

I bet you can tell just by looking at me that I've enjoyed many a good meal. Even some great ones. There were even some that I thought I wouldn't enjoy, but I left the table nourished and full. Some meals I've enjoyed were feasts. Feasts of bologna sandwiches on crushed Wonder Bread, soups made with leftovers before they rotted, old bread and red kool-aid. Now that might not sound like a feast to you, but they were called Feasts and I miss them so.

The feasts were put on every Sunday after 11:30 worship with the Tiospaye Wakan congregation. I was one of their priests and we would gather in a sacred circle for worship. Some would come in late, others walked out during the worship to have a smoke or find a friend to bring back in. That was all ok. The important part was that we were worshipping God together; taking what we had, blessing it, breaking it to share and feeding others. Many of our group were homeless, or addicted, or poor, or considered a 2nd class citizen by other cultures. Most couldn't read, and not many had a stable income. None of that mattered when we were together. Respect for each other was tremendous, holiness was honored, and we really knew that Jesus had placed us in the center of a sacred circle in which we are all related. There was always the first feast of Holy Communion and God's word, then the feast of our sandwiches, soup and kool-aid. Lakota drumming and chant called us to worship, smoke purified our bodies and minds, prayer and song became our common language, and all were welcomed to the feasts of both kinds, no matter whom you were or what your story was.

I believe my friends in this congregation lived out today's scripture lessons so very faithfully. When little seemed like all one could over, there was always feeding and abundance. They knew what struggling with God was like and that in wrestling with God they understood what it was to be named as God's own, to be adopted. I believe, like with Jacob's story which we heard today, my friends knew how preserved their life was after they had seen God in each other, in their world, in their rituals, and in their honoring of the sacred journey of life. For whenever they gathered together, whether in worship or at a friend's home, at a vigil for a deceased loved one or a gathering a year later for that same loved one, they were a generous people: always taking what they had, blessing it, breaking it and sharing it with others. I called my friends a Eucharistic people; they called themselves Lakota Indians. They took seriously the command Jesus gives us today: You give them something to eat.

You give them something to eat. Whether it is spiritual or physical, you feed others. The disciples didn't even stop to think if it were possible and Jesus turns his folks back to the people in the area, the overwhelming thousands of them, and says: You. It's your job. Give the people something to eat. Nourish them with me..

Eating: That's what has been on the news lately: the world is starving, in more ways than one. The pictures are new but familiar. Stark images of children with protruding ribs and distended stomachs, their sad eyes pleading into the camera. Families crawling on parched earth in search of water and food. People shrinking into human skeletons. They were the sobering shots of Ethiopia in the 1980s, Sudan in the late '90s. Now, it is the Horn of Africa facing a famine that could become the worst the world has seen in a generation. God have mercy. We struggle with the news. They are literally starving. Oslo, Norway, lays to rest way too many victims of the mass murder and bombing; senseless acts of violence. Lord have mercy. We're wrestling with this event. Our souls are hungering for something different. Seven and eight year old children are shot in the back in Afghanistan as they run from violence in their streets. God have mercy. We're limping with the burden of such wounded innocence. The world is starving in more ways than one.

Rape, abuse, violence, murder are becoming way too common in our own city news. Natural disasters are huge and deadly. The news is grim, the world is hungry. It is overwhelming; there are just too many to feed.

And what are we to do? How can we respond? Life is hard. Tragedy is truth. We cannot have life unless we have death. So how do we experience life when we see the world so hungry? How do we experience life in faith in the face of such violence, unimaginable and terrible?

How do we live?

By responding to the call to feed others.

To feed others is to take what is there, to bless it, break it open and give it away. To feed others is to live, with God's help and the presence of Jesus, with the unanswered questions and to courageously bear witness to the sadness of lives lost and gifts destroyed. To feed others is to live with the unanswered questions and to bear witness in our words, actions, thoughts and prayers of God's promises to redeem and bring life out of tragedy. To feed others is to care for yourselves, beloved children of all kinds of families, and to seek help if you're having trouble, lead others to help, to honor the life given to you and others as a precious gift. To feed others is to care for one another, with simple hugs and shared tears, chocolate and long talks, walks and comfortable silence whether you are facing the hunger of the world or your own. To feed others is not to blame, but to continue to learn in the face of ignorant violence, to continue to teach and serve, and, though it seems hard to think about, to develop your gifts so desperately needed in this world, as an act of hopeful resistance to the loss of so much promise in the tragedies of our world. To feed others, even though we are all inadequate to the task, is to live a life that changes this world from a place of random violence to a place of joyous peace; that changes this world from a place of retaliation, to a place of justice, forgiveness and grace; to change our reactions from fear of the wind and water to the celebration of the beauty of nature and all that it provides for us.

In the face of tragedy and scarcity, Jesus calls us to feed others. In the face of violence, such as Oslo; in the starvation of a country as in Africa; in the wake of floods and storms such as Vinton, Dubuque and elsewhere; we step forward in faith.

Faith to feed another, however that might look for you. In the face of fear, you choose community. In the face of ignorance, you choose learning. In the face of revenge, you choose justice. In the face of not knowing what to do, you pray. You choose to take one step, each moment, each day, to prevail in spite of the world around us. And you become a Eucharistic person, as God's takes what you offer, blesses it, breaks it into abundant servings and nourishes others from what little you have to begin with.

Amen.