

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

I remember the first time I went to serve at Loaves and Fishes back in Sacramento. Folks from our church served there on a regular basis, but I had never gone before. I rode down with someone as I wasn't sure where I was going. I got out of the car and looked around at the campus there, a dining center, laundry, small school, a small clinic, even a bank where those in need could safely keep whatever valuables they had. There was a lovely green park with shade trees and benches, all of it surrounded by a fence, it was welcoming, it was protecting, it was a safe place for one of the largest homeless populations in California. There were no fights, no drugs, no bullying, not even a police presence, it was respected by all who used the facility.

We went into the dining center, the tables all covered with cloth, napkins, there were real plates, cups and glasses. I could smell something cooking, I forget what it was, but it smelled good and that day we served meat, potatoes, carrots, salad, dessert, a complete meal, to nearly 1,100 people.

Thinking about it brings back memories, the aroma walking into Loaves and Fishes, the aroma of whatever my wife is fixing, the aromas of my mom's kitchen, all the places where I've been invited as a welcome guest. Thinking about reminds me of all those we served, everyone of them treated as a welcome guest.

You know as a child, as a young man, I didn't have anything to complain about, parents who loved me, good food, roof overhead, my own comfortable room, sister and brothers, I had it good. As an adult, I've had it even better. But stepping through the doors of that dining center with 12-15 members of my congregation, I realized what a blessing my fellows were. All were blessed abundantly in a material sense, but more importantly all had been blessed abundantly with not only the ability to care, but to love and give of themselves. I realized what a privilege it is to serve others, to give of what God has given us in so much abundance, not just in the material sense but in giving of ourselves in service to others, and to do so compassionately, cheerfully and lovingly.

Jesus steps of the boat, sees the crowds, notice plural, he sees crowds of people, and he has compassion for them. When Jesus looks at our world he sees crowds of people going without food, without even adequate water, without even rudimentary medical care. He sees the homeless, the refugee, the children at our border, he sees those who are in our area, here around Cook and Orr and Virginia and Hope who are struggling, who are doing without, who are lonely. He sees them with compassion, not as a burden, but as a privilege to help, to feed, to serve. Compassion, mercy. What does God desire of you my brothers and sisters? What's that? Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with our God.

I can imagine the scene, crowds of people, but: "send the crowds away." And the response, "no, I don't think so, you give them something to eat." What? How can we

do this, there are too many, it's too late in the day, we don't have the resources, they are here illegally, they shouldn't have come, and the excuses go on.

So Jesus looks at our world today, talk about crowds! Talk about drought, talk about war, talk about lack of resources, talk about, talk about, talk about. Jesus looks at you and me and says "you give them something to eat."

Oh but there are so many, but Jesus filled with compassion looks at us and gives us the opportunity to be a blessing to others, Jesus blesses us to be a blessing to others.

It is indeed a large crowd, seemingly insurmountable crowds of people, huge problems, logistical problems,, even some distance problems come into play. But we have options, giving to the ELCA is a huge option, a wonderful chance to help those in need, both near and far. Just through the ELCA we can participate in Lutheran Disaster Response, HIV and AIDS ministry, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, ELCA World Hunger, and with other Lutheran partners, Lutheran World Relief.

Let me share some facts about hunger with you from the ELCA

Hunger facts

- 868 million people – that's 1 in 8 – are chronically hungry and cannot lead active daily lives. [1]
- 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty, living on less than \$1.25 per day. [2]
- In the United States, more than 50 million people do not know where their next meal will come from. [3]
- 46.2 million Americans are living in poverty. [4]

[1] [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2012](#)

[2] [The World Bank Poverty Overview](#)

[3] [USDA, 2011](#)

[4] [US Census, 2012](#)

- See more at: <http://www.elca.org/hunger#sthash.Mr7H9KSp.dpuf>

"You give them something to eat," Jesus tells us. Dear friends, empowered by Jesus, part of the body of Christ, you and I can literally feed millions with fellow members of the church.

We have so much to be thankful for, so many blessings, our needs, even many of our wants, provided for. Saved by the grace of God, loving God, loving our neighbors, we can and should thank God for the compassion God has for us, and for all people, and we can and should thank our God for the gift of compassion, for the joy of giving in Jesus' name. AMEN