

Today I want to start by talking about food. What we eat says a lot about where we’re coming from, what our background is, how affluent we are. Food is culture. One of the great things about being in southwestern Ontario and the GTA is that we have the chance to taste so many different foods from so many different cultures.

Now the thing is, we all grow up with certain kinds of food. For most of us, this is probably European / North American fare: you know, meats and potatoes and casseroles. This is our comfort food, food that is familiar, food that triggers something in our brains that says, yes, I know this, this feels like home. We know what we like, and we like what we know.

Most of us know how hard it is to expose kids or grandkids to any new foods: how suspicious they are of anything they don’t know, and how we often have to convince them, “Oh just try just one bite, and if you don’t like it, you don’t have to eat it.” Who hasn’t heard the question, ‘What is this?’, while kids carefully examine the strange food on their plates, poking around with their forks.

But this is not necessarily something that’s limited to kids. When I left home in Connecticut to study music in New York City, all of a sudden I was exposed to all kinds of new kinds of food that I’d previously not encountered. I found myself in a restaurant wondering, “What is this? What am I eating here?”

No matter how old we get, we may remain suspicious of strange foods or decide we definitely don’t like certain things. We may ask, how in the world can people eat this stuff, let alone like it? But we should always remember: for some, this is the daily bread. We may

not be crazy about it, but this is what God so graciously provides as nourishment for the body.

In the Bible, the people of Israel soon have had enough of their life in the wilderness. They soon realize that, although they may have lived in slavery while in Egypt, at least they lived in a civilized environment, and there was enough to eat. Now they had freedom, but they were out in the wilderness. The thing is, freedom often comes with the price of uncertainty and hardships. The new life God had led the Israelites into is strange, unfamiliar, maybe even scary. One of the first needs that becomes obvious is the need for food. The general attitude among them is: so, you led us out of Egypt, just to let us die of starvation?

God listens to the complaint and provides a mysterious substance. And, like many who are confronted with an unfamiliar food for the first time, the Israelites ask, “What is this?” In the original Hebrew text, we actually have a humorous play on words here, because the Israelites ask, “Man hu?” Man hu? Manna! And ‘manna’ is best translated as: it is what it is, or: this is it.

Now isn't it interesting that the people in the wilderness see the manna, see that it is the promised food from God, and still don't recognize it as such? I sometimes wonder what those folks were expecting. It seems they were waiting for something familiar, something they know; and yet, God totally catches them off guard, and surprises them by providing what is needed in an unexpected way.

Last Sunday's gospel from John talked about Jesus miraculously feeding the 5,000. Some of you probably heard Rev. Ruth Brown preach on this story. Now today's gospel is closely connected to

that; the people in the Galilean countryside are still following Jesus; they were fed once, and, as Jesus realizes, they've come for more. They are still hungry. They probably don't quite know themselves what they're hungry for, or what they truly need.

How often do we hear in the gospels this question about Jesus, "Who is this?" Which reminds us of the question asked by the Israelites, 'Man hu', *what* is this? People see Jesus as a teacher, a healer, someone who is different, someone who has authority, a leader, a prophet, someone with amazing powers. But they don't see that Jesus is 'it' – 'manna'.

Just like those Israelites in the wilderness, they don't realize that God has set before them exactly what they need, what the world needs: Jesus himself, the bread from heaven, the bread of life. They don't see that there, right in front of their eyes, is the manifestation of God who models compassion, grace, solidarity, true community – true communion – and self-sacrifice for the sake of the world, for the sake of the larger good.

A few days ago in the Waterloo Region *Record*, we learned of a disturbing incident having to do with food, right on the front page of the paper. Then we learned even more about it on the front page yesterday. The title of the first article, written by Luisa D'Amato in her opinion column was "Destroying food is against Waterloo Region's values". I would add that it is against *everyone's* values, even the complete opposite of Jesus feeding the 5000.

What the article in the paper described was the first parcel of that land in Wilmot Township, located along Bleams Road, "part of the land assembly being pursued for a future industrial site". But we have no definite idea of what it is going to be used for, or when, or

why. Many of you know about this rural prime farm land, totalling 770 acres, which the Region of Waterloo is trying to acquire, while keeping the plan a complete secret from the public.

Well, this newspaper article was about the first 160 acres – a large, expansive, beautiful corn field. I'm sure you all would know what this looks like. In just a few weeks, this lovely corn would have been ripe enough for a harvest, and those of us who have already tasted the corn crop this year know that it is particularly delicious as all the rain we've been having helped to grow it so well.

So what happened that was so horrible?

The Region of Waterloo ordered the entire field of corn to be all plowed under the ground. That's right – not waiting just a little while for a harvest, or even cutting it down now and using it to feed to cattle. Just plowing it down and burying it. Unbelievable. And downright sickening.

Luisa D'Amato writes: "That amount of corn would have created enough corn flakes for 2.5 million boxes of cereal. That's more than four boxes of cereal for each person in the Region of Waterloo. It is unconscionable to use our tax dollars to destroy food, at a time when record-high numbers of people here are receiving free food from food banks because they can't afford to buy groceries."

I don't know about you, but this goes against everything that we value in creating a better world. And against the teachings of Jesus about using our material resources to fulfill a spiritual mandate.

If we are called to become bread ourselves, sharing ourselves with a hungry world, then certainly that sharing has to do with the

stewardship of our own earthly resources. When we are good stewards, then we have more than enough to share.

In endeavouring to love God with all our heart and all our mind and all our soul, we try to see the bigger picture. The picture that goes beyond only seeing one aspect of the story. It's true that the Waterloo Region, and probably Wellington County as well, could use more tax monies coming in from big corporations which take up land and create more jobs. But yet, what about sticking to a long-range plan for the Region, which has already been put in place? The bigger picture sees the needs of the *people*, the care of Creation, and most of all, gives everyone a chance to learn what is going on and why. A democratic society is one that is supposed to give voice to *everyone*, not just a select few. After all, God fed manna to everyone in that desert, and Jesus himself multiplied what was available so that everyone could eat.

Jesus points to himself as the food which endures for eternal life. It is in endeavouring to follow his example, living the life which he calls us to, sharing ourselves with a hungry world, that we find true abundance.

May it be so. Amen.