

# Jordan Station United Church

October 17, 2021

World Food Day

Rev. Anita Spiller

Sermon: "Live Your Mission"

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(Matthew 13:1-9)

Do you know what it's like to put every ounce of ability and energy into something and have it flop miserably? Do you know what it's like to do your best and find that your best just isn't good enough? Do you know what it's like to wait for something good in your life to grow and then wait...and wait...and wait?

That day when Jesus was sitting in the boat in the middle of the sea, he was speaking to a worn-out crowd that felt just like that. His followers had been working hard—really hard—to share the good news, but the message wasn't sinking in. Here they were, going from town to town, sharing Jesus' life-saving message that justice is attainable, that there are key values like kindness and generosity that, if lived out collectively, could save the world. Yet despite their important message, everywhere they went, they brushed up against people who were too preoccupied, too bored, too self-centred, or too stressed to listen. Each time a door slammed in their faces; their discouragement ramped up. It wasn't supposed to be like this. Even though Jesus was sitting in the middle of the sea, it's like he could see into the very hearts of those gathered that day. And in that calm, reassuring voice of his, he told them stories to help them understand themselves and make sense of their life. One of them was the parable of the sower: Some seeds will fall on the path and the birds will eat them. Some will fall on rock and the sun will scorch them. Some will fall on thorns and be choked out. But some will fall on good soil and bear an unbelievable crop. The Parable of the Sower was a pep talk of sorts. It wasn't the kind you would hear in a locker room, though. It wasn't about how great Jesus' followers were or how they would succeed at every turn. It was realistic: Some of the work you do is going to feel like a waste of time. Some of it will even be sabotaged. But keep going. Because there will be success. Trust me. Live your mission.

This, friends, is a millennia-old message we still need to hear. Especially on World food Sunday.

690 Million people will go to bed hungry tonight. Think about that. 690

Million people aren't asking, "What will we eat for dinner?" No. 690 Million people are asking, "Will we eat dinner?" And they ask that question night after night.

Hunger is so pervasive you'd think that the whole earth was made of dust. That no crops could grow anywhere. But we know there's nothing wrong with Mother Nature; the problem lies in the choices we make for her. Poverty, land grabbing, climate change, the commodification of food and water, conflict and political instability.... The causes of hunger are so complex, so intertwined, so systemic, it's natural to wonder how you and I are really ever going to make a difference.

It's like we are standing on that shore right along with Jesus' disciples and there are problems as big as the sea itself in front of us.

And even Jesus is sitting there admitting that addressing hunger isn't easy. He doesn't sugar coat the outcome of our work: some seeds just aren't going to land where we need them to or create the results we want.

But, he says, some seeds will fall on good soil and the result will be phenomenal.

So, live your mission.

Jesus got in the boat that day and rowed into the sea so he could look at the whole crowd at once, so his voice would carry across the water to each and every one of them, so they would take his parable to heart and hear him say: Live your mission.

Friends, one of the ways we live our mission as a United Church is by sharing what we have through our collective Mission & Service.

As a United Church we endorse the principles of food sovereignty: the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. We believe food is a sacred gift from God. Manna from heaven. No one should go hungry.

That's why from coast to coast to coast in Canada, our generosity supports community kitchens and meal programs, food cupboards, shelters, job training programs, community gardens, and healthy food programs. Internationally, we send food in times of crisis, distribute seeds, fund agricultural training programs and micro-lending programs, and support projects that help small-scale farmers access equipment they need and, in some instances, build infrastructure so they can transport their food to market. We work with partners like ACT Alliance and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to move beyond the charity model by helping to work toward long-term systemic change through respectful partnerships.

It's true that we aren't going to solve all the problems in the world, but for some people our support means the world.

Let me tell you a story about a young Canadian named Jesse. When he was 12 years old, Jesse had a traumatic brain injury. His life instantly changed because his brain didn't function the way it once did. By the time he was 17, Jesse had been hospitalized 32 times. Through the ups and downs, his mother took care of him. She was his rock. And then, sadly, three years ago she died of cancer. Without his mother, Jesse's life spiralled out of control. Two years ago, he survived the painfully cold winter sleeping in a storage unit. Then he went to Stella's Circle, a Mission & Service partner, where he was fed, received help to find a home, and is now completing a greenhouse technician college program. Today, Jesse is leading a new social enterprise that grows food for sale.

This, friends, is what happens when seeds of generosity fall on good soil.

Another story, this one stretching from Canada to Japan and then on to Kenya: In Kenya, more than 850,000 children have been orphaned due to HIV/AIDS. Some estimates are even higher. Emmanuel Baya, a farmer living in Magarini, Kenya, lost his parents when he was a child. So, when he saw children looking for food under the cashew trees on his property, he felt a tug on his heart strings. To make a long story short, he opened a children's centre and school for orphans. But he didn't want to just nourish their bodies and minds, he also wanted them to be able to one day sustain themselves. And he knew he needed more skills to help. So, he flew to the Asian Rural Institute in Japan, ARI for short. ARI is an agricultural training institute that teaches organic farming techniques and leadership skills and it is supported through your Mission & Service gifts. When he graduated from the program there, Emmanuel returned home and started an organic demonstration farm next to his school. Today, not only are the 287 children in his care learning how to grow food, but the farm is also serving seven neighbouring communities. Volunteers at the farm are also receiving agricultural training at ARI thanks to your support.

690 Million people may be going hungry tonight. But Jesse and Emmanuel and all the people in their communities that they support and the thousands of people that Mission & Service partners help aren't among them.

That's because they are amazing people, and they are supported by amazing people like you.

This is what happens when we live our mission.

Living God's mission is like planting seeds—each seed contains the

basic material needed to pull off a miracle. And like Jesus says, when they hit good dirt, miracles grow.

Thank you for your mission and service. Thank you for taking Jesus' stories into your heart and letting them transform your lives. Thank you for standing on the shoreline like disciples have for millennia listening to the Parable of the Sower.

Now, let's get to work planting seeds. Let's live our mission.

Amen.