Food in our Lives
Food as Commodity*

A Bulletin Insert for the congregations of the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota

Lessons (Revised Common Lectionary)

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

Psalm 19

Philippians 3: 4b-14 Matthew 21: 33-46

Isaiah 5: 1-7

Psalm 80: 7-14

Collect

O God who created all creatures both great and small: Help us to see the beauty and respect the dignity of each animal, bird and fish [or species]. Keep us mindful that, when it is your will, their deaths help keep us alive; and in our honoring of their lives, may we never treat them as a commodity; through Jesus Christ who came to redeem all creation, and who, along with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns now and forever.. *Amen.*

The 10 Commandments and dietary codes of Hebrew Scripture guided the Jewish people and early Christians. Justness and provision for the poor, aliens, and marginalized were a part of life. Boaz allowed Ruth to glean at the edge of his grain fields. In Acts, the first churches established ways to share food, possessions and commissioned Stephen to care for widows. Peter realized that many more foods were acceptable to eat which led to more commerce with neighbors. Few of us today raise our own food. Yet, we are dependent and effected by many forces of science, economics, health and human life and Earth Stewardship.

Human agriculture began about 7,000 years ago. One of the earliest examples of collective farming was in the ancient town of Ur (in modern Iraq). By 3,000 BCE, nearly 2,500 workers provided food for the town of 6,000.

Despite the agricultural sophistication of Ur, and Egypt's Nile River, people continued essentially to be tied to the land in a very consistent fashion. However, gradual changes did come to this sector of society.

As population grew in cities, farming techniques and practices changed to reflect a need for greater efficiency – from farm implements to herding and penning of animals. With increased trade among nations, crops that were native to one area began to be expanded to new regions. Europeans moving to the Americas rapidly increased this practice.

In the 19th century, mechanization came to agriculture. Early steam plows gave way to tractors, which were used for plowing, planting, mid-crop cultivation, and aided in harvesting. Perhaps most significant transformation of agriculture was the expanded modes of transportation. The first shipment of cattle marketed by rail was in 1852. About the same time, colleges and universities began offering specializations in animal husbandry and soil science and the Congress established the Department of Agriculture.

The first grain futures exchange in the world began in 1848 in Chicago. It was created to provide a centralized location where buyers and sellers could come together to negotiate future prices for certain commodities. The purpose of these agreements was to reduce speculation or risk about the future price of a crop such as corn or wheat. Today there are commodity exchanges around the world, from Winnipeg to Dubai to Kuala Lumpur. In the past two years, however, farmers say speculators are bidding up prices on the market, making it impossible for farmers to meet the margins. According to the American Bakers Association, flour prices are up 50% since January; up 173% since last May.

The idyllic pastoral image of a farm family with 2.4 kids, a loving Collie and barn cats just cannot exist any more. Farming is big business, and must compete in a global market like oil and steel. In 2008, American wheat can wind up anywhere in the world. There is no longer a 'spiritual connection' between food production and consumers. Food has become an international commodity. We have yet to determine the value of the gains and losses of such a system.

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