

Year A – 3rd Sunday of Lent

Hunger and famine are reality in our world today. Just last week the United Nations declared a famine warning for 20 million people in East Africa. Hunger and famine arise from a variety of circumstances. The famine in Africa is caused by war and violence in developing countries, and by climate changes that have left people with little or no water to take care of the crops that they rely on for food and earnings. In the country of Somalia civil war has prevented people from sowing their crops and has turned them into refugees. The United Nations estimates that 5 million people in Somalia, about one half of the population, are in dire need of food assistance. Today people are already dying of malnutrition.

Hunger is not limited to those places in Africa where famine is bringing death to people. Around the world there are people who do not have enough food to eat. Many undeveloped countries around the world have an underclass of people who struggle to survive. Whether in Asia, South America, Central America and, again, in Africa, economic conditions and government policies have left many people with little food to live on.

We can sit here and say that these are problems beyond our borders and that we have no ideas of how we can have an impact. We would also be wrong. Just look down the center aisle at our weekly collection of food for ConCernsU. There are people in our neighborhoods that have a difficult time providing enough food for themselves and their families.

Why all this talk about hunger when Jesus and the Samaritan woman are talking about water?

Yes, they do spend time talking about water, but the real story is deeper. The Samaritan woman

is an outcast in her village. She comes to the well in midday when it would be the hottest. She does this to avoid meeting any women from the village. From the conversation she has with Jesus it is clear the reason for her being an outcast is because of her marital situations. Now meeting Jesus she begins a dialogue with him. This dialogue leads her to someplace she thought she would never find herself. She is an outcast with no hope, but in Jesus she finds hope, and acceptance. You could say that she hungered for someone to show her real love and acceptance. In her conversation with Jesus she finds what has been missing in her life, the revealed truth that God has sent Jesus into to the world for everyone, especially the outcast. She now places her faith in Jesus.

The water that Jesus talks about is the very heart of his mission from God. He is the source of salvation for everyone who believes that he was sent by God and accepts his word. This turning to Jesus is our placing our faith in his words. Jesus talks about water but he really wants us to believe that he was the one sent by God and place out faith in him. Another way of saying this is that he hungers for our belief in him.

Once the Samaritan woman places her faith in Jesus she becomes a changed person. No longer does she seek to distance herself from her fellow villagers. Instead she boldly goes and proclaims openly that she has met someone who could likely be the Messiah. She has gone from feeling like an outcast to becoming a witness, a disciple, for Jesus.

Our world today experiences a variety of hungers. Many people hunger for either power, or fame or wealth, among many other hungers. Other than the hunger for food, all hungers results for a deep feeling of insecurity. This insecurity comes because people have not found a way to

place their trust in something greater than themselves and their ability to direct their own lives.

This is a deep spiritual hunger similar to that experienced by the Samaritan woman. Just as the Samaritan woman discovered, there is only one way to find spiritual rest. We need to place our faith in Jesus' words and believe that he is truly sent by God to bring us salvation.

Concerning the hunger and famine that exist around the world we have to decide how we address the ongoing need. In this season of Lent we can utilize two of the pillars of Lent: prayer and alms giving. Concerning the spiritual hunger that exists, even within ourselves, we have to decide whether or not we accept the words of Jesus, that he is the one sent into the world by God to bring all people to salvation. Are we then willing to be like the Samaritan woman and become Jesus' witness to the world?