

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:11-13, NRSV)

As regional Victoria begins to open up to larger gatherings, I look forward to the days when we gather at the table and share in Holy Communion. There we will openly share and pray as One; “Give us this day our daily bread.” At the heart of this Jesus’ prayer, is what theologian Walter Brueggemann suggests is God’s alternative food policy. When we eat the bread, it is food, and, at the same time, it is nourishment for the life of Christ. In the midst of ease and confidence that we have enough food, it is easy to miss the radical edge that cuts through this prayer. Maybe, if we can appreciate this edge, our eyes may be open to the power of God’s economy of grace to feed the world with the food that genuinely delights and satisfies, *Jesus the Christ*.

Food is essential for life. But it’s more than just healthy nutrients. In fact, reducing bread to these nutrients is the first temptation Jesus faces. Jesus is hungry, and he has the power to alleviate this by turning a stone to bread. Instead, he responds: “As it is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4). Jesus’ choice is not for the power or privilege of self-satisfaction, it is the complete opposite of that choice. Jesus chose the abundant nourishment of life, in God.

If our daily bread, and the tables at which we break it, are understood in the context of the word of God, they can become a banquet at which everyone has a place and every place is honoured. Bread is *more* than a bundle of nutrients. If we can cultivate the eyes and ears to appreciate what that “*more*” is, then food security for all may be a possibility; in real time and space for real people.

Food is a commodity bought and sold in markets all over the world. But it’s a commodity unlike most others. It comes without price from the sun via photosynthesis in plants rooted in soil and water—resources that we did not create. It is not hard to see how our growing and eating food is part of God’s economy of life, which, at its root, is a gift economy. We however, with our understanding of property ownership, can turn gift into commodity for the advantage of free markets. Yet, in a world with enough food to feed every person, still at least 800 million people are hungry. It seems that our markets are deeply flawed as agents of equitable distribution. Some of us may even feel somewhat helpless as we consider; what will it take for us to gather only our share—in God’s economy of life?

Sitting hungry in the wilderness, the Israelites pleaded with Moses to return to their slavery, where at least they “*sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread*” (Exodus 16:3). It took 40 years in the wilderness for the people to learn the fundamentals of an economy that was different from Pharaoh’s—a way for people to be fed *and* free. Jesus’ disciples struggled with the same lesson. They set out without any bread, and Jesus, reminding them of the feeding of thousands with just a few loaves, asked them, “Do you not yet understand?” (Mark 8:21).

Jesus’ question remains. Do we not yet understand even the basics of the generative capacity of God’s gift economy? Bread is broken to be shared. We have been given abundance so that we can give abundantly. The table of the first church was characterised by “glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46). That gratitude and generosity witness to the realisation of God’s economy. The Apostle Paul seems to appreciate the radical generosity of that economy.

Even writing from his imprisonment, with death looming at the door, Paul's letter to the Philippians is filled with joy, friendship, and gratitude. In this, Paul would have to be seen as a great supporter of the Traralgon District mission of "*knowing Jesus and making Jesus known.*" Not only would he be a supporter, I am confident that Paul was adamant about imitating Christ in his own life and, only then, was he resolute about encouraging others to do the same.

For Paul the privilege of suffering for Christ was his way of entering into the depths of God's economy; a place where all that was truly needed was provided and there was enough for all to share. Paul trusts in the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen.

For Brueggemann, the Israelites' instruction to "*gather enough for the day*" trusts in God in a similar way: "No hoarding. No storing up. Where there is no scarcity, there is no warrant for hoarding. No member of the community need be threatened by what the neighbour has, no need for greed, no need for brutality, no need for violence, no need for Pharaoh's way with bread, because Yahweh is the giver who keeps on giving, every day, sufficient for the day."

The parable of the landowner and the vineyard may also be seen as affirming God's generous economy (Matt 20:1-16). This parable may grate against many of our deep understandings of fairness and justice. But, if in God's economy there is always enough, then meditation on any resentment or bias we may feel, about God's gracious distribution to the workers, may encourage deeper reflection on our faith.

Who knows, we may even find ourselves supporters of a *basic living wage*? As I understand it, a *basic living wage* aims to redistribute wealth through honouring the needs, not the activities, of the poor. In God's economy, we, all humanity, are all worth more than we could ever earn. Again, Paul gets it.

As Paul celebrates with joy, his progress in *trusting confidence* of life 'in Christ' (Phil: 1:12-18), his deep desire is for all to share in that life. Unlike, the grumbling Israelites in the wilderness, and the somewhat harshly treated and grumbling labourers in the vineyard, Paul boldly boasts. He boasts of the exaltation of Christ in his own life, and his hope for the Philippians, is for the progress and joy in faith they may also abundantly share (Phil 1:25-26).

Today, in Australia anyway, boasting is often frowned upon. However, the characteristic '*boasting*' of Paul, is not a form of self-aggrandisement. It is more like joyful exaltation, not of himself, but of God in Christ. It is associated with his deep 'knowing' (V19,25), something akin to Job's invincible trust in God's transcendent justice (Job 13:16). Paul's hope and confidence, in his own imitation of Christ and in the possibility of that imitation for others, is a sign of his confidence in the power of God's economy of grace to feed the world with the food that genuinely delights and satisfies: That food is the life of Christ.

For Paul, there are no distinctions at Christ's table: no *us and them*, up and down, *in and out*, *greater or lesser*. Paul also knows that this way of seeing, living, and even eating does not come naturally. It is a pattern of Godly relating that has to be learned. That learning happens in Christ and is part of God's gift economy: generous, open, free from stinginess or any self-serving attitudes. There is nothing we could ever do to earn Godly life, all we can do is trust that Christ in us, can delight and satisfy each other's earthly needs: Then we will be fed and we will be free to feed others.

I am truly encouraged when I see that God's economy of life is so abundantly transforming, that today's best secular practices of community development are imitating some of the core concepts. I am a supporter of Arbinger Institutes books. *The Anatomy of Peace* was a gift that came to me at a time of great need. I could see God at work in its practices. Then, only yesterday I received the newest Arbinger addition to my library, *Dangerous Love*. There is no mention of Christ in this book either (I've only read two chapters though); what is included is generous sharing that leads to fruitful relationships: Dangerous love leads to abundant life.

Here's an example from the book: Miriam, a Middle Eastern woman in her twenties started a non-profit organisation to help young Muslim women interested in sports as a way to create identity and self-worth. She wanted them to be fed with more than food. Miriam lived in a small town. The only facility in town that would suit the planned activities was a gym owned by Mahmoud. This older male refused the group access to his building and this frustrated Miriam. Practicing *Dangerous love* Miriam had to stop competing and arguing with Mahmoud for acceptance and support of her group. Instead she had to turn towards him and see that he was a person worthy of her interest and attention.

Miriam, like Paul, had to let go of her own pain, and in her case frustration, and she had to recognise that Mahmoud had needs of his own. After weeks of helping Mahmoud out with cleaning his facility she accepted an invitation to his home for a meal. By this time, Miriam had become more interested in Mahmoud's challenging life circumstances and she was able to put aside her own needs to consider his. She could see how she might figuratively feed Mahmoud, and she trusted that somehow, she too may be fed.

Her generosity and patience in trusting that her needs and his needs could eventually be met, led to Mahmoud opening up about his painful relationship with his estranged daughter. Miriam recognised the deep spiritual suffering in his broken relationship. So, she took it upon herself to walk beside Mahmoud's wife in a process of reconciliation between father and daughter. Miriam's needs were no longer what mattered most to her, and there was enough love and care to be shared. Soon Mahmoud was free to accept the gift and to imitate its generosity with his own, the use of the gym by Miriam's organisation.

Friends we too have received the gracious gift of faith in Christ, that we may be fed and that we may feed others, in this is our '*knowing Jesus and making him known*'. Amen

