



## Churches' Week of Action on Food - October 2019

### “God’s Promise of Abundance”

*Based on Luke 14:15-24 – The Great Banquet*



Food plays a central role in the stories and teachings of our faith. Food takes on both a physical and spiritual dimension, such as in the sharing of table fellowship or in the breaking of the bread at the Lord’s Table. Woven throughout the stories of our faith, God’s abundant love is expressed through actions of hospitality, where meals are shared with strangers, meager provisions are miraculously multiplied, water is transformed into celebration, transformative relationships are built around mealtimes, forgiveness is extended, and the promise of eternal unity in God’s love is envisioned. Out of God’s great love for us, God has provided more than enough for all of humanity to flourish and to thrive.

The persistent reality of hunger, malnutrition, and food injustices around the globe, however, means that many of God’s children have yet to know firsthand the blessings of God’s abundant love for them physically and spiritually. The root causes for this are complex, historically, politically, and culturally. Yet, as believers in God’s abundant love, righteousness and justice for all, we are mandated to work tirelessly to usher in the reign of God here on earth.

*\*These materials are provided for the Churches’ Week of Action on Food, in support of the ecumenical faith community’s engagement in ministries of food justice, equity, sustainability, alleviation of hunger and poverty around the globe. This year’s materials are provided in partnership between the World Methodist Council<sup>1</sup> and the World Council of Churches – Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance.*

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<sup>1</sup> The World Methodist Council is made up of 80 Methodist, Wesleyan and related Uniting and United Churches representing over 80 million members in 138 countries. It engages, empowers and serves the member churches

## **“God’s Promise of Abundance” Daily Reflections**

### **Scripture Lesson, Luke 14:15-24**

*When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’” (NIV)*

### **Daily Reflection Themes**

#### **Day 1: “God’s Promise of Abundance”**

*“Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (vs 15)*  
by Prof. Dimitra Koukoura (Greece)

#### **Day 2: The Invitation Is Offered: “All is ready...”**

*“He sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is ready now.’” (vs 17)*  
by Lissa Belle Ramos Brown (Philippines)

#### **Day #3: Getting Our Priorities Straight: “Make no excuses”**

*“But they all alike began to make excuses” (vs 18a)*  
by Rev. Steve Hickle – Rise Against Hunger (US/Global)

#### **Day #4: Leaving No One Out: “Bring in those on the margins”**

*“Then the owner of the house [said], ‘go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame.’” (vs 21b)*  
by Claudia Santizo Gramajo (Guatemala)

#### **Day #5: Practicing a Radical Hospitality: “Room for More”**

*“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room...’” (vs 22)*  
by Annie Solis-Escalante (Peru)

#### **Day #6: Building Relationships Through Table Fellowship: A house full**

*“...compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.” (vs 23)*  
by Rev. Luke Edwards (North Carolina, USA)

#### **Day #7: Taking Responsibility: “Are we ready?... Am I ready?...”**

The master’s warning is this: *“I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.” (vs 24)*

by John Nday (Mozambique)

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by encouraging unity in witness, facilitating mission in the world, and fostering ecumenical and inter-religious activities. [www.worldmethodistcouncil.org](http://www.worldmethodistcouncil.org)

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## Introduction

*“We rejoice in every sign of God's kingdom: ... in the abundance of God's gifts entrusted to us that all may have enough; in all responsible use of the earth's resources.”*

This is a part of the Social Affirmation adopted by the World Methodist Council during its meeting in Nairobi, Kenya in 1986. People of the World Methodist Council family and ecumenical partners worked on these materials for the 2019 Churches' Week of Action on Food. We invite Christians of all denominations and traditions to rejoice and give thanks for God's gifts and to think of ways to share God's gifts, so that all have enough.

A source of inspiration for celebration and reflection is Jesus' Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14: 15-24). The image of a banquet refers to abundance, fellowship, joy and hope. In his story in Luke 14, Jesus provokes us to reflect on the question of who will take part in the feast of life and who will not take part. Everyone is invited. “Everyone” includes all those who usually are not asked to sit down at a table with delicious food and wine. But several of those one would expect to sit at the table are not present. Their own agendas keep them busy; no time left to celebrate with others and share God's gifts. How about us? Do we rejoice in the signs of God's kingdom: the gifts of grain, vegetables and fruits as well as the gifts of fellowship, togetherness, creativity and care for one another and for mother earth? Do we set the priorities so that we work for justice in the distribution of God's gifts?

In order to stimulate the imagination for how to celebrate and participate in the Churches' Week of Action on Food, we worked on a liturgy for a worship service. Please feel free to use it in parts or as it is. You are encouraged to celebrate Holy Communion – if appropriate and possible. (Or take at least a taste of bread and fruits). Holy Communion is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, and it nourishes us for our journey as we learn to be good stewards of God's abundant gifts.

In the United Methodist tradition, we pray in the Communion Liturgy: *“By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.”*<sup>2</sup> What does it mean to be “in ministry to all the world” with regard to food for everyone?

Several people from various continents agreed to write brief reflections related to parts of the Biblical Story in Luke 14, 15-24. Their reflections offer a taste of how differently we look at abundance, food security, healthy nutrition and a fair process of sharing the earthly resources. In the Western Hemisphere people are often unaware that they live at the expense of the people in the global south. They even overlook the hungry in their own neighborhoods. But there are also stories to tell of hospitality towards strangers and of initiatives to rise against hunger. The many islands of the Philippines provide rich soil, but many people are starving and longing for justice, not just for charity. In Peru, women took the invitation of the Churches' Week of Action on Food seriously. They gathered to learn together to provide healthy meals with little resources. In Mozambique people struggle to produce food because of difficult conditions and natural disasters. And yet, there are ways to discover more of the hidden riches of the nature for the good of those who live in poverty.

There are many ways to celebrate life, to give thanks for God's abundant gifts and to expand the table to all God's children. The liturgical pieces as well as the examples and thoughts shared in the material will hopefully broaden your horizons and stimulate your imagination as we worship God through prayer, praise, meditation and action.

*Bishop Rosemarie Wenner*

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<sup>2</sup> Service of Word and Table I, United Methodist Book of Worship, retrieved online at: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-service-of-word-and-table-i-and-introductions-to-the-other-forms>

## Abundance: The Unbounded grace of God

Our God is a God of abundance! The scriptures overflow with images that illustrate the exceeding abundance of God's love for us, for the world, and for all of creation.

At the very beginning of creation, God formed the world with all its vast resources and every living creature. As each was created, God declared them to be good. As humankind was created in God's image and likeness, God blessed them with the call to be fruitful and multiply. Every seed, every plant, every source of food was provided in abundance, to assure our thriving. Within the Garden of Eden, God creates a rich and fruitful paradise, where humanity and creation would flourish together in abundance and joy. This promise of abundant living for all is possible through creative use and faithful stewardship of the resources God provides.

As the people of Israel wandered in the desert, God offered daily provision of food with manna, bread from heaven, and water from rock. There was no room for hoarding, for the day's provision was sufficient, and everyone had enough, as they learned to rely upon the Lord. The Promised Land itself was "flowing with milk and honey" – filled abundantly with all that was needed for God's people to prosper.

The well-loved story of the prophet Elijah's encounter with the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17), points to God's abundant provision as revealed during a time of great crisis. As the poor, vulnerable widow acted in faith, her jar of oil did not run empty, and she was able to provide for herself, her son, and extend hospitality to the prophet Elijah.

There are many instances in scripture where God's grace and favor are symbolized by the abundance of good wine.<sup>3</sup> The words of the psalmists have offered comfort to God's people throughout the centuries, which include the images of God's abundance such as these: "*Taste and see, that the Lord is good*" and "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.*"<sup>4</sup>

It's very telling that Jesus' first recorded miracle in John's gospel involved turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. It was a lavish display of God's love being poured out, thus laying the backdrop for other miracles to come... healing the sick, feeding the hungry, transforming lives, resurrecting life from death... Each miracle, each teaching, each act of Jesus would be done in the context of God's love and grace that are abundantly present and offered to all.

As Christians, we unite around the table of the Lord's Supper, a sacrament that celebrates the abundance of Christ's love, as expressed in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup. We remember what Christ has done for us, and we celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death. As we partake in the elements, we welcome the Lord's presence and are sustained spiritually. As well, we look forward with hope, as God gives us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, in anticipation of God's kingdom ultimately fulfilled.

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<sup>3</sup> The Old Testament prophets often used this image of good wine as a sign of God's favor and hope and overflowing joy. For example: Isaiah 25:6 – "*On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines.*"

Joel 2:24 – "*The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.*"

Amos 9:13-14 - "*The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit.*"

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 34:8 and Psalm 23:5

It is God's intention for everyone to have life in abundance - not merely survival but thriving. Jesus declared, "*I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly*" (John 10:10). God cares for all aspects of our lives, and so this abundance refers to both the material thriving and spiritual thriving.

For now, we are standing in the midst of the tension between the "already" but "not yet" nature of God's Kingdom. As we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask that God "give us this day our daily bread," and we affirm with confidence that "thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, now and forever."

Over the past thirty years, real progress has been made in reducing the prevalence of malnutrition in many parts of the world, thanks to the commitment and effective work of organizations, churches, communities, and leaders around the globe. Yet, there is much that remains to be done in order to assure that every person has access to healthy, sustainable food and opportunities for true thriving. To reach that goal would be a true indication of the abundance of God's Kingdom fulfilled here on earth.

The factors that contribute to the persistent disparities are indeed complex. We encourage all our churches to become knowledgeable about issues related to hunger in our own countries and communities. Additional resources are provided below.

In the words of theologian and author Henri Nouwen, "God's Kingdom is a place of abundance where every generous act overflows its original bounds and becomes part of the unbounded grace of God at work in the world."<sup>5</sup>

We offer thanksgiving for all those who are living examples of the overflowing generosity and unbounded grace of God's Kingdom, offered to those who are hungry, vulnerable, and victims of injustice. May God strengthen each of us as we heed Christ's call to "bring in those from the margins," so that all can feast at the Lord's great banquet.

*Rev. Judith Bors Davis*

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<sup>5</sup> Nouwen, Henri J. M. (2011). *A Spirituality of Fundraising*, Upper Room Books.

## **Links to Additional Resources**

**[The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World – SOFI 2019](#)**

**Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)**

**[“The Right to Adequate Food” – Fact Sheet No. 34](#)**

**United Nations Human Rights – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**[“Ten Commandments of Food”](#)**

**World Council of Churches**

**[“5 Global Hunger Facts You Need to Know”](#)**

**World Vision**

**[“Hunger Notes”](#)**

**World Hunger Education Service**

**[Global Ministries & UMCOR \(UM Committee on Relief\)](#)**

**The United Methodist Church**

**[Presbyterian Hunger Program](#)**

**[Lutheran World Federation- Sustainable Livelihoods in a Changing Climate](#)**

**[Bread for the World](#)**

**[Brot für die Welt \(Bread for the World\)](#)**

**[All We Can – Methodist Relief and Development Fund](#)**

**The Methodist Church (UK)**

**[Hunger Statistics in the US: Feeding America](#)**

**FeedingAmerica.org**

**[Hunger in the UK: “Faith in Foodbanks” Resource](#)**

**Joint Public Issues Team (*Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church*)**

## **Day 1: “God’s Promise of Abundance”**

*“Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (vs 15)*

Nature offers to us all that is required for us, our families and our communities to lead abundant and fulfilling lives. This affirmation comes from the common wisdom of all people on the earth. This affirmation is also valid for all natural resources, air, water, and the flora and fauna, which nourishes and sustains all humanity and creation.

However, the abundance as a promise of God is yet to be realized by all; rather, societies experience tremendous disparity, inequity and injustice. The culture of consumption, the commodification of creation, the destruction of the environment, which drives various species to extinction, and the mindless exploitation of natural resources - are all contributing to climate change and consequently threatening the very survival of humanity and the integrity of creation. Our arrogance and greed, often on behalf of the powerful and wealthy, have perpetrated injustice and ceaseless exploitation of the weak and marginalized.

Our taking the abundance of God’s creation for granted, our greed and the irrational devaluation of nature, have led us to disastrous consequences such as the dangerous impact of climate change and economic injustice; more droughts, increased frequency of storms and floods; migrations precipitated by climate change and economic hardships faced by small holder and family farms. The double-edged sword of malnutrition looms over society - with children suffering from stunting and wasting while many in the community are obese. The overconsumption of ultra-refined and packaged foods and beverages in the midst of hunger, starvation and food insecurity; lack of access to nutritious food for the most vulnerable people, when a third of all food in the world is wasted!

This phenomenon stems from injustice on behalf of the powerful against the weak. The privileged exploit the marginalized, their water resources, their cultivations, the fisheries, and their production, for the rich to be fed in overabundance and paying back with low financial returns. In this way, the Amazon and other tropical forests are being levelled and the indigenous inhabitants of forests displaced and destroyed to raise cattle and crops and to strip the lands of its minerals and exploit the water resources, to quench the insatiable appetite of our consumptive culture. The wealthy, that control the world economy, finance tokenistic and ineffective programmes for the amelioration of agriculture or the digging of wells for drinking water without any haste or generosity. Nor do we pay sufficient attention to the education of people in technical-farm schools. The struggle of food and water in the midst of abundance, the inequity and injustice, destroys social cohesion and precipitates violence, conflicts and insecurity.

There remains yet another tragic fact: in the Northern Hemisphere huge amounts of money are spent to remove fat and obesity from the oversized human bodies while mortal illness due to the overconsumption of food abound, whereas in the Global South people are dying at an early age from a lack of nutrients and food.

God gave us our food as a gift, which varies from place to place and contains all the nutrients that are necessary for the development of the human organism and his/her psycho-spiritual functions. Even more, God offered to us the “Bread of Life” - Who descended from the heavens to feed human beings and to give to them eternal life (John 6:33-35, 48). Those who believe in Jesus Christ and who have become members of His Body through baptism (Gal. 3:27) and continuously remain in this by communing of His life-giving Body and Blood have a responsibility in the human society. Their ethos and the way that they face the serious

problems that threaten human societies witness to their true faith in God (Mat. 5:16) Who has offered in abundance everything in the present time and in the eschaton (Lk. 14:15).

Therefore, this means a struggle for food justice. A struggle for justice for countries which produce and export food and are unjustly compensated. A struggle for the economical consumption of food and water in the wealthy countries. A struggle for the just distribution of food, and the promotion of agroecological agriculture that preserves nature and biodiversity. In the Orthodox tradition, fasting, which is prescribed in various periods of the liturgical year and twice within each week of the year, has this deeper meaning: the abstention from gluttony, greediness, and oversaturation - which are the root causes of these issues we must struggle against.

The message for the use of the goods is clear. Christ exhorts us to share our goods. Whoever has two coats should give the one to whom has none (Lk. 10:11). The rich man should be mindful of the poor Lazarus who is starving at the gate of his house (Lk. 16:20), and all of us should take care of the starving and thirsty, the least amongst us with whom the Lord is identified (Mt. 25:31-46). We should take care by offering from our abundance or from our scarcity, because this is exactly what will be the determining presupposition for us to participate in the inexhaustible Eucharistic Dinner in His kingdom. It is a Biblical truth that through sharing your talents/goods, they are doubled, whereas when you hide them for yourself, they are lost.

Such a way of life presupposes an exit from oneself and our egoism in order to meet the starving, the naked, the homeless, or the stateless, who are in our neighborhood, the victims of the economic crisis, the marginalized, the weak, the refugees, the persecuted. The ways to be there for them are many. They are dictated by love, concern, respect for their dignity, and our determination to follow Christ in His way, being just and in loving and caring humankind and Creation.

*Prof. Dr Dimitra Koukoura*

### **Questions for reflection**

The Lord has provided in abundance all that we need. Yet, throughout the globe, such an imbalance of availability and consumption of food persists, that 26.4 percent of the world population - about 2 billion people - experience a combination of moderate and severe levels of food insecurity.

In my own local context:

- Who are the ones who struggle to have access to nourishing food?
- How do I contribute to the inequities that exist?
- How can I advocate for more just distribution and availability of food for my neighbors?

## **Day 2: The Invitation Is Offered: “All is ready...”**

*“Someone gave a great dinner and invited many... ‘Come, for everything is ready now’ ”*

When one tropical country has rich soil that is surrounded by vast waters, most people would think that it must have abundant resources. There must be an immense selection of crops such as grains, vegetables, and fruits and of fishes or other edible sea creatures, which should be enough to feed everyone. Indeed, the resources may be sufficient and sustainable in spite of the country’s growing population. However, in a single stroll on the streets, one can come across hungry people left and right. Farmers and fisherman don’t have enough to eat. Numerous children are undernourished.

The riches are plenty. But why is it never enough? We have a generous God who extends God’s abundant bounty to everyone. It’s adequately plenty that the creator tells us to not worry about what to eat, to drink, or to wear. God says that people are more valuable than all these. Sadly, not everyone thinks that one is just as valuable as the next person. Therefore, to not worry has become yet another luxury, as the majority of the population fight for survival each day, making them wonder if things will be better the next day. While a small percentage do not worry because they need not to, most of those in the lowest classes do not worry for the next day not because their future is secured, but because they simply can’t. When they aren’t even sure if they can survive the day, they do not have the extra time and energy to worry for the next day.

In reality, there is a great imbalance in people's distribution of God’s provision. The poorest of the poor struggle for survival on a daily basis. Most can’t even imagine a better life for them and their families as the “*isang kahig isang tuka*” cycle<sup>6</sup> consumes their minds and their time, in addition to doing daily chores and taking care of their children or siblings. And those who attempt to shake the status quo and call for just changes are often threatened, harmed, or silenced. The ones in the middle classes range from those who are barely surviving to those living comfortably. Most are busy with life, and they have the option to care or not to care. While some do walk alongside the poor, many of them who have the power of number and information choose to be extra careful and just go on with their own lives. Those in the highest of the classes may not know the situation that’s beyond their line of sight. Or maybe some of them know, but it may be hard for them to give up a life that can only be dreamed about by most of the population. There are some people with power, wealth, and influence but it has become extremely challenging to come to a unity that is beneficial to the interest and well-being of all.

The invitation that God extends transcends social and financial status. Charity can go on for days, but social justice can last a lifetime. This means that the dynamic social system in the current times calls ...for bolder sustainable solutions. The problems we have today are a running consequence of our long, complex history, where injustice has been allowed to fester. Band-aid solutions may provide immediate relief, but collectively addressing the root causes and striving for justice will lead to longer-lasting peace and security. God is calling all of us to do our part. We have different roles to play in this multifaceted world, but the work we do should collaborate toward a better tomorrow. We need to realize that the real enemies are apathy and greed, and that we as God’s stewards should be strong allies. More

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<sup>6</sup> Living “from hand-to-mouth” refers to an existence where one has barely enough money or resources to cover the cost of food for the given day.

than giving someone a fish is teaching that person how to fish, and moreover, doing our part to make sure that there is sufficient, clean, and fish-abundant water for everyone to share.

*Lissa Belle Ramos Brown*

### **Question for Reflection**

Jesus tells of a man who is preparing a great banquet with an invitation that is open for all. Here in Luke's version of this parable, the focus is on the expansiveness of God's grace, which extends beyond the boundaries that we create. God does not place one's value based on social status, caste, gender, upbringing, or any other barriers that we humans create. Based on this parable, it is clear that God's abundant provisions of food and sustainable resources should be available to all.

Yet, as today's author points out, great disparities exist within our global community. Among those who live in resource-rich environments, many are unaware of the root causes of hunger and poverty around the globe – or are unmotivated to work toward change. How can I inspire my own faith community to become more actively engaged in ministries that assure that those who are truly hungry have enough to eat?

### Day #3: Getting Our Priorities Straight: “Make no excuses”

*“But they all alike began to make excuses” (vs. 18)*

#### *No Excuses!*

Hold on! Surely you read the gospel text. I invite you to read it once more - and listen again to the opening of the passage: *When one of the dinner guests heard Jesus’ remarks, he said to Jesus, “Happy are those who will feast in God’s kingdom”* (CEB). Upon what did Jesus remark? It was on “banquet etiquette!” He offered them a stark alternative:

*“...When you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. And you will be blessed because they can’t repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected”* (Luke 14:13-14. CEB).

I find it interesting that Jesus using “blessed” evoked for that hearer another “blessed” (or “happy are”) saying, maybe an old saying, which he gladly shared. I humbly suggest that he changed the subject! We do that when we’re uncomfortable, don’t we? After all Jesus, you want us to invite poor, broken down people - with no possibility of a return invitation?

Teacher nonpareil that he was, Jesus used the moment for another story, which went like this: A man set out to host a large (large!) dinner and invited many (many!) people. As was the custom, when all was ready, slaves (*NRSV*) were sent to let everyone know. One by one, they made excuses. They were pretty good excuses, as excuses go – an attentive newlywed, a test drive for five yoke of oxen awaited, a just-closed real estate deal. They even said, “please,” which ought to count for something.

But they were not excused! The host was deeply offended, a feeling marked by anger. In his anger, he sent the slaves to invite those who (wait a minute!) are numbered among those Jesus *just* named in the lesson on banquet etiquette: *Go quickly to the city’s streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame*. They did, and there was still room for more. *Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in so that my house will be filled*. Could it be that this “master” knew exactly where the poor, crippled, blind and lame could be found? Look along the roadways (where they beg?) and in the back alleys (where they are been hidden away?). The host makes it clear: none of those who refused would taste his banquet.

Jesus! That sounds pretty harsh. If we want to know the deeper reasons those first invited refused, it will take an exercise in imagination. Was the host disliked? Did he give bad parties? Was his menu in bad repute? It is closer to the text to say the host erred first by inviting those pretty much like him. He clearly has the means to host a large party, and the people on the guest list are marrying (expenses!), buying oxen (ten of them!), closing land deals (real estate, folks!), things like that. But has not Jesus *just said* invite those who *cannot* return the invitation? The host, angry though he was, lives into that piece of gospel.

Perhaps like him, we also look first to those like us, those who operate in our orbits, who require of us no breakout from our zones of comfort. Perhaps like him, we’re willing to host a party that’s pretty good, even when a kingdom-sized “party” is within our reach. Perhaps like him, and his guest-list, a kingdom-scope party, like the invitation, feels optional. When will we receive that invitation as a mandate?

In the midst of a long career as a pastor, my avocation became one of working to end world hunger. The text invites consideration of 810 million hungry people. That’s one in nine of our

sisters and brothers. The gospel text said it was a “large” dinner. What if God is asking us to invite 810 million people to dinner, the very people who *cannot repay*? 20,000 people are dying each day from preventable hunger-related causes. Find ways to host those who cannot repay in your own community and denomination. Let it be a kingdom-sized feast! On behalf of WesleyMen of the World Methodist Council, I invite you to join that table as a host. To begin, see [FastPrayGive.org](http://FastPrayGive.org).

*Rev. Steven A. Hickie*

### **Question for Reflection**

The banquet was now ready, the food prepared and ready to be enjoyed. Yet those who were invited declined the invitation, making excuses for themselves. As a result, they missed out on the blessing of the gift that was offered to them.

It is all too easy for us to make excuses for not responding as Jesus desires us to do. We may justify our excuses, consider them reasonable. Perhaps we “play it safe” and limit our efforts to helping others in a way that keeps us in our comfort zones. Or, perhaps, we think too small, as today’s writer suggests. What excuses do we (what excuses do I) need to lay aside, in order for God’s abundance to be made known to all?

#### **Day #4: Leaving No One Out: “Bring in those on the margins”**

*“Then the owner of the house [said], ‘go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame.’”*

#### ***“In Your Light We See Light”***

*“Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.”* How many people yearn for this promise to be fulfilled, as they wait for the great day when they will eat the bread of the kingdom of God? For those sisters and brothers who live in precarious conditions and in poverty, surely their yearning to leave behind the struggles of hunger is so great, because they do not always have the means to get a meal. *“Because I was hungry and you didn't feed me; I was thirsty and you didn't give me drink.”* (Matthew 25:42)

In the reality of poverty and scarcity that surrounds us, how often have we ignored those who are hungry, thirsty, outcast, sick, naked or imprisoned? We cannot continue living with a blindfold over our eyes, leaving our neighbors to starve, failing to see the reflection of Jesus in the sisters and brothers in need, and allowing the ambition of wealth and abundances to prevent us from sharing as Jesus did.

Personally, as I share within the Christian community, I have had the opportunity to bring food, prayer and hope, seeing smiles that relieve the soul - smiles that let us know that more than receiving food, they are receiving comfort. Instead, it lets them know that they are not alone. This impresses upon me how much faith can be ignited through prayer, regardless of color, race or culture.

The many hugs of shoeless children have made me happier and more grateful for the blessings God has placed in my life. It is awesome to see Jesus reflected in the innocence of these children, children who run when they see a bag of food. On one occasion my heart was enflamed, and it ached, as I brought a bag of food to one family. As they received the food, a young girl with bright eyes expressed with joy, “Mommy, yes, today we are going to eat delicious food!” That same day, in a seemingly desolate house, no one answered the door, but a girl assured me that an elderly woman lived there alone. I kept knocking until she came to the door. I offered her the bag of food and a prayer, and she offered to me the only thing that she had in return, which was a hug. My words are inadequate to express the sense of helplessness I felt as a human being in that moment.

I have lived through these experiences and emotions as I’ve been serving for the past 3 years with the “Rice and Beans Ministries” in Costa Rica, walking in the rain or under the sun carrying bags of food, while families receive bags of hope and love, remembering that are not alone.

In Matthew’s gospel (ch. 25), we find The Judgment to the Nations, which makes reference to the time when we will all be gathered and then separated from each other (vs. 32). Some will inherit the kingdom that was prepared from the beginning, as it says, *“Surely, I tell you, whatever you do to the least of these my little ones, you do it to me.”*

We are ready to not be indifferent to our neighbor by remembering the words, “you did it to me.” We are ready to take the challenge of leaving the comfort in which we are accustomed to living. We are ready for the pilgrimage to unfold, bringing the marginalized to the great

banquet, so that they can not only quench their physical hunger, but also fill their spirit with hope, knowing that they are not alone. We do not know what a plate of food can turn into. “Let us fill the house,” says the Lord.

Let us remember what the psalmist David tells us about God’s merciful love: *“How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”* (Ps. 36: 7-9).

*Claudia Santizo Gramajo*

### **Question for Reflection**

As the story of the great banquet continues to unfold, the master instructs the servants to go out into the streets and invite to the feast those who are generally excluded from such festivities – the ones living on the margins, the vulnerable. It is a powerful message about God’s all-inclusive love. In God’s kingdom, everyone is invited; everyone has enough; and no one is excluded.

Today’s writer speaks with gratitude of her own faith being strengthened through the experience of bringing food and hope to the most vulnerable in her communities. Can you relate to her experience? Many people who take part in a mission trip will testify to a similar experience of being deeply blessed by those to whom they were reaching out. What does this tell us about the relationship between abundance and gratitude?

## **Day #5: Practicing a Radical Hospitality: “Room for More”**

*“Sir, the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room...’ ”*

It is a universal human right for every person to have access to adequate, safe and nutritious food and to be free from hunger. Pregnant women, mothers and children deserve special assistance and protection.<sup>7</sup> This basic right has been declared through the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and affirmed by governments and agencies around the world. In Peru, the General Health Law affirms this right and aims to provide nutrition and food assistance to those who are most vulnerable.

Throughout the decade of the 1980s, the people of Peru faced serious economic crises that resulted in significant hardship for many families and intensified issues of hunger and poverty that already existed. During that time, local community kitchens emerged as a way to help mothers make meals for their families with the limited resources that were available. Over time, these community kitchens, which were led by women, grew to become a national social network.

Malnutrition and poverty continue to be very real problems in Peru. Almost 50% of children under five years old have anemia, while one in four children under five years of age do not have the ideal height for his/her age. On the one hand, there are many vulnerable people who eat simply to “fill their stomach.”

Yet, on the other hand, Peru is a country rich in resources – there is an enormous biodiversity in agricultural products (fruits, legumes, tubers, Andean grains and many more), fishing, birds and livestock. A culinary boom developed in many people a special taste for rich food, leading to an increase in unhealthy diets as well as an increased risk for cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease.

The Methodist Church of José Olaya, located in the district of Ventanilla in the province of Callao, has established a “Healthy Churches” Ministry with their local community kitchen, in order to equip and promote wholistic, healthy lifestyles as a means of spreading the Good News of the gospel. Our aim was to assist in preparing more nutritious meals using foods available locally – such as quinoa, a very versatile Andean grain. The main challenge was to defy eating traditions that prefer starchy foods and the absence of fruit and vegetables. By utilizing the nearby local food market, we were able to help the women find seasonal, nutritious foods that could become part of their families’ diets. Then, we planned meals based in our Peruvian cuisine to make the change feasible.

Through the efforts of this ministry, women have learned to value the quality and availability of food products grown in Peru, and how they can be used in our traditional recipes without altering the flavor of meals or negatively impacting the family’s budget.

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The OHCHR document (1999) - General Comment 12 states, “*The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.*”

One of the outcomes of this work was that we were able to host an Ubuntu activity<sup>8</sup> last October, during the 2018 Churches' Week of Action on Food. This Cooking Day was only possible through the combined prayer, motivation, and effort of the many women working together to organize the event. As women from different backgrounds and various resources, we prepared a delicious and nutritious meal for 80 people that day. Our focus was on preparing a menu using locally available foods, cooked in a nutritious and healthy way, which was also at low cost and delicious. Not only did this event demonstrate that a self-sustained, community kitchen can play an important role in the overall thriving of its entire community. It also became a living example of how the church can be in solidarity with those most in need – those who struggle to feed their families. In this way, we were able to share Christ's love in action, inviting those most in need to be part of the table.

Radical hospitality can challenge traditions in order to create or strengthen ministries that reach out to the community in new ways. It also welcomes people and invites them to share their own creative gifts. By embracing all, and being open to their innovations, solutions and local culinary resources, we make 'room for more' of our sisters and brothers. In this way, new relationships are built as needs are met and dignity is given to all, assuring their place at the table.

*Annie Solis-Escalante*

### **Question for Reflection**

*"There is still room."* In God's kingdom, there is room at the table for everyone. There is no scarcity, because God's abundance is more than sufficient and leaves no one out.

There are some who claim that hunger around the globe is the result of not enough food to go around – when in reality, the world produces more than enough food to feed its entire population. The problem lies in the access to food that is both healthy and sustainable [[Click here](#)<sup>9</sup> for more information on factors that interfere with food access]. In developing countries - and even in industrialized countries - disparities exist that make access to healthy foods difficult. Today's writer addresses one way the church is extending hospitality and building relationships for long-term well-being and thriving of the community. In your church's own hunger ministries, how are relationships being built for long term thriving?

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<sup>8</sup> Ubuntu Journeys are short-term mission service opportunities for United Methodist Women to interact with the world through mission partners, discovering new ways of working together, supporting one another, and growing spiritually. For this Cooking Day, visitors from the US and various parts of Peru participated in the day's activities. Many of the participants from the local community were from very low-income families.

<sup>9</sup> "The Right to Adequate Food Fact Sheet" (United Nations, OHCHR, 1999)

## **Day #6: Relationship-Building Through Table Fellowship: A house full**

*“...compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled...”*

### **A House Full**

As I drove my well-worn Honda Odyssey packed full of friends staying at the local homeless shelter, Ron, a particularly boisterous and often shameless individual, asked James, “Do you have any cigarettes?”

“No, go fish.” James replied. The whole van belly laughed the rest of the way to my house.

We arrived to find a lively house. The sound of people introducing themselves and the smell of honey ham filled the downstairs. My pregnant wife was putting the finishing touches on our Easter feast. We set our table and brought a folding table from church to make room for everyone. It was an eclectic group: folks experiencing homelessness sitting with college students and former board room big wigs. Yet around the table, all were equal—hungry and eager for seconds of pie.

### **Church Around the Table**

King Street Church was born in the midst of potlucks. When my friend Elizabeth and I asked ourselves how a church for those not interested in church might be created, we thought of the popularity of a local potluck hosted on what residents of Boone call “Hippy Hill.” What would it look like for us to host potlucks, invite our friends who are interested in faith but not church, and see what happens?

A few months and a dozen casseroles later, the conversation one morning around the breakfast table turned towards faith. It went on for an hour, people sharing their experiences with God and their frustrations with their interactions with the church. At the end a young woman asked, “Can we do this again next week?”

It was these meals that brought our friends together, and the conversation and community that formed around the table brought all of us closer to Christ and created friendships that will last a lifetime. Three of the young men that came even got matching tattoos. At the very least their tattoos will last a lifetime.

### **Crossing the Buffet Line**

Every Monday night for the last four years, I ate dinner at the local homeless shelter before hosting a Bible study for the residents. Each week I walked through the buffet line, receiving the meal from volunteers. I’m pretty sure half of the church ladies in Boone think I am homeless.

One week stands out to me. I went through the line, thanking each person for the food they placed on my tray. A volunteer turned to another and said, “Wow, he is so polite.” It was as if she perceived the invisible wall between the haves and have-nots as soundproof.

Many churches are so close to Christ’s table, but they’re stuck behind the buffet line. The church is called not only to feed the hungry, but to eat together. When the table is set and all sit down, labels melt away and relationships are formed. That is the beauty of Christ’s table.

## **The Feast of the Coming Kingdom**

When the Church gathers around the table, we see a glimpse of the coming Kingdom. Perhaps this led the religious leader in Luke 14 to proclaim, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God.” But Jesus expands his imagination beyond a meal shared by the religious elite. He paints a picture of a great banquet overflowing with people from every walk of life. The host gives the instructions: “Compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.”

The wedding feast of the coming kingdom will not be a buffet, it will be a huge table overflowing with amazing food and drinks. People from every nation and background will be laughing together and passing the food to their neighbor, perhaps to someone they’re surprised to see there.

### **Signs of the Resurrection**

After our Easter dinner we transitioned to the living room to watch a short video. In the clip, Father Juan Hernández Pico, friend of Oscar Romero said this: “Friendship is the most important sign of resurrection.”

Looking around the tables that day at the surprising friendships being born, at the abundance of food passed around for seconds and thirds, the resurrected Christ was made known in the breaking of bread and the passing of green bean casserole.

*Rev. Luke Edwards*

### **Questions for reflection**

There are deep, spiritual connections made around the table, as we share in grace-filled mealtime with others. Relationships are built in the breaking of bread and in the sharing of food - lives are shaped and transformed. Christ modeled this for us, as he ate with sinners and righteous, rich and poor, friends and strangers; he was both guest and host. As we partake in the Lord’s Supper, we understand that Christ himself is revealed in the breaking of bread.

Since the beginnings of the church’s history, table fellowship has been an essential aspect of the practice of hospitality and of welcoming the stranger. Yet, this practice has fallen by the wayside in so many faith communities.

- In my local context, what opportunities exist to be in meaningful table fellowship with those who are unlike me?
- Reflecting on the ministries of my own community that provide food and support to those in need, are there ways to deepen the connections between “helper” and “guest”?

## **Day #7: Taking Responsibility: “Are we ready?... Am I ready?...”**

The master’s warning is this: *“I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.”*

When he first arrived at the Cambine Mission Center in Mozambique, missionary John Nday’s first task was to find ways to rehabilitate the farm’s infrastructures that had been destroyed by a cyclone. John was struck by the stark contrast between his new home and the home he had left behind in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As John describes it, “Mozambique is a completely different environment from that one of my own country of the DRC. This is all about the mission. From everywhere to anywhere: from the country with a lot of rains, fertile soil, ... to an almost dry country with lots of sandy soil... Generally, the sandy soils are poor, [and] therefore are not able to produce food abundantly. These were the realities and already therefore a big problem for food production.”

John serves as agricultural coordinator at Cambine Mission, which is sometimes described as a “mixture of awe and ashes.” The cyclone of 2017 is not the first crisis to affect this community. The Cambine Mission<sup>10</sup> was practically destroyed during the Mozambican civil war, which ravaged communities for a decade and a half. After the 1992 peace accord, displaced residents of the area began to return to their villages, only to find themselves without homes or farms or belongings. The collapse of basic community infrastructures meant there was no access to water, healthcare, or schools. The impact of the HIV and AIDS crisis compounded the hardships. With widespread poverty, the challenges have been plentiful over the years.

John set out to help the community develop sustainable agricultural practices that could lead to improved production and access to food. He recognized that a major problem for this community was the soil.

“When I looked around, I realized that in the area of Cambine, there is a lot of cattle manure not used; grass and leaves are being burned; and plenty of dead trees, especially coconut trees... All these are a lot of free resources. With a bit of agriculture skills, we started to make compost from the cattle manure, leaves and grass that used to be burned. Today the farm has improved its soil and is producing abundantly.”

With gratitude, John describes the progress that is now taking place:

“The current situation of Cambine agriculture project is that the farm is producing abundant food for the communities of Cambine educational mission Centre. Lots of varieties of vegetables, cassava, rice, peanut, and beans are being produced at the farm. Also, the farm produces chicken eggs and meat and it raises also the beef cattle. Pigs, goats, and fish are the new activities that are going to be introduced at the Cambine UMC farm before the end of this year 2019.”

The farm began to offer trainings for the community to teach how to grow vegetables with more sustainable practices. In its first year (2018), 10 women completed the program and

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to the agricultural program, the Cambine Mission Center runs a hospital/clinic, several schools, where now more than 2,000 students are enrolled, a theological seminary, and an orphanage. The Cambine property was the gift of a tribal chief to Methodists looking for a mission site in 1890. The chief made just one stipulation in the form of a question: “Do you come in peace?”

were able to produce food for themselves. Today, this farmers' field school is teaching about 250 households how to produce food and improve the soil with the resources available to them, while utilizing techniques that are sustainable and protect the environment. Additional trainings are beginning to focus on market access, to enable farmers to sell excess harvest in local food markets to increase income and alleviate poverty.

Reflecting on his time of mission service at Cambine so far, John offers some of the lessons he has learned:

“We need to appreciate our resources and start from what we have.”

“Communities die by the lack of knowledge. So the capacity-building through the transfer of skill and technology is a very important tool to help fight against hunger and absolute poverty.”

“Be a servant leader who can listen more. Be patient, and be a model for the communities. These are important qualities to help convince the beneficiaries, as it is not easy to change minds.”

### **Questions for reflection**

As we come to the close of Jesus' parable, we are confronted with a stern warning given by the master: *“I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.”* The invitation has been extended to us – to all of us. And the message is clear: God invites ALL to receive the abundance of God's grace. As workers for God's kingdom, we have a responsibility to heed the call and share the abundance that we've received with those who are lacking.

In today's reflection, a community whose resources had been devastated by decades of adversity is discovering sustainable practices, which are leading to abundance and thriving. Transformation can and does take place, as Christ's followers seek solutions to ensure access to healthy food.

Reflecting upon your local context, with its challenges and resources, consider your own response:

- What am I doing to assure that those who are vulnerable have adequate access to food?
- In what ways am I contributing to the disparities and inequalities that exist?
- What are some ways that I can be more involved in advocating for those who are food insecure and vulnerable?
- How can we better support the work of mission agencies who are training, mentoring, and in service to local communities, ensuring viable, sustainable, and secure access to healthy food for all God's people?