

## The SNAP/Food Stamp Challenge Devotional

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice?” - Isaiah 58:6

### Introduction

The Introduction and Leader’s Guide are by Rev. Brian Adams, Pastor of Mt. Rainier Christian Church in Mt. Rainier, MD and Minister for Economic Justice with the Disciples Center for Public Witness.

The Sample Letter is largely taken from Fighting Poverty with Faith’s Food Stamp Challenge Guide.

### Why a devotional?

Luke 12:31: <sup>31</sup> Strive for His Realm, and these things will be given to you as well.

There are various politicians taking the SNAP/Food Stamp Challenge; people have made blogs and Youtube videos about their experiences; there are other guides by different groups, even faith groups, explaining how to take the challenge. So why create this new resource?

This is done with the conviction that it is not just greater compassion, empathy, justice, and food for the hungry that is needed in our world - we also need faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the one that makes it all possible. It is by striving for His Realm and living in His presence that He can work miracles in our country and work through His servants who are faithful to Him, so that everyone can have enough to eat. And it is not just personal faith in Jesus that is needed, but also compassion, empathy, justice, and food for the hungry, because faith without works is dead, and because Jesus wants His hungry children to be fed.

The world needs to see that poverty is a moral issue, and this connection between the Christian faith and hunger justice - that by the actions of Christians in feeding the hungry, and by the words of Christians in sharing the good news about Jesus Christ, that when we do things His way, the hungry will be fed. Christians can make Jesus look bad if we are portrayed in the public eye as judgmental and not concerned with those in need. It is on us to make Him look good, to lift up His Holy Name, and to show the world what Jesus is really about.

It is on us to not just seek justice, but also to be grounded in scripture, prayer, and sharing the faith with others as we do our work. It is the hope that through this devotional, all of us who participate in the SNAP/Food Stamp Challenge will grow in our knowledge of scriptures relating to hunger justice (and we could easily fill several more devotionals, each with 21 more scriptures); in our personal relationships with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and therefore in divine compassion, empathy, and concern for justice; in our ability to witness to politicians and to those we see every day about the need for God’s justice to be done for God’s hungry children; and in hope in Jesus, that He can work miracles and bring justice when we cannot do so without Him.

## What is SNAP/Food Stamps?

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), formerly called food stamps, is a program that serves over 47 million Americans, and is the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net. But it is not just a safety net - SNAP also helps to propel people out of poverty, to give them a boost of nutrition, energy, and saved money, so that they might find hope and new life.

## Why should we as Christians support the SNAP/Food Stamp program?

Luke 19:37-38: <sup>37</sup> As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!'

Many people who do not support SNAP and other government programs to help those in need claim that when Jesus tells us to help the least of these, He means as individuals or churches, and is not talking about the government. But Jesus is our King, so this is not just an individual matter. His Realm is not of this world, but He instructs us to pray that His Realm will come into this world and overtake the realms of this world, and that His will might be done here on earth and in our realms, just as it is in His Realm of Heaven. If we are to bow before Him and praise Him, "Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord!", we must bow before Him and praise Him in every part of our lives, including the political. Living into our calling as a Christian nation, we must keep the laws of King Jesus. And His law is that we are to feed the hungry.

2 Thessalonians 3:10: <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

Sometimes, opponents of SNAP benefits, welfare, and other government programs to help the poor will quote this passage, claiming that people who receive these blessings are lazy, are not working and not trying to work, and therefore should not be receiving help from the government, or maybe even from churches and individuals.

The passage was speaking about the Christian community at Thessalonica, where some people had quit work and become busybodies, spending all of their time meddling in other people's affairs, while they waited for Jesus to come again. Such people should not be able to keep taking from others if they are not going to contribute at all to the Christian community and help support others when they are able to do so. Not working in this way is much different from not being able to find a good-paying job in contemporary America.

The truth is that the great majority of SNAP recipients are working, or are trying to work, or are not able to work, and for some reason or another are just not able to make enough. Over half of those receiving SNAP benefits are children. Without their parents receiving SNAP, the children will also not receive free school lunches, and they will not have the proper nutrition to be able to

focus in class. Many others are seniors who have worked for many years, but are now not physically able to do so. Others are disabled or are going to school. And, especially in difficult economic times, many people are not able to find work, or at least not enough work. Because one man won the lottery and continued receiving SNAP benefits, there is much concern about errors in distributing benefits, but actually the error rate in 2012 - of overpayments AND underpayments - was the lowest in the history of the program. SNAP recipients are by and large very much in need and deserving of the grace of God in the form of the benefits they receive. Paul would not encourage us to deny such people food, and certainly Jesus would not do so.

### What is the SNAP/Food Stamp Challenge?

Taking the Challenge is an attempt to develop understanding and empathy for those who live on food stamps by eating and drinking for a week using only the allotted money that the average person on food stamps would receive. You will learn about some of the difficult choices that people living on food stamps have to make, and how difficult it is to avoid hunger and buy healthy foods with little resources.

Of course, taking the Challenge does not approach the problems an actual person or family living on food stamps would endure. Living this way for a week is far easier than doing so for months or years. People on food stamps may not have cars, making it more difficult to get and transport inexpensive, healthy food, and they may do much of their shopping at a convenience store. They may not have Sam's Club or Costco memberships; they will get far more tired of eating the same inexpensive foods every day than you will for just a week; they may not be able to afford gym memberships to offset eating their less healthy, more inexpensive diet. Think about toilet paper, toothpaste, and other things they will need to buy at the grocery store that is not just food, or how much of a sacrifice it would be to have a special meal for a birthday or holiday on a food stamp budget. Furthermore, if they do not eat a healthy diet, people will not perform as well in school and at work, and there will be many ramifications for their lives. We are blessed to only have to experience part of their difficulties for a week. But we hope that this Challenge will bring us closer to God's love and concern for the people who live this way every day.

### Guidelines for taking the Challenge

- Use only the amount of money to buy your food and drink for a week that the average person would receive in the SNAP benefits, which is only about \$4.50/day, or \$31.50/week.
- Take \$31.50 in cash to make sure you spend the right amount.
- Shop only at stores that take food stamps, places those who receive food stamps could actually shop.
- Do not eat any food you had in your pantry or refrigerator outside of what you buy with your allotted money, except condiments and spices.
- If you dine out, that must come out of your budget.

- Do not eat free food that others give to you.
- These guidelines may be difficult to keep, and your family might complain, but keep to your fast!
- Even if you cannot keep this fast exactly, we encourage you to continue, and to do the best you can.
- Using the devotions in this packet, read one devotion before each meal, and reflect upon the devotion and discuss it with those around you as you eat.

### Other Suggestions

- Start the challenge on Sunday morning with breakfast, then have your commitment service in your church's worship service, and continue the fast through the following Saturday.
- Buy all of your food for the week at once, maybe on the Saturday before you start the challenge.
- You may want to consult a doctor or nutritionist before you begin, to make sure that you will not harm yourself with what you eat.
- Make everything that you can at home, such as homemade bread - it's healthier and cheaper!
- Beans and rice is a staple - an inexpensive way to get your protein.
- Drink lots of tap water - it doesn't cut into your budget, it's the most healthy thing for you, and it makes you less hungry.

### Advocate for Change

Do not just keep your experience to yourself. Do not just allow this to be an isolated week in your life, but instead let this experience transform you, and share with and bless others through how God works in you this week.

- Visit our Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/groups/foodstampchallengedevotional/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/foodstampchallengedevotional/)
- If you comment on this subject on twitter, use the hashtag #SNAPChallenge, which is commonly used by others taking the challenge.
- Journal/take note of your experiences throughout the week.
- Send a letter like the sample on the next page to others, especially politicians, to witness to them about your experiences, and to encourage them to participate in the Challenge.
- Take photos and videos of your experiences of shopping, cooking, and eating, and share them, such as by posting them on our Facebook group.

### Resources

Go to the following websites to learn more about SNAP and taking the SNAP Challenge:

- <http://frac.org/initiatives/snapfood-stamp-challenges/>
- <http://fightingpovertywithfaith.com/f2/food-stamp-challenge/>
- <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christianpiatt/?s=snap+challenge>

Watch these movies:

- Foodstamped
- A Place at the Table
- Go to Youtube and search for "SNAP Challenge" or "Food Stamp Challenge."

### Sample Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Scripture reminds us that often, "The poor person's wisdom is despised and words are not heard" (Ecclesiastes 9:16). Almost half of U.S. citizens are below, at, or just above the poverty line, but we still too often close our eyes to their plight and do not hear their call for justice.

I am taking the SNAP/Food Stamp Challenge, living on the national average SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefit of just \$1.50/meal (\$31.50/week). Over 47 million Americans are SNAP recipients, and this program is crucial to giving these children of God basic nutrition. Over half of the recipients are children, and many others are senior citizens.

I invite you to join me in this effort to highlight the continued challenge of hunger in the United States and the need for continued funding of SNAP and other feeding programs. Please join me in taking this Challenge; visit [www.centerblog.com](http://www.centerblog.com) to download the program, and

[www.facebook.com/groups/foodstampchallengedevotional/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/foodstampchallengedevotional/) to see people share their experiences. Even if you do not take the Challenge, please pray for the hungry of our country, and pray and advocate for justice to be done for God's hungry children.

Psalm 82:3-4 calls on us to "Defend the poor and the orphan; deal justly with the poor and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy." Please join me in heeding this call. If you have any questions, or would like to join me in taking the challenge, please contact

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Sincerely,

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### Day 1

Today's devotions are by Rev. Audrey Connor, who is a pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Lynchburg, VA.

#### BREAKFAST

Numbers 6:24-26: <sup>24</sup> The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

As we begin this week together, we join many families whose challenge does not come from faith but by circumstance. It is my prayer that this week will be one of transformation not only of the participants in this project but across the country in families and tables of eating everywhere. May God bless us as we begin a journey with bodies, our food, and our souls as we journey with God in another person's shoes.

God, we thank you for your constant presence with us. Help us this week to be mindful of you in everything we take into our bodies and remind us of our connection to one another. Allow us to

be peace and light in your world. Amen.

### LUNCH

1 Corinthians 10:31: <sup>31</sup> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

As you take a break in your day, how have you glorified God in your morning? In what ways will this lunch meal be an extension of the love of God? As you thank God for the food you are about to eat, ask God who else needs the love you are given each day and pray about how you can give that love.

God, thank you for this meal. Thank you for all the ways that you show your love to me. Help me to demonstrate your love in big and small ways to all people in our world. May this love be a way to give glory to You. Amen

### DINNER

Genesis 9:3 - <sup>3</sup> Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

With great gifts comes great responsibility. It is clear in the first stories of our Bible that we are different. We have the ability to co-create with God many of the gifts we are given in ways other animals cannot. After this first day of this week-long journey, in what ways do you hear God calling you to care for God's people?

Thank you God for the food I am about to eat. Thank you for a reminder of how I am connected to all your people and your trust in me to help take care of all of your creatures and your creation. Amen.

### Day 2

Today's devotions are by Maxine Gross, who is a government benefits program coordinator, Director of the Lakeland Community Heritage Project, and lay leader of Embury AME Church in College Park, MD.

### BREAKFAST

Proverbs 3:27: <sup>27</sup> Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

I have an intimate relationship with the Food Stamp program or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Since 1984, I have worked for a social service agency processing program eligibility for income support programs including SNAP, Medical Assistance and cash

assistance. Each work day I see and talk with people who are making requests for or already receiving help. Their stories vary, as do all of ours. Most are working people struggling to make ends meet. Many are new immigrants, here seeking a better life. A growing number are elders who worked hard for many years only to see their life savings and homes slip away. It has been my job to see that those people get accurate, timely benefits and that they are treated fairly and respectfully. I will tell you that candidly our agency sometimes struggles to meet those goals. We are doing our best to meet the needs of those who need SNAP, and I pray that you will support us in this ministry.

Creator God, Help us who take this challenge to use this time to reflect upon the struggles of those in need. Please guide us in what you would have us do as individuals to serve your children, our brothers and sisters. Help us to be still and listen to your voice. Lord, your word tells us that we are your hands. Let us do the work you have for us in a cheerful, loving way. As Jesus came as servant let us follow His most glorious example. In His Holy Name we pray, Amen.

### LUNCH

Matthew 6:16 <sup>16</sup>“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

This is my first Food Stamp challenge. What is the challenge for me? It is a time to reorder the food decisions for your family, keeping the cost to the allotment amount established for the SNAP or Food Stamp program. My experience has shown this is not a hardship for a single week. It would become difficult for a longer period. Meal choices are diminished. It also takes more time to plan and organize meals, utilizing sales, and avoiding convenience items. More time is spent in meal preparation. In a way we are fasting, abstaining from our usual, comfortable pattern. Join with me in allowing this to become time a time of reflection and prayer.

Lord God, I bless your holy name. You are the one true God, creator of the universe, the only one worthy of all honor, all glory and all praise. This day I ask your forgiveness for all my misdeeds, all of my thoughts and actions that did not align with your will. Please forgive me for the things I did that were wrong, and for all the times I failed to do what was right and good. Lord, I ask you to forgive me and bring those things to my understanding. Please give me the power to live in a way pleasing to you. I am powerless. You are all powerful. With you all things are possible, so we ask it all in Your Name. Amen.

### DINNER

Luke 12:48: <sup>48</sup>But one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to



whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

I had heard of the Food Stamp Challenge before this, but never considered taking it until I was asked to help in creating this devotional. I am nearing a time of transition and was led by the Holy Spirit to see this Challenge as an opportunity for reflection and prayer. Reflect with me upon the needs of others. Pray with me that their needs will be met. Reflect with me upon our role as citizens. Pray for guidance as we work to influence our leaders. Reflect with me upon the work required of our leaders. Pray with me that our leaders conduct their work with wisdom and compassion. We are our Lord's instruments here on earth, His feet, and His hands to serve. Pray with me for God's guidance in finding the way He would have each of us serve. Pray with me for His grace to carry out the mission He has for us.

Holy God, You have led us to undertake the Food Stamp Challenge. Thank you for those that organized this endeavor. Guide and protect them as they do your work. Guide me and protect me as I challenge myself to live ever more fully according to Your ways and Your calling upon my life, to need less for myself so that there can be more for others. We ask these things in the name of the Lord. Amen.

### DAY 3

Today's devotions are by Emily Adams, who coordinates community-serving partnerships for the University of Maryland, College Park. She is a member and lay leader at Mt. Rainier Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Mt. Rainier, MD.

### BREAKFAST

Isaiah 58:4-10: <sup>4</sup> Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? <sup>6</sup> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? <sup>8</sup> Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rearguard. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, <sup>10</sup> if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

Loving God, we thank you for giving us a wealth of resources within our command so that it is within our power to "give ourselves" to minister to the wicked and oppressed, to break bread with the hungry and to house the homeless, satisfying them even as you have satisfied our hearts

with your mercy, making them full.

Through the prophet Isaiah, you reached out to your people and, seeking diligently after our salvation, you taught us that we cannot please you without hearts and hands that are generous and merciful to those who are in physical and spiritual need, just as you are generous to us.

This morning, we bow before you and ask you to grant us a special revelation of Your Heart, which ordered the Universe according to your desire to show your character of steadfast love and mercy toward the wicked and those in every kind of need. You showed this steadfast love and mercy even toward the sinners who insulted You as you hung naked upon the cross, just so your creation might know the merciful love of its Creator toward them. We confess that we too are sinners in Your sight, and we praise You especially for Your forgiveness of our sins and Your healing presence in our lives, which is a testament that You show mercy to the undeserving, such as ourselves.

Speak into our hearts through your Holy Spirit, that we might recognize and thank you for your mercies towards us. Open us up to the opportunities you have given to us today to answer your call to show forth your mercy, "giving ourselves" to the hungry. Enlighten us as to how doing so is participating in the desires of your Divine Heart that shows mercy toward all, to the glory and praise of your Holy Name. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

## LUNCH

Luke 6: 20-21: <sup>20</sup> Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Realm of God. <sup>21</sup> 'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. 'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed be the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who exchanged the comfort of heavenly habitations for hardship and poverty in order to lead us out of darkness and into the Kingdom of God's limitless love and mercy through his blameless life, His excruciating Passion, and death and resurrection that won victory over death.

Teaching Your Disciples the knowledge imparted to you by the Creator whom you knew intimately, You exposed a principle of the accounting system in the Kingdom of God: it is not loss but gain for us when we as Your Church forgo the comforts of this life and satisfaction so that we can share our excess with the less fortunate. Although You are perfect in Your Self and have all things and are in need of nothing, you bless us when you enable us to embrace hunger and poverty so that we might give to our neighbor for Your Sake and in Your Name, as in so doing we can play a part in your Divine plan for redeeming creation through the spread of the knowledge of Your Love.

Please turn Your gaze toward us now and teach us the same lesson that You taught to Your disciples. As we act in faith, giving as we are able for Your Name's sake, reveal to us Your Holy

Realm in our heart, and reign in it. Illuminate the eyes of our hearts, and make Your holy truth that You spoke to Your disciples evident to us. Show us what it means to be blessed in your Realm, and show us how when we sow mercy by acting in a way that reveals your Divine Mercy, we will reap fullness and joy in Your Realm. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## DINNER

James 2: 14-17: <sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers and sisters,\* if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup>So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Holy Spirit, Mighty Counselor, you burn as a fire of love and light in the hearts of Christians everywhere and at all times, yet we confess that we have so often allowed the cares of the world and our selfish tendencies to smother your flames that would consume our heart with your love.

To help us overcome our weakness, you urge us through the words of the Apostle James to examine our spirit toward those in need as a measure of the extent to which our faith is healthy and lively. In James' mind, our works of charity are the necessary proof that we are the Children of the Most High God, whose command is mercy and solicitous care for the least fortunate. These works are the evidence that we trust you will reward our faith and Christian charity with salvation and an eternal future in your presence.

Let our acts of mercy and faith of this day, then, find favor in Your sight. Let them show that we believe in a Merciful God who rewards those who share His gifts with others, with even more gifts to share. Smile on us, Lord, as we pray to know You more and to live more in accordance with your Holy Word. Blessed Spirit burning within our hearts, consume everything in us that is selfish or unbelieving in your truth until all that remains is a strong and lively faith that is a beacon of light and mercy that draws attention of all to see the Glory of the Merciful and Beautiful Creator of us all. We ask this through the Name of our hope, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Day 4

Today's devotions are by Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea. She is the director of Refugee & Immigration Ministries for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and previously served for 23 years as the Founder and Executive Director of Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries. She has worked in ministry in South Korea, and has led numerous mission trips in Laos.

## BREAKFAST

Matthew 25:1, 14-15, 19, 22: <sup>1</sup> Then the realm of heaven will be like this....<sup>14</sup> For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup> to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to their ability....<sup>19</sup> After a long time

the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them...<sup>22</sup> And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.

For many years, God granted me the insightful experience of living in a highly impoverished community of refugees in Central California, nicknamed after a refugee camp in Thailand. There, I lived among over 3,300 refugees from the highlands of Laos, who had served in partnership with the United States in our "Secret War in Laos" in the 1960s and early 70s. In that time, we had depended fully on the skills of the Hmong and other highland farmers to help our soldiers locate and grow food in the jungle for survival, and navigate the rugged landscape to safety amid the threats of Communist takeover.

Now years later, in our Fresno, California neighborhood where so many had settled, I was brought to tears one day as a dear friend and mother of 8 children came sobbing into my home. When I asked what was wrong, she said, "The manager has pulled out all of my long beans and corn, because he said they didn't look pretty." She'd so creatively used her talents of farming to turn a 10 x 6 foot plot of fallow land in front of her apartment into a feasting garden for her poor family. Like the worker with 2 talents, she had greatly multiplied the benefits for her family—and the manager's actions not only caused her deep pain, but injured the food security of her family.

Prayer: Lord, help us be agents of love that multiply and celebrate the talents of the poor among us. Help us look for ways to strengthen opportunities where family abilities can be honored in helping find solutions to hunger. Amen.

### LUNCH

Proverbs 3:29: <sup>29</sup> Do not plan harm against your neighbor who lives trustingly beside you.

Another refugee leader spent many hours recruiting friends and neighbors to participate in planting and harvesting their own vegetables. She was a part of a church sponsored community garden, that transformed its fallow back lot into a productive haven of hope for more than 20 refugee families. Never did a church member come near the garden without being offered an armload of Asian eggplant, corn, or sugar cane from the grandmas and grandpas who warded off depression and maintained good physical condition by their hard work within each row. One day when a neighbor called the police to complain that he didn't like hearing their language as they worked in the morning, and was upset because he smelled their onions growing, the gardeners responded by delivering bags of vegetables to the doorstep of every neighborhood home. Being good neighbors witnessed to the love of Jesus Christ, and became a great testimony to the church members themselves.

Prayer: God of love and life, help us to be good neighbors to the New Americans among us, and to be open learners for ways we might give opportunity for them to demonstrate their hospitality among us, as well. Amen.

### DINNER

Numbers 13:1-2, 25, 32-33: <sup>1</sup> The Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes....<sup>25</sup> At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land....<sup>32</sup> So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report...saying...<sup>33</sup> all the people that we saw in it are of great size....and we seemed like grasshoppers before them.

A third refugee community had twenty five families growing vegetables in a community garden space provided by yet a different congregation. During the garden’s development, the farmers who were more accustomed to monsoon farming were hesitant to trust their plants could grow under the drip irrigation style prevalent in California’s Central Valley. The farmers celebrated these new practices, however, when they saw their corn grow above their heads! Happiness sadly dissipated, however, when neighbor children began to throw rocks at them, and one hot summer night took a pair of plastic scissors and systematically cut each of the 32 drip irrigation lines providing life and growth to the plants.

As the plants shriveled, the gardeners went into action to introduce themselves and confront the power of evil. At first, they were afraid, and wanted to keep silence. But after praying, and with determination that God had brought them with a purpose to their new homeland, boldly invited those very neighbor children who had damaged their garden to a cultural festival and picnic. There, they shared with them Hmong dancing, grilled ducks, and—of course—abundant vegetable dishes from the garden! As a result, both the farmers and the neighbors had opportunity to share in the gifts of produce and people in their neighborhoods.

Prayer: Help us, Generous God, to trust that you have given abundant gifts; always enough for your people. Let us hear your voice calling us, as you called your people the Israelites, to have confidence in what you have provided for our satisfaction in this land of blessings. And help us always to share access to these blessings with others who are in need. Amen.

### Day 5

Today’s devotions are by Rev. Dr. Rosetta Robinson, who is the Program Director, Congregation and Community Support, with Interfaith Works, in Rockville, MD.

### BREAKFAST

Matthew 6:9-11: <sup>9</sup> “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your Realm come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread.”

The Lord’s Prayer teaches us to pray to God with reverence and humility for our daily bread, the things we need to survive each day. It also turns my heart to my neighbors who must turn to the church and government programs to put food on their tables. As I seek God’s will for my life through prayer, The Lord’s Prayer reminds me to pray for others in need. I will pray because God cares that we all are fed.

Lord, I pray for those whose daily bread costs more than they can afford. Increase my

understanding of poverty and hunger in my community. Teach me to praise you with a heart of thanksgiving for Jesus Christ, who sustains us with human and spiritual food, now and forever more ... In his name, Amen.

### LUNCH

Ps. 41:1 (NKJV): <sup>1</sup> Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.

Have we gone too far with the expression, "Have a blessed day?" You might not feel blessed or empowered to bless your day if it entails standing in an unemployment line or rummaging through garbage cans for food. Today, as I consider what it means to bless others, I think of the Patriarchs and Jesus who blessed people. I also think of David who said: "those who consider the poor are blessed." May it be so for you and for me!

Gracious God, we see many passages in the Bible that encourage us to show your compassion for the poor. Show me how to be a blessing to a hungry world. Thank you for the blessing of the gift of salvation through your son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that sustains us now and forever more, In Jesus name, Amen.

### DINNER

Exodus 16: 13, 31:

<sup>13</sup> Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat..."

<sup>31</sup> The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.

I remember what it was like to participate in the Food Stamp Challenge earlier this year, and how hard it was to shop, each day to make meals that cost under \$5 a day. Oh, if only I had been able to find the same bread the Israelites found on the ground each day when they were camped out in the wilderness. The book of Exodus tells us that God sent the tasty wafers as a reminder that God cared about their needs. Today, I ask myself this question, how can I help someone who does not have enough to eat to find Manna to fill an empty belly?

Jehovah, Jireh, God, you fed the Israelites when they were camped out in the wilderness. Show me how I can best advocate for those who struggle to live on a meager budget each day. Thank you for sending us Heaven's Best, Jesus Christ, the true and living bread for the world. Amen.

### Day 6

Today's devotions are by Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker-Langston, who is the executive director of the Disciples Center for Public Witness and the director of Disciples Justice Action Network. He

also serves as the Justice Advocacy Consultant and Public Policy Advisor to the Office of the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

### BREAKFAST

2 Corinthians 9:9-11: <sup>9</sup>As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, He gives to the poor; His righteousness<sup>\*</sup> endures for ever.' <sup>10</sup>He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.\* <sup>11</sup>You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.

In God's good creation, God has provided enough for everybody to have their basic needs met. If we have been blessed with stewardship over a part of God's abundance for all, then we, as people of faith and conscience, have both the responsibility and the privilege to share these blessings with others, especially those most in need, through our personal giving, our community involvement, and our advocacy for public policies consistent with this understanding of God's purposes.

O God of abundance, you have blessed your children with enough and more than enough to meet all of our needs. So fill us, we pray, with such an abundance of gratitude that we will freely share our blessings with others and do our part to ensure that, in all areas of life, your abundance is more equally shared, leaving no one poor or hungry or homeless. This we pray in your Holy Name. Amen.

### LUNCH

Psalms 72:11-14: <sup>11</sup>May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service. <sup>12</sup>For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. <sup>13</sup>He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. <sup>14</sup>From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

This Scripture teaches us two things: (1) that the greatness of a nation depends on how it treats the poor, vulnerable and needy; and (2) that the government (here represented by the king as sovereign) has a God-given responsibility for the life, health and well-being of all who suffer and are in need. In a democratic society where the people are sovereign, it is now our responsibility to work together through our government to fulfill this sacred obligation for political leaders in all nations.

Just and merciful God, you are the Giver of all good things and the Judge of all nations. Have mercy on the nations of the world, including our own, bless us with good and wise and

compassionate leaders, and help us always to remember that the greatest among nations is the one that does the most to lift up the least of its people, especially those who are poor and hungry. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

### DINNER

Proverbs 31:8-9: <sup>8</sup> Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. <sup>9</sup> Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

As people of faith and conscience, we are called by God to be advocates for the poor and needy. This we must do among our friends and colleagues, within our families, within our congregations, within our communities, and within our democratic system of government.

Sovereign God, with great joy and hearts full of thanksgiving, we thank you for all your many blessings. Forgive us, we pray, for our selfishness and our blindness, open our eyes, ears, hearts and hands to our suffering and struggling sisters and brothers, and empower us humbly yet boldly to advocate for those whose voices go unheard and whose needs go unmet. This we pray in your Holy Name. Amen.

### Day 7

Today's devotions are by Rev. O. I. "Cricket" Harrison, who formerly taught Worship and Church Music at Lexington Theological Seminary in Lexington, KY. She currently serves Bethany Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Odessa, TX, as Minister of Music and Education.

### BREAKFAST

Leviticus 25:35-38: <sup>35</sup> If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. <sup>36</sup> Do not take interest in advance, or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you. <sup>37</sup> You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit. <sup>38</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

The book of Leviticus often gets a bad name. Some people look at it as a bunch of boring rules set to govern situations that don't even exist anymore. But on closer examination, these rules have a double purpose. They serve to order human life in various circumstances for the single reason of honoring God; to live peaceably, kindly and justly with all people is a way of acknowledging God's holiness. This brief passage is drawn from a larger discussion of the Year of Jubilee. Every 50 years was a year of Jubilee which was a time of settling debts, returning real estate to its ancestral owners, and allowing the land to lie fallow. One of the elements of this



Jubilee year is an emphasis on the just, humane distribution of food to those who are in “difficulty” or “become poor” (NIV). Food is to be provided but not at a profit.

Commercial food growers might balk at such an idea—for the food corporations, the priority appears not to be the feeding of the world’s population, but the creation of wealth for the stockholders. For Christians, the challenge might be finding ways of assisting the recipients of food stamps to stretch their limited resources. Food banks and backpack weekend food programs for school children can help, but more assistance is needed. Church folk could devote themselves to helping grow more food. Rather than growing lawns that must be maintained, perhaps community gardens could be planted. Instead of tending a memorial rose garden, perhaps a congregation could use memorial funds to support a food garden. Although it is more convenient to opt for “big food,” believers may need to be creative about developing “small food” and offering it to those in need. The God who brought Israel out of Egypt is still in the slavery-breaking business—even when the slavery we know is that of inflated charges of food for profit.

Liberating God, just as You led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, lead us out of our dependence on food providers who demand increasing profits without considering the number of people who go unfed. Let us be diligent in learning new ways to grow food on our own and finding local resources that produce needed food at reasonable cost. Amen.

## LUNCH

1 Kings 17:7-16 : <sup>7</sup> But after a while the wadi (creek) dried up, because there was no rain in the land. <sup>8</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, <sup>9</sup> “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” <sup>10</sup> So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.” <sup>11</sup> As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” <sup>12</sup> But she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” <sup>13</sup> Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup> For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.” <sup>15</sup> She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. <sup>16</sup> The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

For those of us privileged to live in abundance, to be placed in a position of scarcity is deeply frightening. When a child is affected by hunger, the emotional impact for the parent is even more devastating. While the scripture says God had already “commanded” the widow to feed Elijah,

the widow (we do not have her name) seems not to have received God's request. She is quick, however, to do what the prophet requests even after telling him clearly that essential foodstuffs are at critical lows. God's prophet, Elijah, was under a great deal of stress so we should cut him some slack for apparently not hearing the widow's statement "no food available." As the widow prepares the meager meal, she unknowingly enters a new realm of being: the world of "enough". Mind you, near starvation is not replaced with new storerooms stacked floor to ceiling with supplies. As the scripture says "she as well as he and her household ate for many days."

But they probably weren't "Super-Sizing" their portions. The concept of enough challenges both our bloated North American appetites and our sense of just distribution of food. There was no magic carried out in that house—unless one considers the power of obedience to God and the gift of generosity. There was enough—not too much, not too little—enough. God is, indeed, a God of abundance but it is an abundance of generosity that works to see that everyone has enough to eat.

Holy God, in your wisdom you created all kinds of food so all people could eat.

Our nation has enough to feed every household, but the prophetic work of restructuring our economy and restoring equal access to food will take decades to show results. Strengthen our resolve to show our gratitude by working for food justice. Amen.

## DINNER

Acts 6:1-6: <sup>1</sup> Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup> And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, friends,\* select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, <sup>4</sup> while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.' <sup>5</sup> What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup> They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The spirit of generosity burned brightly in that first gathering of believers but, like every other human organization, there were some problems. One of these issues came from language differences. The Hebrew-speaking widows were receiving their portion of the food distribution (Acts 2 tells us the early believers held their resources - including food - in common to be distributed as any had need). But the Greek-speaking widows were somehow being left out. The apostles made a statement that some might hear as self-important: "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables." Really? To make sure the human community is properly fed is less important than preaching and teaching? (Maslow's

hierarchy of human needs might show something different: that a person cannot move toward faith commitments when bodily needs like water and food are neglected.) In defense of the apostles, they did not ignore the request. Instead, they made a prayerful judgment that their primary spiritual gifts were for preaching and teaching, so others would be needed who had spiritual gifts for compassion and service. There is a real lesson for contemporary congregations here. Feeding the hungry is every bit an act of faith as preparing sermons and planning worship. For the church to confront hunger with all its political complexities is a Christ-mandated challenge. To challenge ourselves to eat within the limited resources of those on food stamps is more than an exercise of compassionate curiosity (“Could I do that on only that much?”). To begin to order our lives in solidarity with the “least of these” as Christ would say is an important spiritual discipline, a daily action of incarnate prayer.

God of Light and Life, we give thanks for your gifts of abundance. As this day draws to an end, keep us mindful of those whose access to healthy food is limited because of the financial restrictions on food stamps. Help us find ways to grow our own food to share. Show us how to live more generously trusting that you will always provide us with enough. Help us organize our ministries in the church so everyone’s needs can be met as we strive to express your Spirit’s good gifts. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.