

**SERMON: "WHAT DO YOU SEE? SCARCITY OR ABUNDANCE?"**

**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT ISAIAH 6:1-8  
NEW TESTAMENT LUKE 5:1-11**

**February 9, 2025  
Hunger Awareness & Action Sunday**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

I was an economics major in college. One of the jokes we told on ourselves was this. "If you take every economist in the world and you line them up head to toe, you know what you reach? Well, what you won't reach is a conclusion." Admittedly, those insider jokes are best kept inside.

Actually, what you reach (and this is quite evident these days) is lots of conclusions, lots of differing and conflicting conclusions. Think about the stories you're read and heard about the impact of tariffs. It's all so complicated!  
And that's just the economics. It's bigger and busier. It is entire systems and infrastructures and supply chains, lots of layers, laws and logistics.

This Sunday, as requested by our Outreach committee, we are focusing on hunger Hunger Awareness (being honest about the problem locally and globally) and Hunger Action – doing something about the problem  
Going to preach with a focus on hunger. Picked this day because it fits with the passage from the lectionary about this big haul of fish – the abundance.

You'll also notice all the bulletin announcements relative to hunger about Sunday Supper, Fair Trade Coffee and a 'thank you' from the Food Bank And relative to abundance – a class on "And God saw that it was good"  
We have announcements like that most weeks. Today, you get a sermon too.

I've done things like this, programs after worship, in other churches I've served. Can I tell you about those experiences and what I learned?  
At the church in Georgia, we had a lunch after church. Served a simple meal of beans and rice. Thought about not serving a meat, lots of people can't afford it But didn't want to alienate anyone – so we served chicken

The thing I remember most were the signs on the table that described each item and where it was from. It highlighted how intricate and interrelated our supply chains are – the chicken was from nearby Gainesville, lots of processing plants there The things from farthest away – thousands of miles, coffee and tea.

We should do something like that here. It would be a serving of humble pie We like to think of Iowa as an agricultural leader. We do produce more pork than any other state – North Carolina is number two. But our biggest crops ... the corn doesn't really end up on our tables, it goes in the tank (gas tank) and the soybeans, where do they go?

## A FISH FRY?

So, please give some thought to where your food comes from (probably California esp. our fruits and veggies) and the journey it makes (and the costs of that).  
Historically, people eat what they have available. I'm positive the first person to shuck and suck down a delicious oyster, way back when, was not from around here

I remember I sign I saw in downtown Accra, the capital of Ghana.  
It read in big bold letters – We must grow what we eat and eat what we grow  
A great message to a people whose history is one of others coming to claim the things that come from your land (or under it). Colonialism.

And a good message to us - appreciate the farmers. And not just the farmers in Iowa but Columbia and California, India and Idaho. Think about what is available to you.  
Think about the abundance on your plate, on the menu, at the store  
Not everyone has that, you know? Availability to that abundance

The passage from Luke, chapter five is a story of abundance

**When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.**

I've preached on this passage before, focused on it being a call story.  
It is that. This overflowing catch helps convince these fishermen to follow Jesus.  
This is also where Jesus makes the connection to the same kind of "big catch" when it comes to calling people to follow him. He tells these 'disciples to be' that they will fish for people. I can see them thinking that fishing will be good.

This passage is about being called to follow. One scholar I read talked about the big catch in this story being the future leaders found here. Good point.  
But what about all those fish? They filled both boats ... so they even began to sink  
That is a whole lot of fish. Abundance. Churches have been doing fish fries for generations. Might this have been the first one? They had lots of fish

What are we going to do with all these fish? This is a call story about following Jesus  
Isn't part of that call figuring out what to do with all those fish?  
On this day when we focus in particular on hunger awareness and action,  
I'd like to make the point that God the Creator provides us with the abundance

But the scarcity, that's not really God's doing, is it?  
Yes, there are droughts and storms and some pests. But the food deserts (like the one in north Waterloo after the HyVee closed), the climate change fueled by our burning fuels and the pesticides washed downstream all the way from Iowa to the Gulf of Mexico ... that is our doing - the scarcity.

## AWARENESS & ACTION

Verse eleven, the end of this story, reads this way, **“When they had brought their boats to shore they left everything and followed him.”**

I could be a biblical literalist and use this sermon to say we should leave boats full of fish to rot in the sun. Can you picture that? Can you smell it?

No, that’s not the message. Yes, there is an urgency to following Jesus

But doesn’t their bringing their boats to shore make us think of the whole process of finishing the work of bringing in the haul or the harvest. Being rather OCD might this be my chance to say something my family hears often, “the job isn’t done until we’ve put things away and cleaned up.” And a family favorite – “Everything in it’s place and a place for everything.” Felt good to say that from the pulpit!

What are we to do with all these fish, all this abundance?

Hunger awareness is step one, realizing that for far too many, there is scarcity.

Part of that awareness means realizing that the problem is real

Don’t you think that the fisherman soon to be disciples knew who might need some of that abundant catch of fish? People right there in their community

Hunger is a problem in our community – with children in our community, with those who work hard working a minimum wage job trying to make ends meet, You know there are food pantries on campus at UNI ... because they are needed.

Step two is hunger action. What are we going to do with this abundance?

Are we going to pretend it is really scarcity and fight over it?

Are we going to worry about ‘getting more’ more than others getting enough?

I began this sermon talking about differing conclusions and layers of complexity because the answers to how we do something about hunger are multi-layered

They are about our practices. I remember my mom encouraging us to join the ‘clean plate club,’ not to waste food. I’ve learned that lesson

I the one who eats what’s in that container in the back of the fridge

Hunger action is practical. It is also political

Now before you start squirming hearing that word “political’ in the pulpit

Let me try this. The policies and people you and I support make decisions that affect us all, including those who struggle to put food on the table.

We will see that as our leaders discuss how to pay for tax cuts or trim the deficit

Guarantee you one of the programs they will consider cutting is school lunches.

The conversation has come up before and will come up again. So a question

Should providing free school lunches for some or all students be something government does, or should those programs be cut?

The policies we do and do not support are a big part of the complex and

multi layered systems that make the abundance God provides available. Or not.

Be honest. The choices we make at the polls do affect the choices available

(and not available) to us and to our neighbors

## SUMMARY

Hunger action is practical. It is political. It is also programmatic. All three and more.

Answering the call of Christ, I am convinced, is not multiple choice among these three  
It is “all the above.” We can and are called to do something about hunger  
by being faithful in all three areas – in our daily living (the clean plate club),  
in our public and political support of a safety net (whatever that looks like) ...

And in the programs we participate in and support. Lots of options there

Supporting Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and the local Food Bank, (whose work  
is interrelated and impacted by what government does), serving at Sunday Supper.

Giving through the Souper Bowl of Caring today and other programs

There are many ways to serve

Let me close by telling you about one other church program we did – a hunger meal

I found it helpful in thinking about hunger awareness and action

what often happens with the abundance God provides

Here is a how a hunger meal works. First thing, you don't call it a hunger meal.

You treat it as if it were any other meal. The surprise is important in raising awareness.

We did it just with the youth group (about 20-25 youth). They were a tight-knit group  
with really good leaders, adult and older youth. Their closeness really helped

The outline is that you feed people based on how people eat around the world

to highlight the disparity. Out of the 20 some youth there, most got beans and rice  
and water. Five or six got nothing but a cup to go and get water from the kitchen.

Three kids got a steak dinner with salad, baked potato, a coke and dessert

As you might well imagine, all eyes were on those three kids.

Their actions were honest reflections of our varied responses.

One didn't even start on her meal, she cut it all up in portions and passed her plate

One portion per person until it ran out, which it did about halfway round the room

One other ate most of his, then left the leftovers for whoever claimed them first

The third young person ate most of his. He was the last to finish.

He cut the third piece of cake, a big piece. Couldn't finish it

Then he took his plate (and the rest of the cake) and threw it in the trash.

Two of his closest friends in the youth group rushed to the trash can  
and ate the rest of the cake out of the trash bin with their hands

There was a laughter that was both honest and awkward

I was thankful that the trash can liner was a new one

I tell you about that youth group and that meal wondering ...

Which one of those senior high youth, the ones who had the power to do something,  
the three that got the nice dinner, the two that that ate the cake out of the trash ...

Which one of those are you? What would you have done?

What are you doing with the abundance God has given you?