

2019 Bread for the World Sunday Reflection

On Bread for the World Sunday, churches of all faith traditions offer prayers for those who live in hunger in our own country and abroad — and for our nation’s decision makers who can change the policies and conditions that allow hunger to persist. Trusting in the abundance of God’s creation, people of faith rededicate themselves to seeing that those who struggle with hunger are able to move out of poverty and feed their families.

“There is Enough...More than Enough”

by Rev. Teresa Hord Owens

The feeding of the 5,000 is one of the few accounts of Jesus’ teaching that is included in all four of the gospels. In all cases, it is the men who are counted. Including the women and children vastly multiplies the impact of what Jesus does for this crowd of people. Beyond the multiplying of loaves and fishes, however, Jesus teaches an important lesson about the nature of the kingdom of God.

In Luke 9:10-17, the story follows the commissioning of the twelve disciples to go out on their own to do ministry. The disciples return to share with Jesus what they had done. Jesus and the disciples head to the city of Bethsaida to get away for some private time. The crowds find out where Jesus is, and they follow him. The text tells us that “he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured” (Luke 9:11). Jesus was truly a teacher and pastor.

The arc of Luke’s gospel focuses on Jesus as the one who cared for the least among them: the poor, the sick, the women, and others marginalized in this 1st century culture. They needed Jesus’ teaching, they needed healing, and Jesus always had enough for those who sought what he had to give.

On this particular day, the disciples encourage Jesus to send the crowd away to find food in a nearby village. The ability to provide that much food is, the disciples think, more than they have. But Jesus tells them, “You give them something to eat.” The disciples reply that they have only five loaves and two fish.

Instead of waving a magic wand or raising his hand to say “eat and be filled,” Jesus blesses the food, then tells the disciples to distribute it. Surely, more than one of the disciples were skeptical about the outcome. However, they do not withhold what they have. They give it to Jesus and allow it to be used by him. They distributed what he has blessed to the gathered people.

And, as we know, the people were not only all fed until they were full, but there were many baskets of food left over.

Most of us think of this story as a miracle of abundance, Jesus multiplying the five loaves and two fish. But New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan invites us to look at this story as a *parable*—a story using familiar scenarios and understandings to teach us about what Jesus proclaimed as the kingdom of God. Jesus invited the people to imagine what it might look like in a society where all gave and all shared in God’s abundance.

What could our world be like if we allowed Jesus to not only bless our resources, but also to bless and guide the *means of distribution of the world’s resources*? What if we were each willing to give of what we had so there might be enough—even abundance—for all? Not wealth for all, but enough for all: food on the table, clothes in the closet, safe and affordable housing, healthcare, accessible education, safety on our streets and in neighborhoods.

But what keeps us from walking into this vision of the kingdom of God?

Our society has conditioned us to believe that resources are scarce. You are told that, if you don’t have enough, it is because you are not working hard enough. In God’s creation, however, we see the abundance of all that we need.

The early Christians lived by collecting what everyone had and distributing according to each one’s need. As we trust in the abundance of God’s love, we allow Jesus to bless and direct how we use the resources God has given. Then there is enough! More than enough!

Rev. Teresa Hord Owens is General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Prior to her election, she was dean of students at the University of Chicago Divinity School.



Rev. Teresa Hord Owens

Prayers for Bread for the World Sunday

by Edith Avila Olea

Opening Prayer

God, our creator, we give you thanks for every breath of life and for every gift that comes from your abounding grace. Grant that we might share these gifts with our brothers and sisters near and far. May we so trust your grace that we give generously to those who are in need. Lord, we ask you to hear our prayer. **Amen.**

A Responsive Prayer

We pray for all your children here and across the world. We pray especially for children who are hungry and scared. May we learn to be good stewards of the gifts you have given us so that no child feels the fear of hunger.

We call on your abounding grace. Oh God, hear our prayer.

We pray for families here and across the world. We pray especially for families who are persecuted by violence or forced to flee by natural disasters. We pray for their protection and security.

We call on your abounding grace. Oh God, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who feel abandoned and for all those who hunger for love. May we see the face of God in every human being we encounter. May we bring light and love to their fear and longing.

We call on your abounding grace. Oh God, hear our prayer.

We pray for the salvation of the earth. We pray for the protection of this world against climate change. We recognize that, in protecting our home, we are protecting the most vulnerable among us.

We call on your abounding grace. Oh God, hear our prayer.

We pray for all the leaders of this world. May your Holy Spirit dwell within them and guide their deliberations and decisions. May our leaders honor the dignity and well-being of all people in our own country and abroad.

We call on your abounding grace. Oh God, hear our prayer.

We pray for each other as members of the one human family you have created. In moments of doubt and fatigue, may we surrender to your love. In moments of joy and gratitude, may we praise the name of him who is the source of that love, Jesus Christ.

**We call on your abounding grace.
Oh God, hear our prayer. Amen.**

Edith Avila Olea is the Justice and Peace Associate Director for the Catholic Diocese of Joliet in Illinois. She is a recipient of Bread for the World's 2019 Rev. Arthur Simon Award for Faithful Service to End Hunger. In 2015, she received the Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award for her work to fight poverty and injustice through community-based solutions.



Edith Avila Olea

Offering of Letters

As part of your Bread for the World Sunday celebration, you may want to conduct an Offering of Letters—taking time to write brief letters to your representative and senators in Washington, D.C. Your letters can be written to urge Congress to accelerate progress on global nutrition, to address the root causes of migration, or to reform our criminal justice system—all critical to ending hunger and poverty in the United States and abroad. For sample letters and more information, visit bread.org/sunday.

About Bread for the World

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. God's grace in Jesus Christ moves us to reach out to our neighbors—whether they live next door, in another state, or on another continent. Bread for the World's work is made possible by contributions from individuals and churches. We invite you to join us by visiting bread.org/join or calling 800-822-7323.



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