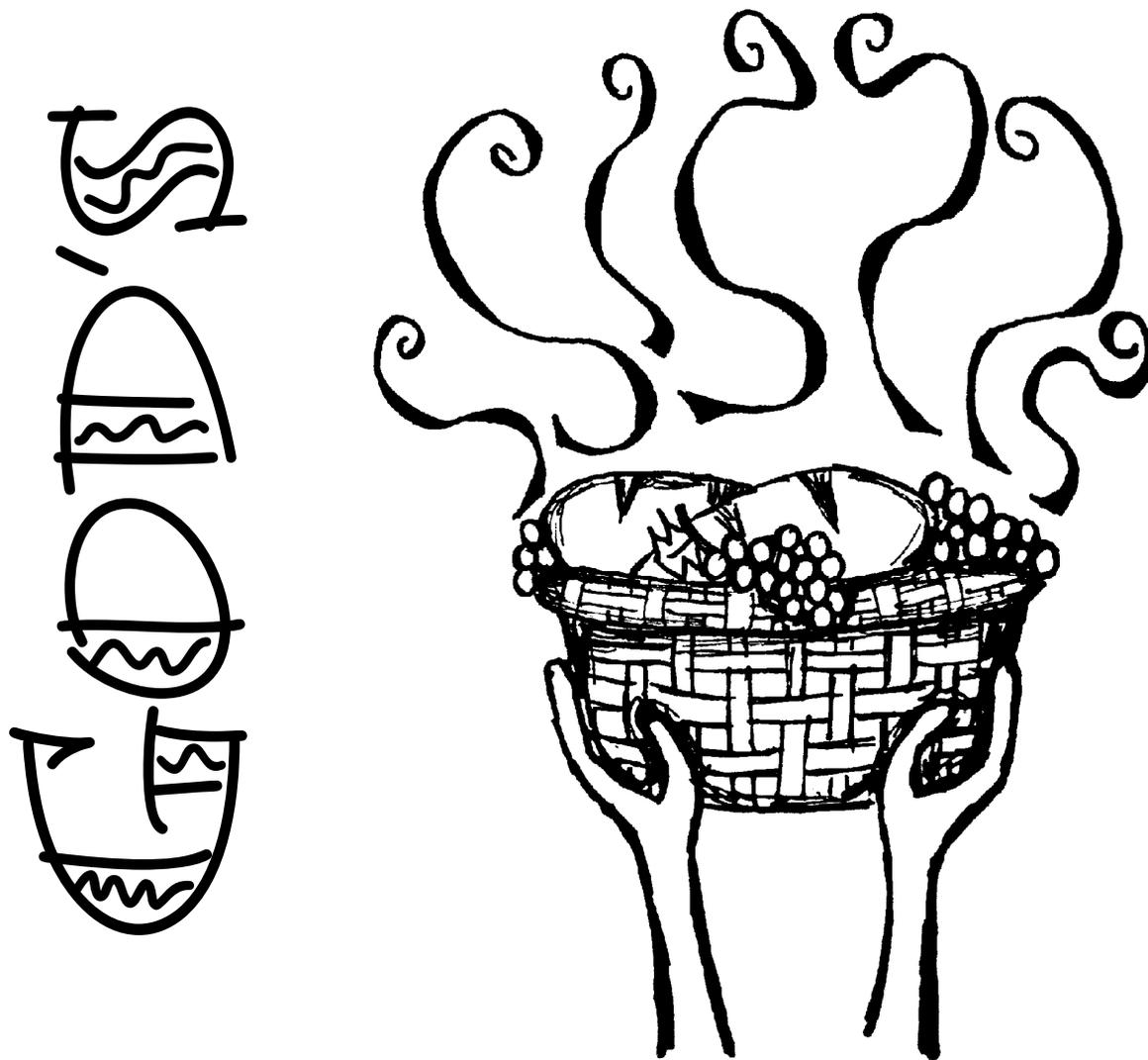


BREAD AND BUTTER



a packet of resources for your
congregation's hunger emphasis

*Worship tools with a peace and justice emphasis from Seeds of Hope Publishers,
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RESOURCES
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Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group intends to seek out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable, and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

Editorial Address

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GOD'S BANQUET

In this Hunger Emphasis Packet:

- brainstorming session—page 3
- bulletin art—pages 4-6
- a hunger emphasis sermon—page 7
- a bookmark—page 9
- an interpretive reading for youth—page 10
- an activity for children—page 11
- "Postcards from the Agape Meal," a story—page 12
- liturgy from the Agape Meal—page 15
- quotes, poems, & pithy sayings—page 16
- a hunger emphasis drama—page 17

Plus

- the 2001 World Food Day calendar
- a 40-day calendar
- a hunger emphasis place mat

A WORD ABOUT THIS PACKET

These materials are offered to you on clean, unattached pages so that you can more easily photocopy anything you wish to duplicate. We are constantly looking for ways to make the pages more attractive and easier for you to photocopy. Feel free to copy any of this, including art, and adapt these tools to your needs.

The art on the cover was created by Rebecca Ward, a student at Midway High School in Woodway, Texas. The theme, God's Banquet, was inspired by a church in Suffield, Connecticut and is described on the brainstorming page. We have tried to put together a variety of creative, innovative activities for your hunger emphasis that we hope are different from hunger activities you may have seen and participated in before.

One thing that we included this time that is a little different is a feature article. This one describes an innovative meal that a church in Fort Worth hosts for street people in their downtown neighborhood. The Agape Meal is a wonderful model for groups that want to make their feeding program more gracious. We also included the liturgy used each Thursday night at the Agape Meal.

The material in this packet is your congregation's to use freely. We have tried to pull together creative and inspiring resources that you can use to raise awareness of issues surrounding economic justice and food security (especially from a biblical perspective) in your congregation. We endeavored to choose a variety of age groups, worship areas, events, and angles, so that you would have a potpourri of art and ideas from which to choose.

We make a conscious effort to maintain a balance between the apostolic and the contemplative—on the one hand, the dynamic challenge to stay true to God's mandate to feed the poor and struggle for justice, and on the other hand, our own compelling need for nurture and healing while we work toward those dreams.

We hope that these resources will help your congregation to sponsor a hunger emphasis that is not just a repetition of past programs. We hope that they will help your congregation to celebrate the season.

A BRAINSTORMING SESSION

from editors and friends

Scriptural Themes

The theme for this packet is “God’s Banquet.” The background scripture is Luke 14, and includes Jesus’ discourse on hospitality (7-14) and the Parable of the Great Dinner (15-24), although it is helpful to read the entire chapter, to gain a sense of the scene. The occasion for these stories is a Sabbath meal to which Jesus has been invited by one of the leaders of the Pharisees.

Sterling Severns, a minister in Washington, DC, reminds us that, all through the gospel of Luke, Jesus is eating with all kinds of people. Immediately after our text Jesus moves into discourse about the cost of discipleship and descriptions of his followers as salt. Then he moves into the “lost” stories—the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. We have included a sermon by Richard Groves (see page 7) which deals with the “lost” stories—and with Jesus’ habit of hanging out with unsavory characters.

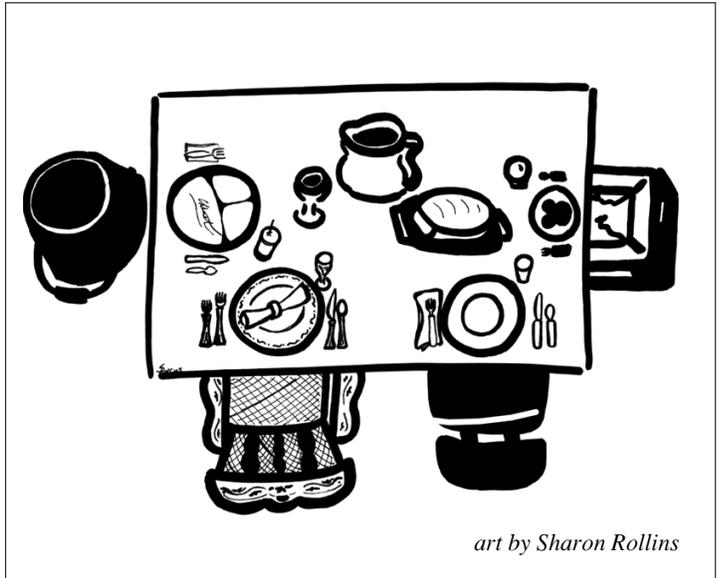
Joy Dews, a youth minister in Waco, Texas reminds us of the incredibly rich interpretations of our passage in *Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation* by Clarence Jordan and Bill Lane Doulos. For inspiration look at pages 26-27 and following. (See also page 18 of this packet.)

Visual Effects

The brainstorming on this theme began last October in the temporary worship space of a church in Suffield, Connecticut. In the front of the makeshift sanctuary was a table, covered with a simple cloth. Around the table were different kinds of place settings. There was an ornated one with a matching place mat and cloth napkin, elegant china, silver, and crystal. There was an ordinary-looking setting of plain pottery and flatware; a battered-looking, mismatched setting, and a Disney setting for children.

Around the table were different kinds of chairs. In front of the fancy setting was an exquisitely carved wooden chair. In front of the Disney setting was a high chair. In front of the plain setting was an aluminum chair. On one side was a wheelchair. One of the members, Natalie Das, caught me looking at the assembled assortment, and said, “That will be up there for several weeks. It is there to remind us that all kinds of people are invited to God’s table.” And there you have it—God’s banquet.

John Ballenger’s drama, beginning on page 17, includes a description of decoration for a sanctuary that particularly lends itself to a food drive. It would make a compelling visual aid, even if you don’t plan to use the drama during an all-church service. It could be adapted to use for your main Hunger Emphasis service.



Creative Worship Services

Sterling Severns put together several creative services for college students who were experiencing a poverty simulation followed by services to homeless people in downtown Washington, DC. One of the things he did toward the end of this intense week was to invite the students to wash each other’s feet, using the CD *Jesus’ Blood Never Failed Me Yet* by Gavin Bryars. The CD takes the voice of a homeless man in London and adds orchestration.

This is a powerful piece of music to use at any time, but is especially so after a group has been “homeless” or has interacted with homeless people. It could also be used in a profound way with communion—especially a communion done in the way John Ballenger describes in his drama (see above).

Special Resources

You will find in this packet a place mat, two 40-day calendars, and a bulletin insert to use during your Hunger Emphasis. The place mat could be used during any fellowship meal or during a special Hunger Emphasis meal, such as a soup-and-bread meal or a simulation exercise. For ideas about how to plan hunger meals, see the Seeds fall packets for 1998 and 1999.

We have produced the 2001 calendar in two ways, so that it can be used beginning on September 6 and leading up to World Food Day (October 16), or during any other 40-day period (for instance, some groups some churches use it as a Lenten discipline.) —lkc

BULLETIN ART



[Jesus said] "...there was once a man who threw a great dinner party and invited many. When it was time for dinner, he sent out his servant to the invited guests, saying, 'Come on in; the food's on the table.'

"Then they all began to beg off, one after another making excuses. The first said, 'I bought a piece of property and need to look it over. Send my regrets.'

"Another said, 'I just bought five teams of oxen, and I really need to check them out. Send my regrets.'

And yet another said, 'I just got married and need to get home to my wife.'

The servant went back and told the master what had happened. He was outraged and told the servant, 'Quickly get out into the city streets and alleys. Collect all

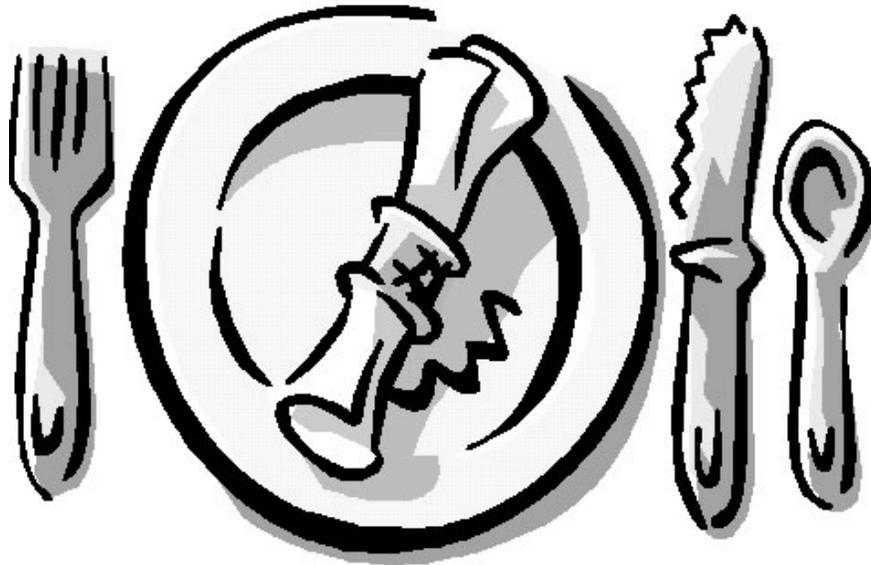
who look like they need a square meal, all the misfits and homeless and wretched people you can lay your hands on, and bring them here.'"

Luke 14:15-21

The Message

art by Sally Lynn Askins

BULLETIN ART



Jesus said, "The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors, the kind of people who will return the favor. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You'll be—and experience—a blessing. They won't be able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God's people."

—Luke 14:12-14,
The Message

BULLETIN ART

Jesus is saying to us, today, "God's children are coming home from their long, self-destructive exile. In



heaven the angels are singing." And on earth God is asking, "Will you rejoice with me? I don't ask you to understand everything. I don't ask you to approve of everything they have done. I just want to know whether you can rejoice with me that some of my children are coming home."

—Richard Groves

Note: This quote is taken from the sermon "Will You Rejoice with Me?" that begins on page 7.

WILL YOU REJUDGE WITH ME?

a sermon by Richard Groves

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

As strange as it may seem, it is nonetheless true that Jesus may have been killed because of his eating habits. Not so much how he ate as with whom he ate.

There was a well-known proverb in the first century—Jesus may have heard it. It said, “I saw them eating and I know who they are.”

There is certain wisdom there. Eating is more than a biological necessity; it is a social activity with its own dynamics and understood rules. One of the rules is that we do not eat with just anyone. Can you imagine anything more unpleasant or stomach-churning than sitting down to dinner directly across the table from someone you absolutely can’t stand? We don’t do that. We eat with people we are comfortable with, people whose company we enjoy.

That being the case, it stands to reason that you can learn something important about a person if you can find out with whom s/he shares meals. That was the wisdom of the ancient proverb, “I saw them eating and I know who they are.”

I do not know whether Jesus’ critics were familiar with that proverb, but they knew its truth. “This man receives sinners,” they said, “and eats with them.” They understood that the fact that Jesus made a habit of sharing meals with people who were on the margins of respectability implied an openness, a receptivity that was in violation of—and indeed might even be destructive of—the customary ways of structuring society.

They were right. Jesus welcomed all kinds of people. And his hospitality was a threat to the way society was structured in his day, no less than it is a threat to society as it is structured today, whether we perceive the threat or not.

Several years ago, I taught an introductory course to the New Testament at Salem College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where I live. With midterm exams approaching, I offered a review session during the last week. Attendance was optional, and the atmosphere was casual.

After an hour and a half of reviewing their notes and asking for clarification of things they were unsure about, the students fell into a conversation about the portrait of Jesus that is painted in the Gospels. Jesus is pictured as being comfortably open to people who lived on the other side of the boundary that declared the outside limit of societal approval: tax collectors, traitors to their country because they collected



“Jesus welcomed all kinds of people. And his hospitality was a threat to the way society was structured in his day, no less than it is a threat to society as it is structured today, whether we perceive the threat or not.”

taxes from their own people for the hated Romans; prostitutes; Samaritans, toward whom the animosity was so intense that people from Jerusalem would rather walk around Samaria than through it, which was just as well because there were Samaritan villages that wouldn’t let you walk through anyway, not if you came from Jerusalem; lepers, who were compelled to live in colonies for the deformed and the dying, colonies which, ironically, became islands of community, for there Jews and Samaritans were welcome, their suffering and alimentionation created a common identity that superseded religious and ethnic differences.

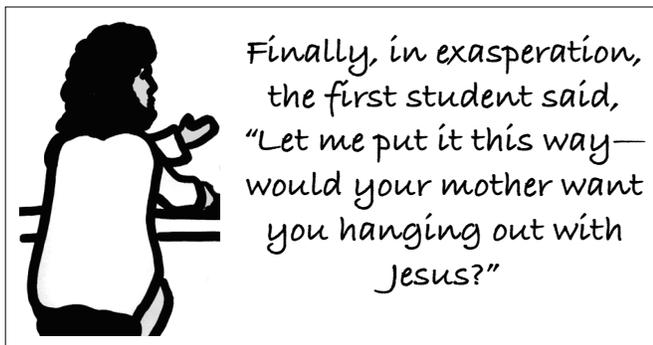
Jesus welcomed all these people, and he ate with them.

One student was trying to make the point that we have become so accustomed to reading familiar Bible stories that we no longer see how really radical Jesus was. But she was having no success whatsoever with one of her classmates who was just not getting the point. Finally, in exasperation,

the first student said, “Let me put it this way—would your mother want you hanging out with Jesus?”

In any other circumstance a question like that might have led to a knee-jerk, pious response. I halfway expected someone to break out in the first verse of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” Surprisingly, it elicited a sober reply. “I’m not sure I would want to hang out with him,” said the student to whom the question had been directed. “I would like to think I would. But there are people who do the kind of things Jesus did and say the things he said and take the stands he took, and I don’t hang out with them. What makes me think I would hang out with him?”

It was one of those rare moments of troubling honesty, reminding us that Jesus is a threat to the way our own society is set up just as he was a threat to the way his own world was structured.



It is not surprising then that some members of the religious establishments found Jesus very threatening. “So, Luke writes, “Jesus told them his parable.” He told *them*—the Pharisees and scribes—the parable. It is always important to figure out at whom Jesus was aiming a particular story. It makes a lot of difference who its target was. Luke wants us to know that the parable of the prodigal son was told by Jesus to the Pharisees and scribes in direct response to the criticism that he was associating with and welcoming the wrong kind of people.

What did the story say to those who were so bitterly critical of Jesus’ table companions? And what does it say to us?

I will tell you what I think. But first I need to take a moment to point out some things about the larger setting of our text. Jesus actually told three parables in response to the criticism that was leveled by the Pharisees and scribes, not just one; there was a story about a lost sheep and another about a lost coin, as well as the parable about the lost son. There are similarities between the stories. In each parable something that was valued was lost. In one parable it was a sheep, in another parable it was a coin, in the third parable it was a son.

In each parable that which was lost was found. In the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin the owner took aggressive actions and searched until s/he found what was lost. In the parable of the prodigal son the father waited

patiently until the son came to his senses and returned of his own will.

And in each parable there is an invitation to rejoice. Embedded in each parable is the question, “Will you rejoice with me?” The shepherd says to his friends and neighbors, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.” The woman calls her friends and says, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.” The father sends word to his older son, saying, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.” In other words, “Rejoice with me, for my son who has been lost is found.”

I am convinced that that question—Will you rejoice with me?—is the key to understanding what Jesus was saying to his critics. More importantly, it is the key to discovering what the parable has to say to us today.

Not long ago I received a late night telephone call from two old friends. One of the great pains of their life, perhaps the greatest pain, had been the alienation of their only son, now grown. Mental illness and drugs had combined to damage seriously not only the young man’s potential in life but also his relationship with his family. He had broken off all communication with them.

My friends heard by way of the grapevine that their son was living on the streets. Their hearts grieved, and they worried themselves sick, but they could do nothing. Then one night, out of the blue, the telephone rang and they heard their son’s voice on the other end of the line. My friends were ecstatic, to the point of tears, as they described the conversation—how it seemed like old times, how they exchanged jokes, how their son told them he loved them, how they had made plans to get together for the first time in five years.

How insensitive would I have been if, after my friends had finished their joyous story, I had said, “Could I get back to you? I have a call holding.” Imagine a friend calling with the wonderful news that a lost child had come home and asking you, “Can you come over? We’re celebrating! As soon as you can get here!” Can you imagine being so callous that you would answer that you have something else to do, perhaps some other time? Yet that is the accusation Jesus hurled at the religious leaders in the parable of the prodigal son:

“God’s runaway children—some who left of their own free will and their own foolish choices, others who left because you made them leave, saying they did not fit your definition of what God’s children should look like and act like and think like—are coming home. Wounded and battered in body and spirit, bearing in their souls the scars of lifetimes of hard living, abuse, ostracism, they are not a pretty sight. Their wounds have begun to heal. But they have a long way to go. And they want to get well at home. It is a great day. In heaven the angels are singing. God asks you, the spiritual leaders of our people, ‘Will you rejoice with me? Will you share my joy? My children are coming home.’ And

there you stand out in the field, all by yourself, away from the homeplaces, away from where the family is gathered, with your arms, folded, head back, chin tucked in, and ‘No!’ written all over your face. You cannot or you will not rejoice over the return of God’s runaway children.”

That’s what Jesus said to his cultured despisers in that warm, comforting little story that we know so well and find so inoffensive.

And that is what he is saying to us, his church, today. “God’s children are coming home from their long, self-destructive exile. In heaven the angels are singing. And on earth God is asking, “Will you rejoice with me? I don’t ask you to understand everything. I don’t ask you to approve of everything they have done. I just want to know whether you can rejoice with me that some of my children are coming home.”

Too many times in the past, the church has responded as the older brother responded. Even in our own time, the church is often found standing out in the field, away from the home place, away from where God’s family is gathering, with its arms folded, its head thrown back in defiance, and a big “No!” written across its face. Not to some supposed political agenda, but to real live, flesh-and-blood, brothers and sisters in Christ, who have faces and stories, and to Christ himself, who said that whenever we welcome the stranger, even if the stranger is one of our own, we welcome him.

Jesus often referred to the kingdom of heaven as a banquet to which the elite of society had been invited. But those who received invitations could not rejoice with the host over his good fortune; they had other, more important things to do. So the host sent invitations into the streets, to beggars, and homeless people, and he welcomed them into his home and around his table. In Jesus’ day those who came

in from the highways and hedges were prostitutes, the homeless, lepers, tax collectors, notorious sinners. In our day, who would they be? People living with AIDS? Gay and lesbian Christians? The poor? Undocumented aliens? Do we rejoice that Gods’ children want to come home, or do we resent them? Do we do everything we can to make them feel unwelcome and unwanted? Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that the kingdom of heaven is the Lord’s banquet.

Luke wants us to know that the parable of the prodigal son was told by Jesus to the Pharisees and scribes in direct response to the criticism that he was associating with and welcoming the wrong kind of people.



Therefore, the Lord makes out the guest list—not us. All we do is deliver the invitation.

Are the social issues that face us difficult? Are they complicated? To be sure. As Ben Matlock would say, “Ain’t nothing easy.” But beneath everything—beneath questions about scriptural interpretations, beneath vagaries of denominational politics, beneath complexities of social problems—God is asking a simple question, “Will you rejoice with me? My children are coming home. Will you rejoice with me?”

How can we, in Christ’s name, say no, when the very word “amen” means “Yes!” in Christ’s name. Amen.

—Richard Groves is a minister in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.



Beans, Rice, & Cappuccino

by Michele Perry

Beans and rice and cappuccino steam
as we sit and talk
about a bowl of rice that feeds five for a day
about beans—a luxury
while we sit sipping mocha lattes

HUNGER—the faces of 38,000
children that cry from the silence
of day-old graves
(is God’s love declared in the grave
or His faithfulness in destruction?)

what does that look like?
we can’t conceive
every sip another one dies
voices that cry loud whispers into silence
in distant lands: Bosnia, Bangladesh, Brunei
in far off places across the street
will we—can we hear their cries
while sipping cappuccino
and discussing beans and rice...

Michele Perry—a native of Orange Park, Florida—has done everything from serving at an orphanage in Bangladesh to working with children at a camp on Cape Cod to teaching backyard Bible clubs in US inner cities.

THE BANQUET TABLE

an interpretive reading for youth

Note: This reading can be done for the congregation in worship or simply among the youth as an interpretive exercise. It can be done with or without pantomime, but it would be more effective with pantomime (or dance, if your youth tend toward that kind of interpretation). If you choose to use pantomime, you can decide to use as many players as you like, or as many as you have. You could ask your players to dress up according to the roles they play, or you could ask them all to wear the same color. They might enjoy setting up a banquet table and festooning it with place settings, confetti, and flowers. Brainstorm with them and get them to come up with interpretative actions for each reading. Some of them could dress in fancy clothing, and some in rags. Or the same group could play both the original guests and the substitute guests. Encourage them to be creative.

FIRST READER: A certain Man was preparing a great feast.

SECOND READER: He invited the many to come and eat,
to come and eat and drink His cup to be...

THIRD READER: At the banquet table of Love,
At the feast of Forgiveness
Where Mercy serves and Truth lives
and Hope is found.
At the meal of Righteousness,
Grace abounds.

FIRST READER: The servants called the many to come and eat.

SECOND READER: Excuses were made.

FOURTH READER: One had a new field.

FIFTH READER: One had a new wife.

SIXTH READER: All too busy to come and be His guests...

THIRD READER: At the banquet table of Love,
At the feast of Forgiveness
Where Mercy serves and Truth lives
and Hope is found.
At the meal of Righteousness,
Grace abounds.

FIRST READER: The Master said,
"Since they did not come when I called,

SECOND READER: Go and gather

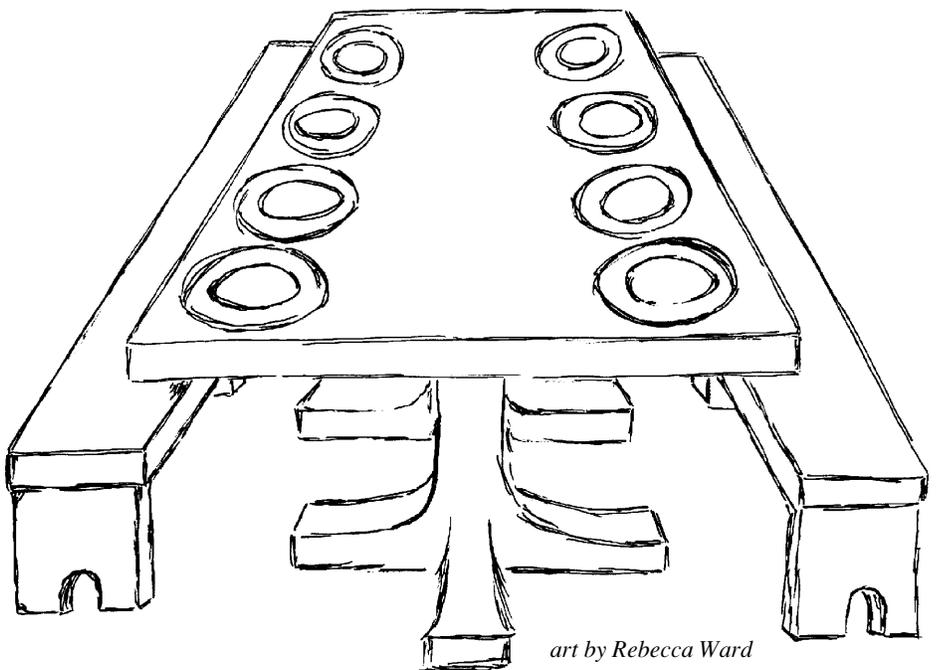
the poor and lame,
the broken and shamed

FOURTH READER: to come and eat
and they will be guests..."

THIRD READER: At the banquet table of Love,
At the feast of Forgiveness
Where Mercy serves and Truth lives
and Hope is found.
At the meal of Righteousness,
Grace abounds.

ALL READERS: Yes, at the meal of Righteousness,
Grace abounds.

This reading was adapted from a poem by Michele Perry.



art by Rebecca Ward

A KID STARTED IT

an activity for children

by Jackie Saxon and Katie Cook

CAST:

- Jesus
- Philip
- Andrew
- Boy with Lunch
- One of the Twelve (10 of them—name them if you want)
- Person in Crowd (assign this to all children who don't have another part)

SET:

- green blanket for grass
- "rock" for Jesus to sit on (could be a chair with a blanket draped over it, a tree stump, a large turned-over bucket, etc.)

PROPS:

- at least twelve baskets
- one child's lunch box (a Lion King one would be fun)
- construction-paper bread loaves and fish (enough for each child to have one)
- a large banner (or posterboard, or large map of the world) with the words "What Can One Kid Do?"

COSTUMES:

- 8 1/2 x 11 posterboard pieces (with string attached to hang around children's necks) inscribed with the name of each character

This activity was designed for a children's camp, but it can be used in Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, or any other Christian education setting. Have the props and "costumes" ready when the children arrive. (Depending on time and resources, you may prefer to let the children dress up in "period" costumes.) Assign roles. (You may want to do this by ballot, so that the children are sure there is no favoritism; you would simply write down the names of the characters on slips of paper, fold them, and let the children draw them out of a basket.)

Let the children help you lay out the "set." (An alternative idea would be perhaps to take the children outside if there is a suitable place for it. You could bring them inside for the last part.)

Ask the actors to take their places—Jesus will be on the "rock" and the others will be gathered around. Scatter the Twelve among the Crowd. You will probably want Philip to be close to Boy with Lunch. Make sure Boy with Lunch has the lunch box. Depending on how many teachers or helpers you have, ask them to sit among the children and help them listen for their part. After asking them to listen carefully for their parts,

read John 6:1-14 to them. When you have read through the scripture, ask the children to go over what their role calls for.

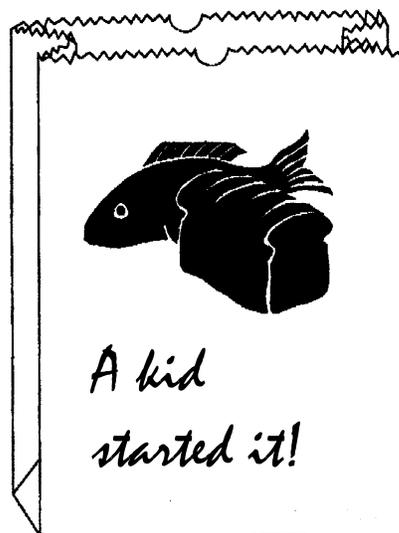
Next, tell them that you are going to read through the passage again, and their job is to act it out as you read. Tell them this is the dress rehearsal. Then read the passage slowly, prompting them if you need to. Plan your pauses so that each speaking actor will have a chance to speak his or her part. Then go through it once more, "for real."

If you are outside, after this would be the time to go back inside to "process" what they have acted out. Talk to them about hunger. You could say something like "Just as the people with Jesus that day were hungry, there are hungry people in our world and in our community." Talk about how, once the boy shared, there was enough for everyone.

Make sure the banner or sign saying "What Can One Kid Do?" is prominently displayed. (You might consider using an old, large map of the world for this.) Pass out the construction-paper loaves and fish. Talk about how Jesus still cares about hungry people and wants us to do what we can to help them. Ask each one to think of something he or she can do to help hungry people, to write it down on the construction paper, and tape it to the banner.

Then remind the children that in the Bible story it was a "kid" who started it. End with a prayer that God would help each one to know how to help hungry people.

Note: The idea for this activity was inspired by the "A Kid Started It" campaign created by the hunger program of the Presbyterian Church USA. The folks at the hunger program produced colorful T-shirts that said "A Kid Started It" with loaves-and-fishes art—with matching temporary "tattoos." The tattoos, they reported, were wildly successful. If you have the time and resources to produce some kind of "souvenir" of this activity, it would help to reinforce the children's memories of the story—and especially the knowledge that it was, indeed, a child who first gave up his lunch.



—Jackie Saxon is a minister in Austin, Texas. Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor.

POSTCARDS FROM THE AGAPE MEAL

Serving Food, Dignity, and Relationship in Fort Worth, Texas

by Jan Richardson

Picture two scenes from the inner city: In one, a line of street people winds its way past some tables set up under an outdoor awning. As each person takes a dish of soup or chili, or a sandwich, along with some chips and dessert, he or she finds somewhere to perch out of the chilly wind to eat the meal—perhaps on some metal chairs set out nearby, or on the curb, or against the wall of the brick building a half block away.

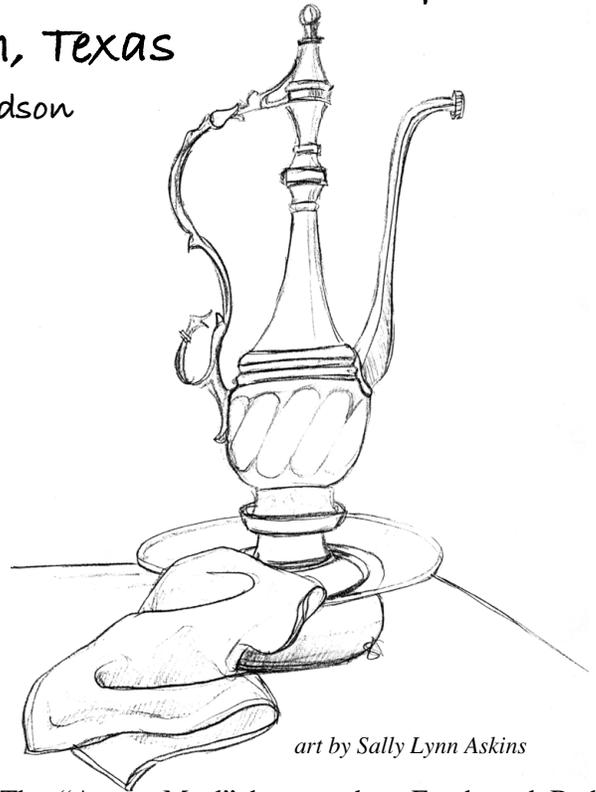
In the other scene, you see men and women entering the large, well-decorated fellowship hall of the wealthy urban church. Someone is playing a medley of hymns on a grand piano as the guests enter and take their seats for a meal. The round tables are set for eight with white linen tablecloths and napkins, adorned with flowers and votive candles.

A host in an apron waits near each table, ready to serve a family-style dinner of salad, baked chicken, green beans, mashed potatoes, and homemade cobbler. Conversation buzzes as the guests greet each other warmly before the minister rises to offer a word of thanks for the meal.

What are we seeing? An all-too-familiar example of comfortable Christians from the suburbs driving past the hungry and homeless to enjoy their sumptuous annual holiday banquet at a prestigious “downtown” church?

Not this time. Rather, it’s Thursday evening in Fort Worth, Texas and the weekly Agape Meal is about to begin at Broadway Baptist Church. What’s unusual? The guests here are the very same folks who waited in line for chili and sandwiches from the Salvation Army the evening before—the street people of downtown Fort Worth.

For two-and-a-half years the members of Broadway Baptist have done a simple thing—shared a sit-down dinner with anyone off the streets who will come. It may be “simple” to make a nice meal and share it with guests from the inner city neighborhood surrounding the church, but this one ministry has had a profound effect on all who have been part of it, from the table-setters, servers, and dishwashers to the church members who “host” each table, making conversation and passing the salad bowl.



art by Sally Lynn Askins

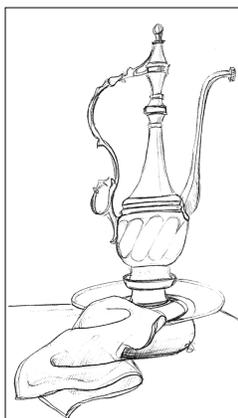
The “Agape Meal” began when Frank and Beth Wilson, along with their Sunday school department of young adults, began looking for some kind of “hands on” ministry they could do together as a group. Karen Gilbert, Broadway’s Community Minister at the time, became involved in the search.

Because she interacted with the neighborhood “street people” every day through the ministries of the Baptist Center—food bank, clothes closet, sack-lunch program, and more— she was able to direct the attention of the Sunday school department to the needs of those closest to home, those who spent most of their time within a few blocks of the church.

At about the same time, a couple in the church gave a sizable donation designated for a special use. The money was to go to establish a new ministry—not yet chosen—that would help the most needy in the community and would involve the most church members in direct contact as well. Over a period of several months, the decision was made to visit the Church of the Savior in Washington, DC, to see its urban ministries firsthand.

Frank Wilson, pastor Stephen Shoemaker, and Cindy Johnson, a member of the Sunday school department, made the trip in late 1994. They returned convinced that what the church needed to do was set up a weekly meal for neighborhood people modeled on the “Agape Meal” served at Church of the Savior’s Christ House. Plans were made, training sessions held for volunteers, and in late April of 1995, the first Broadway Agape Meal was served.

That first night, about forty church members arrived—excited, a bit nervous about what to say to these strange beings, “The Homeless,” and by 6:00 we were standing by our tables with our new aprons on, ready for anything. By 6:30 about fifteen guests had found their



One night there was a new Broadway volunteer who didn't know the routine, and started to pass the bread around too early. The black man in dreadlocks sitting next to her took his headphones off and said, "Hey, you can't do that yet. You have to say, 'God wants you to have this bread.'"

way into the church, most of them “regulars” at the Baptist Center, whom Karen Gilbert had persuaded to come share a meal with us.

“It was kind of disappointing, but funny, too, once we looked back at it,” said one of the volunteers who was there that first night. “Here we were, forty church members from the suburbs, hovering around fifteen overwhelmed guests, asking if they wanted more tea? More bread? Coffee, maybe? Finally we just all sat down together at the tables and began talking to each other as we ate. The guests were really the ones who were gracious—they put us at ease right away.”

For several months, the group of guests each week stayed small—between twenty and thirty, mostly “regulars.” Then, suddenly it seemed, more of the tables filled up each week. We began serving fifty to sixty as a rule. After a while, the word had gotten around the street (as Karen had told us it would!) and the numbers jumped again, and again a few months later.

By the end of the first year, the average number of guests each week had reached 100, and we began having to ask for more volunteers to help. It seemed that finally the folks on the street had begun to believe that they were

welcome, really welcome, in a “fancy” church that had been in the neighborhood for over a hundred years, yet had seemed so inaccessible.

They saw the expensive cars and clothes of the people who swarmed in the doors on Sunday morning. And even the “nice” surroundings we so carefully cultivated for the meal—the tablecloths and candles, the music and home-style food—at first seemed too fancy for many of them.

I remember asking one of the men at my table one night early on why we weren’t getting many guests. Was the word not getting out that there was a free hot meal available every Thursday? “Oh no,” he said. “Everybody knows about this now. It’s just too fancy for a lot of people. They’re ashamed to come in here if they haven’t had a shower that day or if their clothes are dirty. It would be like you being invited to a ‘black tie’ dinner and having nothing to wear but blue jeans. You probably just wouldn’t show up.”

He was right—and all we could do was to keep telling the folks that came, “Tell everybody we want them here! It doesn’t matter to us what you wear or if you come straight from working outdoors all day and don’t have time to clean up. Just come!”

They did. By 1997 the numbers reached 200 and over every week. Still, four years later, people pour in the door at ten minutes to six, and volunteers serve until the food runs out. About a third stay for the short worship service that begins at 6:30, though it’s important that no one feel obligated to “go to church” in order to be fed.

An Alcoholics Anonymous group began meeting after the meal, in a side room off the Fellowship Hall. A number of musicians emerged from the numbers of guests, and they participate in the worship time.

Most important than any of these things, though, is the fact that relationships between Broadway members and neighborhood folks began forming. More and more of the church folk began recognizing the men they saw on the street corners downtown during the week. Instead of turning our heads to avoid eye contact, we would say, “Hey, there’s Clay! There’s Wayne!” and wave.

They became people we knew, people we ate with and prayed with and sang with every week. We shared their stories, and they shared ours. And that’s what changed us most of all—the stories. Here are some of them—“post-cards” from the Agape Meal.

The Voices

One young member said this: “I think the moment that touches me most deeply every week is when everyone is seated and we say a short litany, acknowledging that God is the one who has given us this meal and who brings us together. At one point, the pastor asks us to pass around

the basket of bread on the table. As we pass the bread to our neighbor, we say, “God wants you to have this bread.”

One night there was a new Broadway volunteer who didn’t know the routine, and started to pass the bread around too early. The black man in dreadlocks sitting next to her took his headphones off and said, “Hey, you can’t do that yet. You have to say, ‘God wants you to have this bread.’”

Another night I was standing at the back, having gotten there a little late, when we started to say the Lord’s Prayer, like we do every week. Just as we began, one of the guests came over to hug me, and he just stayed there, leaning against me, pretty drunk, but saying every word of the Lord’s Prayer. It was a holy, holy moment as his voice mingled with mine and two hundred others—all of us equally needy—leaning on each other as we prayed Jesus’ prayer.

The Faces

Another volunteer, a man in his late sixties, shared this story: “When they asked my Sunday school class to come help serve at the Agape Meal, I really didn’t want to do it. I thought, ‘I don’t want to be around those people! They’re against everything I stand for—hard work, taking care of one’s family, staying sober, pulling your own weight.’ But I was embarrassed not to raise my hand when the rest of the class was volunteering.

That one night changed my whole life. I don’t think I’ve missed a week since then! Now I really know what ‘those people’ are like; I’ve talked to them, and I know something about the problems they’ve had. I feel like I’m a completely different person, and I think this has changed our church, too.”

The Lord’s Supper

Every week, after the meal, we offer the Lord’s Supper in the chapel upstairs. The pastor stands up in front of the altar, and one by one, whoever wants to can go up to take the bread and cup. Then the pastor asks if there’s anything the person wanted prayer for, and he puts his arm around them and prays for them right there. One night I heard a man say, “I need you to pray for me to love my enemies.”

One night another man looked the pastor in the face and said, “I want to pray for you and for the church here.” Another man who finally took communion after hanging back for months said, “I haven’t done this in twenty years.” His face was radiant. And I’ll never forget the little man who stood absolutely still for a long time after taking the bread and cup, then said, weeping, “The meal out there

was good, but this is what really matters—this is what I really need.”

Sharing Our Lives

There have been many milestones as a result of the Agape Meal. They’ve had at least one wedding—a couple who had just been released from jail and wanted to get married so they wouldn’t break parole by “living together” showed up one Thursday night just as the volunteers were cleaning up. They’d been searching for days to find a preacher who would marry them. A bunch of the

Another night I was standing at the back, having gotten there a little late, when we started to say the Lord’s Prayer, like we do every week. Just as we began, one of the guests came over to hug me, and he just stayed there, leaning against me, pretty drunk, but saying every word of the Lord’s Prayer. It was a holy, holy moment as his voice mingled with mine and two hundred others—all of us equally needy—leaning on each other as we prayed Jesus’ prayer.

folks went into the chapel, where the pastor performed the ceremony, with the groom’s brother and one of the “dishwashers” as witnesses!

The hosts have received a lot of babies and children as guests, and have watched as children were born to regular guest couples. There have also been deaths. Within two years, two of the regular guests had been killed on the streets.

We had a memorial service after one of those deaths, where people were invited to come to the front, light a candle, and say the name of someone they loved who had died. I will never forget the looks on the faces of some of the most hardened, beaten-down old men as they reverently whispered the names of parents, children, spouses, and friends.

We all need a chance to remember—and to share each other’s grief as well as joy. That’s really what the Agape Meal is all about. As the opening litany says, “We gather at these tables to share our lives as we share this meal.” And everyone leaves each week not just with full stomachs, but with full hearts.

—Jan Richardson, a former member of Broadway Baptist and a regular volunteer at the Agape Meal during its early years, lives in the Berkeley, California area, where she lives out a call to bring creativity and art to the worship of God.

LITURGY FROM THE AGAPE MEAL

*Note: The following is the order of worship used at the Agape Meal
at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.*



The early church met and shared an Agape Meal. *Agape* is the New Testament word for the love God showed us in Christ, the love we share in Christ, and the love that is the reason for this meal.

The Gathering

LEADER: Welcome to you all in the name of Christ, for this is God's house and God's table, and we are God's people. Let us rejoice and be glad, for this is the day the Lord has made.

PEOPLE: Yes! Let us rejoice and be glad.

LEADER: Do you know why we gather this evening?

PEOPLE: Yes! We come to share a meal together.

LEADER: Is that all?

PEOPLE: No! We also come to be with one another and to share our lives as we share this meal.

LEADER: And is there yet another reason for our coming together?

PEOPLE: Yes! To express our faith and our thanksgiving.

The Sharing of the Bread

LEADER: I offer to you bread: Bread that is necessary for life,
Bread which comes as a gift from God, and, for Christians,
Bread broken and shared as a symbol of Christ's body given for us.

PEOPLE: What have we done to earn such a gift?

LEADER: The truth is that we have not earned this bread,

it is a gift from God. But what if we feel unworthy to receive this bread? Please know that *everyone* here is welcome to this bread, not because of our worthiness, but because God loves us and wants us to have it.

So let us pass the baskets of bread to one another and be filled with the Spirit of God.

Let us say to our neighbor:
God wants you to have this bread!

The Blessing of the Meal and Lord's Prayer

LEADER: Please bow your head for the prayer of blessing and then join me in saying the Lord's prayer together

(prayer of blessing)

PEOPLE: (the Lord's prayer)

The Meal

The Time of Celebration

Songs, Sharing of Celebrations and Concerns
Scripture and Meditation

The Offering

In the early church everyone shared in common. People who had plenty shared with those who had little. An offering basket is placed at the table for those who can contribute toward the expenses of this meal. For those who cannot contribute, we want this meal to be a gift of the church to you.

Benediction/Closing

Following the meal, all who are followers of Christ and wish to partake of communion are invited to move into the chapel to receive the Bread and Cup. Those who are interested in talking to someone about spiritual matters are encouraged to let someone at their table know.

QUOTES, POEMS, & PITHY SAYINGS



art by Rebecca Ward

For Jesus, then, liberation is total liberation. And thereby he identifies the root of all injustice and exploitation: breach of friendship, breach of love. We are not presented with a liberation open to a “spiritualistic” interpretation, still so tightly clung to in certain Christian circles. Hunger and justice are not just economic and social questions. They are global human questions, and they challenge

our way of living the faith in its very roots.

—Gustavo Gutiérrez

There is no greatness where there is not simplicity, goodness, and truth.

—Leo Tolstoy

The first freedom of man, I contend, is the freedom to eat..

—Eleanor Roosevelt

Whatever your life situation might be, find some way to be in immediate contact with the little ones, the nobodies.

Get in touch with the people who are of no account, who haven't made it into the great American midstream. Maybe they don't talk 'right' and smell 'right.'

They may not seem to be part of the 'in' group.

...There is a reason we push all these people far away and far apart: They represent everything we fear and everything we deny about ourselves.

Yet to be touched by these people is to discover the deepest recesses of our life.

—Richard Rohr

Micah Pascucci, when he graduated from college, decided to hike the Appalachian Trail before en-

tering the “Real World.” While there he had a powerful epiphany:

“Oatmeal for breakfast, a bagel, cheese, and peanut butter for lunch. Noodles for dinner. *Nothing!!!* I'm an American, for Christ's sake! Where's the Beef?! I want to consume, eat till I need to unbutton my pants, until I'm sick. *I was starving.* At least what I thought was starving. Starving for an ignorant, middle-class, American white boy. That's when it hit me. Some people don't get this much. No, wait—MOST people don't get this much.”

After this realization, Pascucci went, literally, straight from the Appalachian Trail to a hunger training farm in Texas he had heard about as a youth. He showed up on their doorstep and asked to be allowed to help out on the farm. A year later he went back for an official internship. He wrote in their newsletter, *Farm Notes*, “If the Real World calls, I'm not here.”

—from *World Hunger Relief, Inc*

Insulation

by Marlene N. Doughty

to insulate: “To place in a detached situation; to separate by a non-conductor from other bodies”

Insulation—

How fine it is for keeping dwellings warm!

How useful, too, for muffling unwanted sounds.

The security of our lives gives another kind of insulation—from the face of need.

Our busy schedules, comfort, and our wealth all cushion us from seeing what is there:

the ones without a home, without a wage

the ones who find their tastiest meals

in the soup kitchen seven blocks away.

How easy to drive by and never see

the insecurity, the want and fear

persisting in those shabby homes and streets.

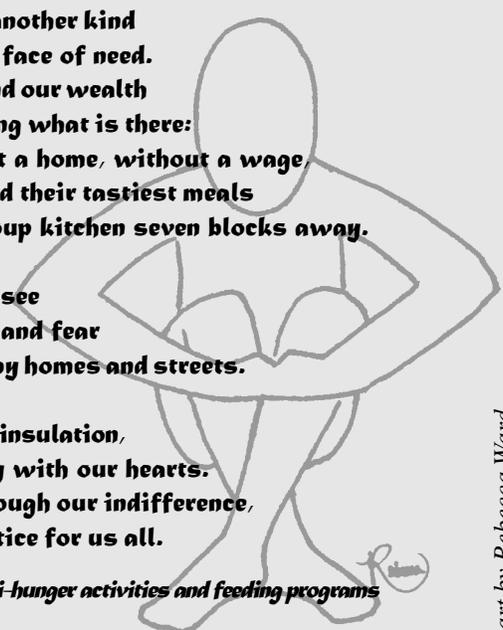
Let's strip our minds of harmful insulation,

and clearly see the needy with our hearts.

It's then that we will pierce through our indifference,

to seek and find true justice for us all.

—*Dee Doughty has been active in anti-hunger activities and feeding programs in the Chicago area for many years.*



art by Rebecca Ward

THE TABLE OF THE LORD

a drama

by John Stewart Ballenger

a play for four persons (men and women) at the front of the sanctuary, one person (man or woman) at the back of the sanctuary, a number (you pick, but minimum of four) of persons (men and women, boys and girls) throughout the sanctuary and one woman in the congregation.

The front of the church should be set as normal. If your pastor uses a pulpit, have it in place. If, however, you don't have an altar table set out normally, place one front and center. It should have a plywood sheet over it covered with a tablecloth so that you can't tell that it's the altar table just by looking at it. The table should be set for dinner, with plates, glasses, napkins, silver and serving dishes. Put the canned goods and nonperishable food items you have been collecting for World Food Day in baskets and place the baskets around the front of the sanctuary. You need at least eight full baskets, preferably more. If you have more, put the rest behind the first pews next to the center aisle.

When voices come from the congregation, they should be scattered throughout the sanctuary; they should be diverse in age and gender, and they should follow each other quickly so that the sound jumps around the sanctuary. When voices come from the congregation, feel free to add more "like" lines. Have several people saying one or more of the lines together, or individually. See what it sounds like. See what sounds best.

voices from the congregation:

Pass the potatoes please.

There are more rolls in the kitchen, should I go get them?

Can I have another piece of chicken?

Don't forget to save room for dessert.

Oh, I couldn't possibly.

I'm so full I'm not going to be able to eat for a week.

During these lines, four people who don't have lines, who aren't speaking, come forward from the congregation. One goes to the front left (Downstage Right—DSR), one to the front right (Downstage Left—DSL), one to front center (Downstage Center—DSC), and one to the pulpit (Upstage Center—USC).

As they say the next lines, the four (DSR, L, C and USC) take four of the baskets of food from the front and place them next to each other in the center aisle. Then they go back to their places.

DSC: Abundance is a foreign concept in most of the world.

DSL: Abundance is even a foreign concept in much of America.

DSR: But most of us take abundance for granted.

USC: I have come that you might have life and life more abundant.

Next lines from the congregation:

(matter of factly)

Of course you have.

During the next lines (still from the congregation), DSR, L, C and USC add the last four baskets to the heap in the center aisle.

(smugly) You have come that my life might be more abundant.

(smugly) You have come to give me more abundance.

DSL: The gospel of success is so attractive, isn't it?

DSR: So seductive.

DSL, R, C and USC: *(in unison)* So nice *(draw out the hissing sound at the end of "nice.")*

DSL, R, C and USC go back to their places.

DSC: Abundance taken for granted is translated into perversions—distortions. And the fact of the matter is, that we as humans, are ill-equipped to handle abundance appropriately.

DSL: Rather a blunt statement there, eh?

DSR: Wouldn't it be nice if it weren't true?

USC: Could you explain junk food to someone without food?
next lines from the congregation:

Ah. Well, it's um, food that has no nutritional value, but it uh, tastes good.

It's um, something to do—something to eat—while you're doing something else.

You know like busy work is work you do just to be working?

Junk food is the kind of food you eat just to be eating.

USC: How about fast food?

next lines from the congregation:

It's when you want to eat in a hurry.

Yeah, when you've only got a few minutes to eat, or no time to prepare.

Yes, well, fast food is food subordinate to convenience.

DSR: *(incredulously)* You eat just to eat while you're doing something else?

DSL: *(incredulously)* food is less important than convenience?

DSC: Insufferable arrogance incarnate in advertising.

from the congregation:



art by Sharon Rollins

Not going anywhere for a while? have a Snickers.
Thirsty? have a Sprite.
Have it your way, everyday.
Have a Coke and a smile.

Add some other commercials if you want. Substitute local ones—better ones. They should all have to do with food or drink and should focus on the immediate gratification of want.

DSR: Insufferable arrogance incarnate in those who mock our needs with the over-arching importance of the immediate gratification of their wants.

DSL: Mock without thinking. It's not deliberate.

DSC: It's unconsciously cruel.

USC: Abundance taken for granted is translated into perversions—distortions.

DSC: It becomes a competition.

from the congregation:

(triumphantly) The gospel of me.

(triumphantly) The gospel of mine.

DSC: You ever get mad at a brother or sister or guest for having gotten the last one?

USC: Whatever the one was.

from the congregation:

I'm sorry, that was the last one, dear.

No more.

They're all gone.

That was the last of it.

Nope, that finished it all off.

We'll get some more next time we go to the store.

DSR: Delayed gratification was rarely, if ever, a consolation to me when I was a kid.

DSL: Consequently, delayed gratification is rarely, if ever, a consolation to me as an adult.

from the congregation:

(stridently) I want it NOW.

DSR: You ever get mad at a brother or sister or guest for having taken more than you did? And then had it occur to you as you looked across the table at how much they got, that who you're really mad at is yourself, for not having taken more when you had the chance. And it just doesn't work to ask for more before you've eaten what you already got, even though that's what you really want to do.

from the congregation:

(stridently) I want it all NOW.

DSL: Or you're with your family at the cafeteria, and your parents look at all you've put on your tray to begin with and look at all that's still left on your tray at the end and say, "eyes bigger than your tummy, eh?"

from the congregation:

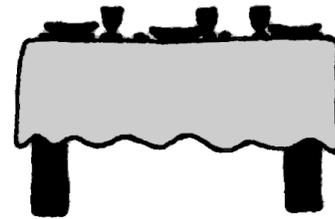
(defensively) well, I wanted it THEN.

DSC: And how many times have you left the table feeling rather bloated: "Oh, I ate too much." And did you ever notice that if you eat too many pancakes and waffles for breakfast, the same

smell you celebrated upon waking up and walking into the kitchen is positively sickening?

from the congregation:

(defensively) But I wanted it all THEN.



art by Sharon Rollins

DSC: What we want now, we will justify later.

DSL and R: *(in unison)* What we want, we will justify.

USC: Did you ever feel the need to grab as much as you could, for fear of not getting as much as you wanted? You've noticed, haven't you, that for us it's always about what we want, not what we need. What we need is a given—taken for granted.

DSC: Insufferable arrogance incarnate in those who mock our needs with the over-arching importance of the immediate gratification of their wants.

DSL: Mock without thinking.

DSR: Unconsciously cruel.

DSC: Then we get spiritual.

USC: *(with excitement)* At the table of the Lord, there is room for all!

from the congregation:

Amen!

Reach the unreached!

Pull up a chair to the table of the Lord!

USC: *(with excitement)* At the table of the Lord, there is bread and wine for all!

from the congregation:

Preach it!

Evangelize the masses!

Pull up another chair to the table of the Lord!

a voice from the back of the sanctuary:

(strongly) I have come that you might have life and life more abundant.

DSC: Big deal—it's symbolic.

from the congregation:

(righteously) He has come that we might teach them of the abundant joy of the Christian life.

(piously) He has come that we might make their spiritual lives more abundant.

(syrupy) It's all anyone really needs.

DSL: Everyone can have a symbol. As much of it as they want.

DSR: It doesn't cost me anything.

DSC: We've made of the Lord's supper, fast food—junk food—something incomprehensible to those without food.

from the congregation:

Do you who are starving believe that you have sinned?
Do you who have buried your children who all died of malnutrition believe that Jesus will save you?
Do you for whom health care is not a part of your world accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

voice from the back:

(sadly) Insufferable arrogance. The cruel mockery of those who deny our needs with the over-arching importance of the immediate gratification of their wants.

DSC: Abundance taken for granted is translated into perversions—distortions.

DSR: Who cares if people are oppressed—as long as they know Jesus.

DSL: Who cares if someone's starving—as long as they can have the Lord's supper.

from the congregation:

Mock without thinking

It's positively sickening

several voices from the congregation in unison:

Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry, or thirsty, and did not take care of you?

voice from the back:

Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.

from the congregation:

You did not do it to me.

You did not do it to me.

voice from the back:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (*1 Corinthians 11: 27-28*)

USC: The multitudes hunger. Do we send them away?

from the congregation:

"Aw, let them fend for themselves."

"We're not prepared to feed this many."

"Have they been baptized?"

voice from the back:

Jesus said, "All I have is my blood. All I have is my body."

DSR: And he looked to heaven, blessed and bled—blessed and was broken,

voice from the back:

"This is my body. This is my blood."

from the congregation:

And all ate and were filled.

And all eat and are filled.

DSL: Jesus bled—Jesus was broken, and by the grace of God, there is enough—enough for all.

DSR, C, L and USC redistribute the baskets of food around the front of the sanctuary and add to the original eight any that were stashed behind the front pew.

next three lines said as a round from the congregation:

With baskets left over

With baskets left over

With baskets left over

USC: Baskets of grace. Baskets of love. Baskets of food. Baskets of canned goods and nonperishable food items. Baskets of compassion incarnate in what people need. Jesus made manifest in specific, particular needs met.

voice from the back:

I have come that you might have life more abundant—

DSC: A life of health,

DSR: A life of dignity,

DSL: A life of unsurpassed worth.

USC: You know, most people serve the best first. Then if that runs out, you get whatever's in the fridge: the leftovers from previous meals, scraps. But here the more that is served, the better it all gets.

voice from the back:

I have my body. I have my blood. And I have come that you might have life more and more and more abundant.

DSL: What's it like to bleed for life that may one day be?

A woman who has not said anything to this point stands up in the congregation:

It is to suffer for a dream that may one day be, but it is to suffer without guarantee. It is to be reminded that tomorrow is always prepared today, and that no one is born without having caused pain, without rending and tearing. No one is born without a blood debt owed to others. (*she sits down*)

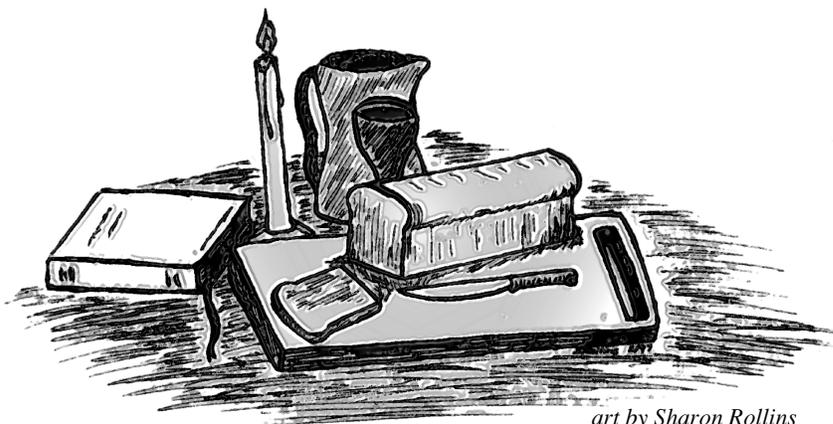
DSR: What's it like to be broken for people you don't even know?

woman, sitting:

It is a profound affirmation of faith and hope and love.

all the voices in the congregation in unison:

And the greatest of these is love.



art by Sharon Rollins

DSL and DSR pick up the plywood: tablecloth, place settings and all. They carry it off, leaving the altar table bare. USC places on the altar table a chalice and pitcher. DSC places a loaf of bread on a plate next to the chalice. In the silence, USC pours juice from the pitcher into the cup. In the silence, DSC lifts the loaf and tears it in two. USC and DSC then leave.

If this is an option, have your choir or an ensemble sing a hymn or choir piece from the back of the sanctuary. There should be nothing visual for the congregation to focus on except the communion table. The following are a few suggestions:

- “In Remembrance,” Ragan Courtney, Buryl Red
- “I Come with Joy,” Brian Wren
- “For the Bread Which You Have Broken,” Louis F. Benson, V. Earle Copes
- “Here’s to the Day,” Milton Brasher-Cunningham, Billy Crockett

Whatever piece you choose, it cannot be a selection that is only celebratory. It must move from what Christ offers us, at the table, to our responsibility as those who partake at the table.

Follow the music with a prayer, also from the back of the sanctuary. If you don’t have music, go straight from the end of the play to the prayer. The following is a suggested prayer:

Our God,

Make of our living
a habit of giving.

May the basic needs of others

Be a priority

in our culture of magnified personal wants.

And may we be uneasy

eating the Lord’s supper

as long as there are those that hunger—

as long as there are the least of these

whose needs are not yet met—

as long as Jesus is not fully present.

All this we pray in the name of the one

whose voice disturbs us

from the very back of where we’re comfortable.

Amen.

—John Ballenger is a pastor and writer in Decatur, Georgia where he lives with his wife Susan, also a minister, their cat Lewis, and their dog Layla. He has been the Seeds drama and poetry editor for ten years.



Jesus draws us pictures—He stages little dramas for us—because He wants to make us well. But it almost seems that there is something in us that doesn’t want to understand. We want to hold to the death-dealing systems that Jesus has come to smash. These systems may impose upon us a job, an income level, a social milieu, or a lifestyle that keeps us enslaved to its own preservation at the same time that it keeps us too

busy to accept an invitation to a greater feast—one that Jesus talked about in Luke 14...

—from Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation