**World Food Sunday – Live Our Mission!**

Today I share with you a message that comes from the United Church Mission and Service, and I begin with these questions:

Have any of you ever put every ounce of ability and energy into something and then have feel like it just isn’t working?

Have you ever found that your best just isn’t good enough?

Do you know what it’s like to begin something so full of hope, and then wait…and wait…and wait for others to get energized around you – and then begin to feel despondent when you don’t get the expected response and results?

I know I have felt that at times in Ministry.

Jesus’ disciples knew that feeling too.

That day when Jesus was sitting in the boat in the middle of the sea, he was speaking to a worn-out crowd. 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

 and that if lived out collectively, these values 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 face, 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 to 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 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.

Statistics from World Vision tell us that 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 *anything* tonight?”

And they ask that question night after night.

Hunger is so pervasive you’d think that no crops could grow anywhere on the earth. But we know there’s nothing wrong with Mother Nature; the problem lies in the choices we make.

As Paul Bartlett rightly pointed out in his article for the newsletter this week – the food shortage problem is due to Poverty, land grabbing, climate change, racism, conflict, political instability, and the list goes on …….

The causes of hunger are so complex, so intertwined, so systemic, it’s natural to wonder how you and I are ever going to make a difference.

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

And even Jesus is sitting there with us, admitting that addressing hunger isn’t easy.

He doesn’t sugar-coat the outcome of our work.

He tells us that some seeds just aren’t going to land where we need them to, or just aren’t going to 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.

That’s Jesus’ message to his followers that day – and that’s the message for us today. Live your mission.

So, how do we do that?

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

As a United Church we support the principles of food sovereignty.

We believe that all people have the right to have healthy and culturally appropriate food, produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods.

We support the right for people to define their own food and agriculture systems.

We believe that food is a sacred gift from God.

Manna from heaven. No one should go hungry.

That’s why from coast to coast in Canada, our generosity supports:

* community kitchens and meal programs,
* food cupboards,
* shelters,
* job training programs,
* community gardens
* breakfast programs in schools… and more!

One of the food programs that Mission and Service supports in Canada is our very own Food For Friends program!

The United Church also supports international programs:

* we send food in times of crisis,
* distribute seeds,
* fund agricultural training programs and micro-lending programs,
* support projects that help small-scale farmers access equipment they need
* We work with partners like ACT Alliance and the Canadian Food grains Bank, to help move beyond the charity model and 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.

Jesse in Toronto is one of those people. 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, Jessie is leading a new social enterprise that grows food for sale.

Here’s a picture of him at Stelle’s circle. (picture)

Jessie says he hopes to supply restaurants with the produce he and others grow.

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

Another story is one that stretches from Canada to Japan and then on to Kenya. It’s the story of Emmanuel Baya, a farmer living in Magarini, Kenya.

Emmanuel lost his parents when he was a child, and so when he saw children looking for food under the cashew trees on his property, he felt a tug on his heart strings. This short video tells his story:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFB1OKVhTjg&t=100s&ab_channel=TheUnitedChurchofCanada>

Today, Emmanuel’s’ farm serves seven neighbouring communities. Volunteers at the farm are also receiving agricultural training at ARI, thanks to your support.

Paul Bartlett will share another story of success with you in our Minute For Mission later today.

690,000,000 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, are not 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.

So today, on this World Food Sunday:

 let us stand on the shoreline like disciples have for millennia,

 let us not get overwhelmed with the inequities of food distribution,

 but let’s listen to the Parable of the Sower,

 and let’s get to work planting seeds as we live out our mission.

Amen.