



# Creation Season

Proper 24, Year A, October 19, 2008

*Special Recognition of the Place of Food in our Lives  
Food as Basic Human Need*

Information and Reflections for Homilists, Liturgists, and Clergy of the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota

## Revised Common Lectionary Readings:

Deuteronomy 34: 1-12      Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18      1 Thessalonians 2:1-8      Matthew 22: 34-46  
Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17      Psalm 1

## Alternate Readings

Isaiah 55:1-5      Matthew 14:13-21

## Reflections

*Food is our most basic need after oxygen and water. Without it, life cannot go on.*

The feeding of the five thousand is the most told of all stories in the Gospels.

Matthew's Gospel includes two near-duplicate stories (see also Matthew 15:32-39) which are close parallels of two in Mark (6:32-44 and 8:1-10). Luke (9:10-17) and John (6:1-13) also include the "feeding of the five thousand" or a parallel.

These stories of divine provision echo a common theme in Israel's scriptures. As bread and fish feed the hungry crowd in the wilderness, manna provided daily sustenance for the Israelites in the wilderness. The gospel narratives of Jesus also remind us of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, to whom he gives bottomless supplies of oil and grain, (1 Kg 17:8-16) and of Elisha feeding one hundred (2 Kg 4:42-44).

In addition, Jesus' blessing and breaking bread are the same actions as those in the gospel accounts of his last meal with his disciples (see Matthew 26:26; see also I Corinthians 11:23-24; Luke 24:30; Acts 27:35).

This image of Jesus providing food for the hungry is so powerful that John's gospel identifies Jesus as himself the Bread of Life.

*Nowhere is the connection between environmentalism and social justice more clear than in the production and supply of food.*

Runaway climate change will likely reduce and certainly disrupt food production throughout the world. A study published in Science suggests that, "due to climate change, 'southern Africa could lose more than 30% of its main crop, maize, by 2030. In South Asia losses of many regional staples, such as rice, millet and maize could top 10%.'"

The years 2007-2008 saw dramatic world food price rises, bringing a state of global crisis and causing political and economical instability and social unrest in both poor and developed nations.

Systemic causes for the world-wide food price increase continue to be the subject of debate. Initial causes of the late 2006 price spikes included unseasonable droughts in grain producing nations and rising oil prices. Oil prices further heightened the costs of fertilizers, food transport, and industrial agriculture.

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## ***The poorest countries and people would be hardest hit.***

The 2001 IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) Third Assessment Report concluded that “the poorest countries would be hardest hit, with reductions in crop yields in most tropical and sub-tropical regions due to decreased water availability, and new or changed insect pest incidence. In Africa and Latin America many rainfed crops are near their maximum temperature tolerance, so that yields are likely to fall sharply for even small climate changes; falls in agricultural productivity of up to 30% over the 21st century are projected. Marine life and the fishing industry will also be severely affected in some places.”

“Climate change induced by increasing greenhouse gases is likely to affect crops differently from region to region. For example, average crop yield is expected to drop down to 50% in Pakistan according to the UKMO scenario whereas corn production in Europe is expected to grow up to 25% in optimum hydrologic conditions.”

## ***Inequalities of wealth lead to inequality of everything else, including food***

For example wealthier people can afford to feed grain to cattle for meat, while many of the world’s poorest people cannot afford even enough grain to feed themselves.

“About 70 percent of the grain produced in the United States is fed to animals destined for slaughter. Worldwide, the figure is over 33 percent. Two-thirds of U. S. grain exports end up being fed to animals. It takes up to 16 pounds of grain to raise one pound of edible beef in a feedlot. To make matters even worse, the U. S. is a major importer of beef, much of it raised for the fast-food hamburger markets on land that was formerly tropical forests, in countries where there is widespread hunger.” (<http://jewishveg.com/schwartz/jvpeace.html>)

Wealthy nations can even afford to use grain to produce fuel.

## ***Food shortages often lead to political instability or even war.***

“Last year saw mass protests in Mexico over the skyrocketing prices of tortillas, rice riots in Senegal, and street demonstrations in Italy over higher prices for pasta. Many governments have slapped price controls on food or imposed limits on exports of grain (such temporary measures, done for political purposes, usually backfire later in the economy). So far this year, higher wheat prices in Pakistan have led to smuggling and a need for troops to guard grain reserves. In Indonesia this week, 10,000 sellers of soybean products stormed the government palace to protest high prices.” (*Christian Science Monitor*, January 18, 2008)

The Minnesota Episcopal Environmental Stewardship Commission (MEESC) has prepared Creation Season materials for Propers 22-25, Year A, with a focus on food. If you find the information on this reflection to be of interest, you may wish to visit the MEESC website for more information ([www.env-steward.com](http://www.env-steward.com)). Members of MEESC are available to visit your congregation to assist you and them in an environmental stewardship walk.

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***People have fought over productive land throughout history.***

“Talmudic sages saw significance in the following; The Hebrew word for war, *milchama*, is directly derived from the word *locham*, which means both “to feed” as well as “to wage war.” The Hebrew word for bread, *lechem*, comes from the same root. This led the sages to suggest that lack of bread and the search for sufficient food tempt people to make war. The seeds of war are often found in the inability of a nation to provide adequate food and other resources for its people. Hence, feeding tremendous amounts of grains to animals destined for slaughter, instead of feeding starving people, could be a prime cause for war.”  
(<http://jewishveg.com/schwartz/jvpeace.html>)

***Why is this issue of concern for Christians?***

If you live in a developing country, and most Christians do, it may be a matter of personal and family survival. Even those of us in wealthier nations need to be concerned if we are to follow the teaching of Christ and our tradition.

In both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures God shows great concern for the plight of the poor.

In addition to the above mentioned identification of Jesus as the bread of life, illustrated by a quite concrete feeding of 5000 plus people, we find that early Christian communities were known for their care of widows and orphans.

God’s promise to Israel was a land flowing with milk and honey. And God sought to ensure that all the people enjoyed it’s benefits. Farmers were instructed not to till the corners of their fields, but to leave some grain there to be harvested by the poor. Lest ownership of land become concentrated in too few hands, the law calls for a Jubilee year every 50 years, in which all lands would be returned to their original owners. The Prophets railed against those who grew fat at the expense of others.

Finally Christians are called to concern by Jesus’ saying, “In as much as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.”

***What shall we do, in our concern?***

First we must take every action we can to limit climate change by limiting the emission of greenhouse gasses. The three most effective steps for American consumers are to use less fuel, use less electricity, and eat less meat, especially red meat.

But that won’t be enough without government and industry action.

“Making sure that the next generation has enough food is no longer merely an agricultural matter. Historically, food security was the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture. Food scarcity could be alleviated simply by fine-tuning farm policies and investing more in agriculture. Now, however, achieving an acceptable balance between food and people depends as much on family planners as on farmers. Decisions made in the ministries of energy that will affect future climate stability may have as much effect on the food security of the next generation as those made in agricultural ministries.

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Securing future food supplies depends on stabilizing climate, stabilizing population, raising the efficiency of water use, protecting cropland from conversion to nonfarm uses, reducing air pollution, stabilizing aquifers, stabilizing soils, and protecting the earth's biological diversity. These are also the steps needed to put the world on an economic and demographic path that is environmentally sustainable.

Although this listing of needed steps is a short one, the scale of the total effort needed is unprecedented. Stabilizing population means revolutionizing human reproductive behavior. Stabilizing climate means restructuring the global energy economy. Historically, the only effort that approaches the scale and urgency of the one outlined here is the mobilization during World War II." ("Rising Grain Prices May Disrupt Global Economic Progress" by *Worldwatch Institute* on August 16, 1997, [<http://www.worldwatch.org/node/1613>])

Written for MEESC by

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To contact MEESC, visit their website ([www.env-steward.com/info/members.htm](http://www.env-steward.com/info/members.htm)), call the Rev Tom Harries (contact information in the Diocesan Journal), or send a note to:

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