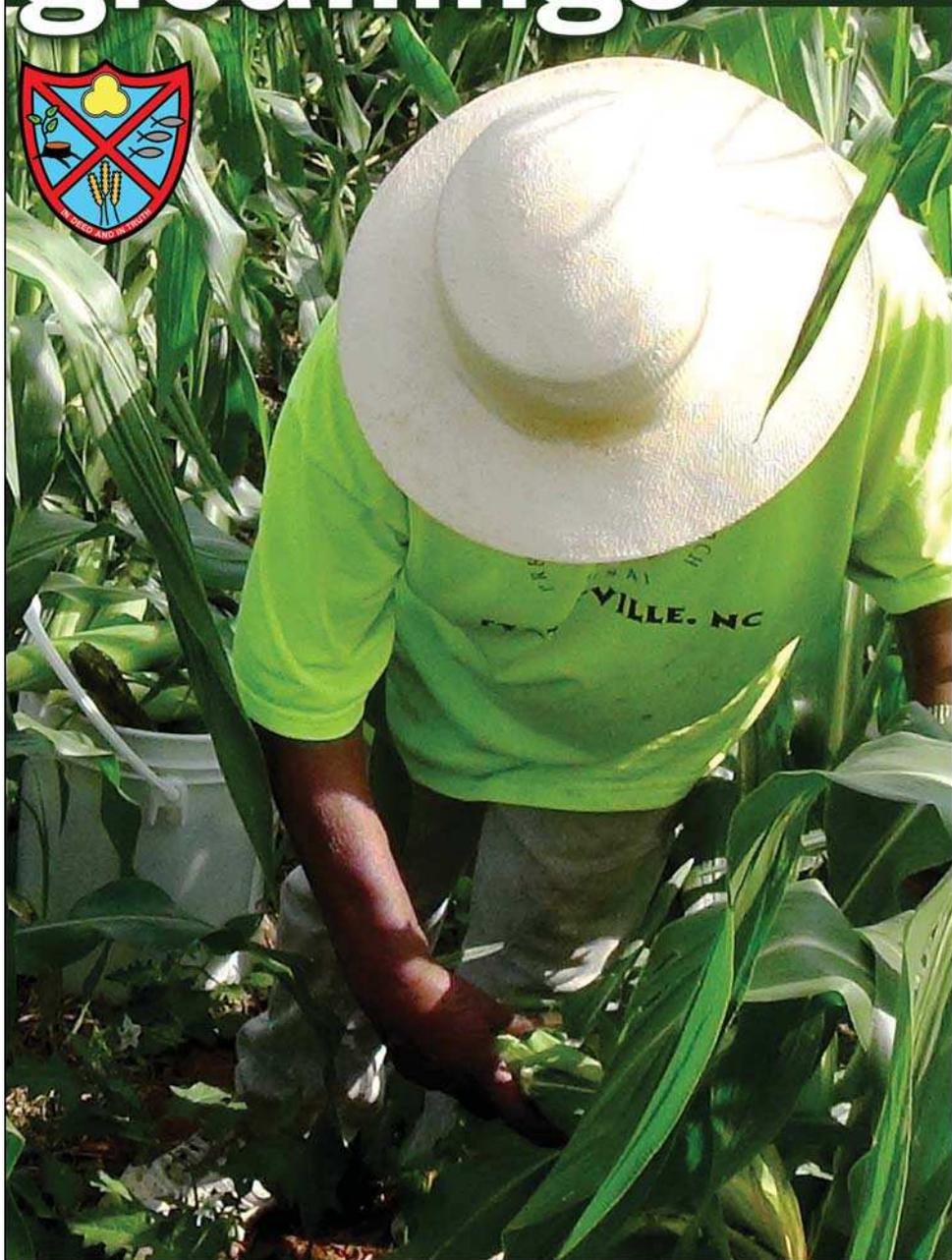


# gleanings



**Hunger-Focused Bible Study for Young People & Adults**

# gleanings

Ten Hunger-Focused Bible Study Sessions for Young People and Adults

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**1**

**Old Testament**

## **Genesis 18:1-15** (NRSV)

*The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup>He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. <sup>3</sup>He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup>Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.”*

*So they said, “Do as you have said.” <sup>6</sup>And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” <sup>7</sup>Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.*

*<sup>9</sup>They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” <sup>10</sup>Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. <sup>11</sup>Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.*

*<sup>12</sup>So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” <sup>13</sup>The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ <sup>14</sup>Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.”*

*<sup>15</sup>But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”*

# 1

# Hospitality

*Abraham and Sarah prepare a meal for unexpected guests*  
Genesis 18:1-15

Verse to Remember: Is anything too wonderful for God?  
(Genesis 18:14a)

## Background

Having heard a call from God, Abraham has left his homeland behind. He becomes a nomad, living in the wilderness, traveling gradually toward the land God has prepared for him. Abraham is wealthy, with vast herds and flocks, and lives with Sarah, his wife, along with servants to tend the livestock and the home and with an extended family, in large tent homes, that they pack up and move seasonally to make the best grazing land and flowing water available.

Abraham's great sadness is that he has no children to carry on his family name. By the time of this story, Abraham is already an old man, and Sarah is an old woman.

Here, at the hottest part of a very hot day, as Abraham is taking a break from his work and from the heat, three visitors suddenly appear in front of him. Culturally, Abraham is expected to show hospitality, if only as a means of assessing whether the strangers are friend or foe. As you might imagine, there are many levels of hospitality, ranging from a distant wave, to an invitation for visitors and their livestock to draw water from Abraham's stream, to allowing them to pitch their tents within the boundaries of Abraham's camp, even to welcoming the guests inside for a simple bowl of soup. But Abraham's hospitality goes beyond even this. Abraham bows before the visitors, a gesture of servitude. He calls for a servant to bring water and wash their dirty feet and invites them to rest under the shade of a tree. Abraham even offers a little bit of bread.

And then Abraham does even more—he acts as though these are honored guests that he has invited for a feast. He asks Sarah to bake yeast cakes with the finest flour, and he goes out himself to the grazing land and chooses a tender calf, that he has a servant kill and prepare for the guests. This is no quick snack supper! Yogurt and milk complete the meal, at which Abraham acts not as host, but as servant, standing near the table as the visitors eat, so that he can better attend to their needs.

As it turns out, the visitors are, indeed, messengers from God, who have come to bring the news that Abraham and Sarah will soon have a new baby—seemingly absurd and totally unexpected news that will change their lives forever.

## Reflection

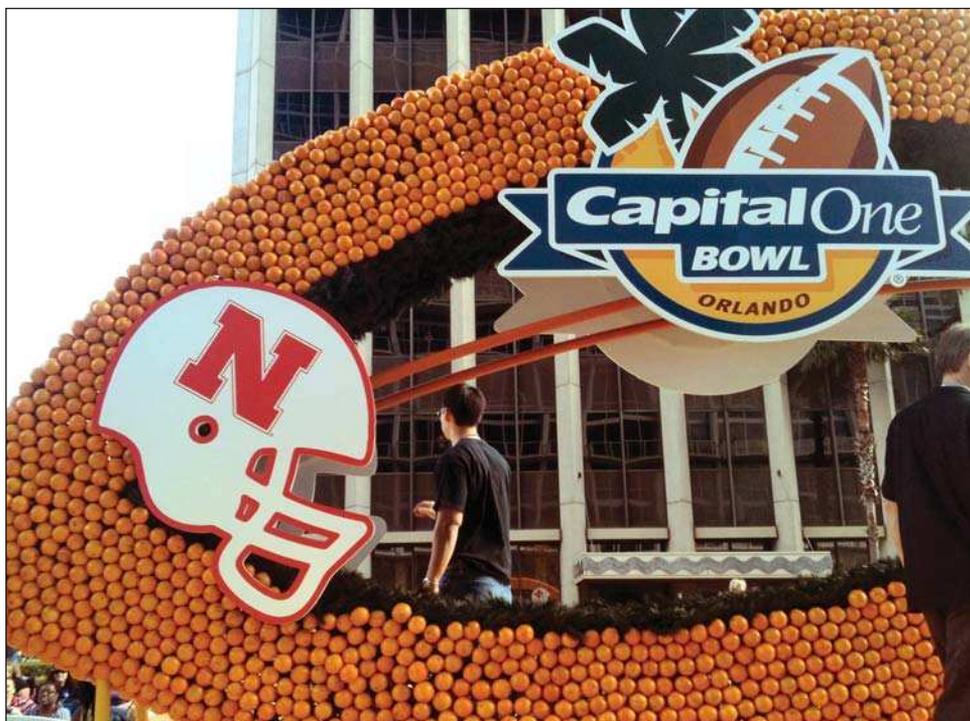
- How do you feel when you find strangers knocking on your door? How do you respond in this situation?
- What “levels” of hospitality do you show to guests? How do you decide what degree of welcome to offer particular guests?
- What joy and what worries, fears, or discomfort do you experience in welcoming guests to your home?
- What does hospitality mean to you? How do you demonstrate hospitality beyond simply welcoming people into your home—what other kinds of hospitality are there?
- Can you recall a personal experience where either showing hospitality or being shown hospitality was transformative for you?
- Re-read Matthew 25:31-46. In teaching about the Last Judgment, Jesus describes a more radical kind of hospitality expected of his followers—“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”
- To whom is God calling you to demonstrate hospitality? How can you/will you respond?

- Does showing hospitality require financial resources? How can one who has little show hospitality to others?
- Where do you find hospitality (and truth, and meaning) in this statement: “Christianity is one beggar telling another where to find food.” (D.T. Niles)

## **Prayer**

God, we are so glad that you welcome everyone to your table: strangers and travelers, poor people and rich people, those who have no friends. You even welcome me. Thank you, God. Amen.

## **Notes**



## **Fruit on a Float**

If you've ever watched the big parades surrounding the NCAA college football playoffs, you've probably seen the huge floats of the Capital One Citrus Bowl parade, decorated with tens of thousands of pieces of fresh, delicious fruit, all grown in Florida.

You may not know that each year, Society of St. Andrew volunteers are waiting at the end of the parade route. They carefully unfasten each piece of fruit from the zip tie attaching it to the float, then bag or box it.

When all the floats have been stripped, Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida picks up tractor-trailer loads of grapefruits, oranges, tangerines, tangelos, lemons, pomelos, and more. Over the next few weeks, this good food is shared with hungry people throughout the region, providing excellent nutrition to those in greatest need.

## **Genesis 25:29-34** (NRSV)

*Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished.*

*<sup>30</sup>Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!” (Therefore he was called Edom.)*

*<sup>31</sup>Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.”*

*<sup>32</sup>Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?”*

*<sup>33</sup>Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.*

*<sup>34</sup>Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

# 2

## **Trickery**

*Esau sells his birthright for a bowl of stew*

Genesis 25:29-34

Verse to Remember: Teach us to count our days,  
that we may gain a wise heart. (Psalm 90:12)

### **Background**

This story is about the grandchildren of Abraham and Sarah, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. From the very beginning of their lives, we are told, these boys have fought, each trying to be the first, the biggest, the best, or the most important. Esau is the first-born. In ancient Hebrew culture, being first-born entitles him to inherit the family lands and wealth and to

receive his father's blessing, becoming (at Isaac's death), the patriarch, or head of the family. The family lands and wealth belong to Esau from the moment of his birth, as surely as if the deeds and keys are already in his hands. These things are his birthright.

When the twins grow up, Esau is big, boisterous, and (according to the traditional definition) manly. He is his father's favorite, and he spends his days hunting and gathering and working the fields. Jacob is quiet and prefers to stay indoors; he is his mother's favorite son. In the little snippet of the story that we are reading, Jacob has spent the morning in the tents, making stew, while Esau has been out in the fields.

To us, what happens next sounds like one of those little off-handed things that siblings do to take a dig at each other, but this has some real and permanent consequences for the future of the Hebrew people. Esau yells that he's starving and commands Jacob to put lunch on the table. Jacob says, "Sure, I'll do that, big guy, if you'll sell me your birthright." To Esau, it's a great joke. "Man, I'm dying of hunger here. Who cares about a birthright when you're as hungry as this?" "Whatever, Jacob. Just put the food on the table, and you can have whatever you want."

And with that careless response, Esau gets lunch and Jacob gets the inheritance. A blink of an eye, and everything has changed, not just for Esau and Jacob, but for their children and grandchildren, to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  generation.

## Reflection

- Have you ever experienced real, gnawing hunger or actual fear that you would not have enough to eat?
- How does our hyperbole or exaggeration, when we say, "I'm starving" or "I'm famished" diminish our ability to understand and respond to real physical hunger?
- Can you recall stories (from your own life, the lives of people you know, or of people that you've heard or read about) when a single moment or single decision changes the course of a life?

- There are some bits and pieces of this story that may bother you, including the characterization of Esau as more manly than Jacob and the description of each son as the favorite of one or the other of the parents. Consider these issues as you read and study the story. Are you or do you know someone for whom those traditional gender stereotypes are uncomfortable, either because they feel themselves to be outside those stereotypes or because they recognize the limitations of the stereotypes? Do you know someone who lived with parents that played favorites, someone who is or who feels unloved by their parents, or someone who feels less than their siblings?
- What do you feel you deserve, or that you are owed? What are you willing (or not willing) to do to see that you get it?
- Read John 4:1-29, the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. Beyond food, for what are you hungering today? What spiritual and emotional hungers do you need to fill?
- Where do you get living water?

## Prayer

God, sometimes we are greedy and want more. More than our share, more than you have given us, more than we need. Open our eyes to see our neighbors in need, and open our hands and hearts to share what we have, so that everyone has enough. Amen.

## Notes



## **Apples Everywhere**

Most apples in the orchard ripen about the same time, so with the high costs of seasonal labor, farmers may send workers and equipment through the orchard a single time to harvest whatever is ripe and ready for market.

That “single pass” harvest leaves lots of fruit behind: apples that ripen late, that are blemished, or are too large or too small for the farmer’s sale contract. These apples may stay on the tree until they ripen and beyond, eventually rotting on the ground. Unbelievable quantities of apples go to waste in every orchard, simply because they’re not ready when the farmer is!

The Society of St. Andrew mobilizes volunteers to go into orchards to glean after harvest: to pick, dig, or gather everything remaining after the workers and equipment are done. This good food is shared with hungry people, through food pantries, shelters, and other feeding programs nearby.

## **Exodus 13:3-10** (NRSV)

Moses said to the people, “Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because the Lord brought you out from there by strength of hand; no leavened bread shall be eaten.  
<sup>4</sup>Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out.

<sup>5</sup>When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this observance in this month.

<sup>6</sup>Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival to the Lord. <sup>7</sup>Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen in your possession, and no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory.

<sup>8</sup>You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’

<sup>9</sup>It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of the Lord may be on your lips; for with a strong hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt.

<sup>10</sup>You shall keep this ordinance at its proper time from year to year.



# 3

## Obedience

*The Hebrew people eat a quick meal before leaving Egypt*  
Exodus 13:3-10

Verse to Remember: Do not fear, for I am with you.  
(Isaiah 43:5a)

### Background

We've moved forward more than 400 years. Jacob's son, Joseph, is sold into slavery in Egypt (in another bit of family trickery), but eventually becomes the Pharaoh's chief of staff. In that role, he invites his father's extended family to come and live in Egypt during a time of drought in Israel. As centuries have passed, though, the Hebrew people have ceased to be welcome guests in a foreign land and are slaves of the Pharaoh, forced to labor on his massive building projects throughout the country.

It's time for them to leave slavery in Egypt and return to Israel, and God has called Moses to be the leader who will make that happen. Naturally, Pharaoh is loathe to lose his hundreds of thousands of free laborers, so he won't let the Hebrews leave without a fight. God afflicts Egypt with nine successive plagues, to make sure Pharaoh knows things will not go well for Egypt if the Hebrew people remain in captivity. Finally, it seems that Pharaoh is willing to release his slaves, but again he changes his mind.

God then unleashes a tenth plague, so terrible that Pharaoh is practically willing to buy the Hebrew people plane tickets back to Israel. In one horrific night, the first-born males, both human and animal, of the entire land of Egypt are killed. The first-born of the Hebrews are spared, though, because God has them mark their door frames, so the 'Angel of Death' passes over those homes. Remembering this night becomes for the Jewish people, even today, The Passover.

But the Hebrew people must move quickly to leave Egypt after the Passover. They leave quickly enough that there is not even time for the day's bread to rise. So forever after, when they commemorate the Passover, they must eat the special meal of remembrance with their traveling clothes on, sandals on their feet, and walking sticks in their hands. That sense of rushing to escape captivity is an important part of the remembering and re-telling of the story, so that no one among them can ever forget the mighty acts of God that brought them safely out of Egypt and back to the Promised Land.

## Reflection

- Usually when we think of being passed over, we are not grateful. We think of being passed over for a sports team in school or for a promotion at work, of being a wallflower at a dance, or not getting a callback following an audition. What “Passovers” have you experienced?
- What special meals are important in your family? In your culture? Are there particular foods you prepare, blessings you recite, or actions you rehearse as part of those celebrations?
- Can you recall a time when you felt you were “spared” from an accident, an illness, or a difficult situation? How did that make you feel? Were others not so spared?
- This episode in the life of the Hebrew people raises tough theological questions for adults. We see God choosing death for the first-born children of an entire nation. Here God's particular care for the descendants of Jacob means that not only their oppressors, but also, surely, thousands of innocents, die. This seems at great odds with the God of love and mercy preached from our pulpits, the sweet and gentle Jesus who welcomes children on his knee. We will not easily resolve this or make the entire story comfortable—nor should we. Spend some time discussing the ways God acts in the story of the Passover.

- Our focus in this story is of the Passover meal as a sign of obedience to God, commemorating the Hebrew people's escape from slavery in the land of Egypt. In the selected passage from Exodus, Moses reminds the Hebrews of their hasty departure and commands them to keep the Passover, or Festival of Unleavened Bread, every year. How do you show your obedience to God? (What does it mean to you, to be obedient to God?)
- Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. How is Holy Communion (the Lord's Supper/the Eucharist) a new Passover? From what are we, who celebrate Holy Communion, escaping? From what are we being passed over?
- In your life, out of what is God leading you—and toward what?

## Prayer

God, sometimes we feel alone or in trouble, but you are always with us. Show us your way and teach us your laws, so that we may obey your commands and be your faithful people. Amen.

## Notes



## **Thanksgiving Turnips**

Perhaps in your family, Thanksgiving is a holiday that brings everyone together for a day of conversation and food, gathered 'round a table full of good food.

In Southwestern Virginia, many families have another Thanksgiving Day tradition—they go together into the turnip fields to glean turnip roots and greens for a few hours before heading home to enjoy their big dinners. Gleaning is a great activity for everyone, from youngest to oldest, as these girls can attest!

This farm is near Riner, Virginia, about four hours from Washington, DC. The farmer plants acres of turnips every year, just so Society of St. Andrew volunteers can glean them and share the turnips and greens with agencies feeding their hungry neighbors. Nearly every weekend in the fall, from the end of September right up into December, you'll find hardy gleaners out in the turnip fields!

## **Exodus 16** (NRSV)

*The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt.*

*<sup>2</sup>The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”*

*<sup>4</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. <sup>5</sup>On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.”*

*<sup>6</sup>So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup>and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?” <sup>8</sup>And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but” against the Lord.*

*<sup>9</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.’” <sup>10</sup>And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup>The Lord spoke to Moses and said, <sup>12</sup>“I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat*

*meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.”*<sup>13</sup>

*<sup>13</sup>In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup>When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup>When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup>This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’” <sup>17</sup>The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. <sup>18</sup>But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. <sup>19</sup>And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.” <sup>20</sup>But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. <sup>21</sup>Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.*

*<sup>22</sup>On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, <sup>23</sup>he said to them, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.’” <sup>24</sup>So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. <sup>25</sup>Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. <sup>26</sup>Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none.”*

*<sup>27</sup>On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. <sup>28</sup>The Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? <sup>29</sup>See! The Lord has given*

*you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.”<sup>30</sup> So the people rested on the seventh day.<sup>31</sup> The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.*

*<sup>32</sup>Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, in order that they may see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”<sup>33</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations.”<sup>34</sup> As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the covenant, for safekeeping.*

*<sup>35</sup>The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. (<sup>36</sup>An omer is a tenth of an ephah.)*

# 4

## The Miraculous

*God provides manna and quail in the desert.*

Exodus 16

Verse to Remember: I will sing of your steadfast love,  
O Lord, forever. (Psalm 89:1)

### Background

It hasn't been long—a few days, a week, maybe a month or two. The Hebrew people, led out of captivity in Egypt by the mighty hand of God,

have had a narrow escape, again, from Pharaoh's troops, who came to intercept them at the Sea of Reeds. Now they are walking on toward the Promised Land, and the food they had stuffed into their pockets and knapsacks before leaving Egypt has finally run out.

The complaints begin, perhaps from a child. "What's for lunch? I'm hungry!" But, as everyone soon realizes, there isn't any food, so more people join the chorus. As the volume of the outcry rises, so does the level of anger. Soon adults are saying crazy things: "It would have been better if we'd stayed behind in Egypt." "That Moses fellow, he just brought us out here to the wilderness to kill us." "God has forgotten us. We're going to die."

But, of course, God has not forgotten God's chosen people. God has a plan, and God provides for them, in unexpected and amazing ways. Throughout forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the Hebrew people need never be hungry, as God rains manna like dew in the morning and sends flocks of quail into their camps every evening.

Scholars believe manna to have been a sticky, sweet, bread-like substance. The word manna is interpreted as the phrase, "What is it?" reflecting how unfamiliar a substance it is to the Hebrew people. (For more information, [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manna) offers a good article about manna: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manna>.)

Whether the manna and quail are always present in that wilderness, but have simply gone unnoticed before by the Hebrew people, or whether they are an unexpected and abundant gift from God, uniquely given for all the days and years the Hebrews spend wandering, we do not know. But for people grounded in scarcity and fear and hunger, the manna and quail God provides are miraculous proof of God's goodness, God's steadfast love, and God's abundance.

## Reflection

- When have you felt God's absence? Have you ever considered yourself to have been forsaken by God?

- It's easy, in reading this passage, to find ourselves astonished by the way the Hebrew people so quickly take for granted God's actions in getting them out of captivity in Egypt. We are dumbfounded to read how quickly they turn against God, how quickly gratitude is overtaken by worry, self-pity, fear, and grumbling. Where would you place yourself in this story? Are you raising the outcry against God? Are you quietly worrying? Are you scurrying around, trying to make the best of a bad situation? Are you offering comfort to those who are struggling? Are you in awe of God's miraculous gifts? Are you hoarding the manna, to be sure you get yours? Are you helping others gather enough?
- When and why have your spiritual pockets and knapsack felt empty? What have you done to seek spiritual re-fill? What do you need to do today to "top off" your pockets?
- This tension between scarcity and abundance is something the Society of St. Andrew faces, addresses, and interprets every day. Millions of people in the United States do not have enough to eat, while billions of pounds of good, nourishing food goes to waste every year. Where in your life do you feel a tension between scarcity and abundance?
- Read Matthew 14:13-21, a New Testament story about another time that thousands of hungry people are fed by a gracious, loving God of abundance, through the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fish. What similarities and differences do you see between the Feeding of the 5,000 and our passage from Exodus today? Why, in the New Testament story, does God provide more food than is needed to feed the gathered people?

## Prayer

God, we pray for people who are hungry, for children and for grownups who worry that there will not be enough to eat. Help us remember that enough is all we need. Teach us to share, so that all may be fed. Amen.



## **Green Beans Galore**

A major green bean grower on Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau was convinced that his green bean culls didn't belong in a hole in the ground (where they had gone for years), so when he learned about the Society of St. Andrew, he was thrilled to be able to share those unmarketable beans with hungry families. By pickup truck and by dump truck, on flatbeds and in bins, these green beans are now going, day after day, from the farmer's fields to the forks of hungry families—often being served at table within 24 hours of harvest!

The pile of beans you see here measured 60 feet long by 15 feet wide by 4 feet high! It took 100 Society of St. Andrew volunteers about six hours on a hot July day, to bag 57,936 servings of fresh green beans, that were distributed the same day to hungry people in nine surrounding counties.

Why couldn't these beans be sold? They were simply too long or too short to meet the requirements of the farmer's sale contract.

## 1 Kings 17:8-16 (NRSV)

*Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, <sup>9</sup>“Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.”*

*<sup>10</sup>So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.”*

*<sup>11</sup>As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.”*

*<sup>12</sup>But she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”*

*<sup>13</sup>Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup>For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.”*

*<sup>15</sup>She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. <sup>16</sup>The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.*



# 5

# Hunger

*A poor mom shares her food with Elijah.*

1 Kings 17:8-16

Verse to Remember: You shall eat plenty and be satisfied  
and praise the name of the Lord. (Joel 2:26a)

## Background

The Hebrew people have now long been back in the Promised Land. They've asked God to provide earthly kings, and the time of Saul, David, and Solomon has passed. Territorial, religious, and leadership disputes have split the Promised Land into two nations: a Northern Kingdom (Israel) and a Southern Kingdom (Judah). The earthly kings have turned out to be real problems, grabbing for land, behaving badly in general, and even worshiping other gods. In 1 Kings we read of king after king, each worse than the last, described in this way: "And so-and-so did what was evil in the sight of the Lord."

Elijah, whom we meet today, is the first of the great prophets. He is of the Northern Kingdom and is sent to call the king and the nation of Israel to righteousness. He points out their wrong-doings, and he doesn't hesitate to do physical harm to those who get in his way. Some of the Elijah stories are pretty violent! But what we see first in Elijah (and later in other prophets like Hosea, Joel, and Amos) is an understanding of himself as communicating directly with God; a clear sense of what is right and wrong in God's sight; accompanied by a deep love of God's people and an unmatched zeal to see the nations restored to righteousness and living as God intends.

God has caused a years-long drought to affect the Northern Kingdom, so that the experience of hardship and hunger might call the nation to

repentance. As in every time and place, the hardship is greatest and the hunger most profound for those who have least. In the midst of this drought, God sends Elijah to the village of Zarephath to stay for a period of time with a poor widow.

A widow gathers sticks for the last fire she will ever make, to cook the final measure of flour that remains, with the dregs from her oil jar. She and her son will eat their last meal and then slowly starve to death. The widow is out of food, out of hope, and out of options, facing the inevitable with resignation.

To this widow—a woman who is probably not even an Israelite—God sends Elijah. He asks her for a drink of water and then a bite of bread. She brings Elijah the water, but refuses to give the bread. Elijah then offers her a message from God: if the woman will share what she has, she will always have enough. She will never go hungry, as long as the drought lasts.

The widow of Zarephath responds in faith. She welcomes Elijah into her home and shares all that she has. God keeps God's promise to her, rewarding her faithfulness and trust with fresh flour and new oil each day, bags and jars of life-giving food that sustain her and her son throughout the difficult days and years of the drought. She always has enough for the day.

## Reflection

- In today's story, we meet desperate physical hunger as we encounter the unnamed widow of Zarephath and her son. Their cupboards are bare. They have nothing. This is beyond skimping on food or skipping a meal; it's beyond choosing food over mortgage or medicine as 50 million Americans do each year. There is simply nothing left. Find photographs of persons in areas of drought and famine who face starvation, and take a few minutes to hold their lives and their faces in your hands, heart, and prayers.
- When we read the story of Abraham and Sarah welcoming three strangers earlier, we talked of hospitality and of sharing with others

out of abundance. Here, the widow of Zarephath gives out of scarcity, sharing the little she has. How are giving from abundance and giving from scarcity different? What qualities would you attribute to one who gives from abundance and what qualities to one who gives from scarcity? Is one type of giving better or more valuable than the other? Why or why not?

- Why do you think the widow is not named in this story?
- Have you ever faced a situation in which your life depended on trusting God or another person?
- What does the phrase, “God will provide” mean to you?
- Read or sing the hymn, “Great is Thy Faithfulness” or read Lamentations 3:22-33.

## **Prayer**

God, we love you and we trust that you will always give us what we need. Help us always to share, when we have a little and when we have a lot, so that everyone will have enough. Amen.

## **Notes**



## **Sweet Potato Mustache**

Every year sweet potato growers in North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee (and a few other states, too!), share millions of pounds of nourishing potatoes with people who are hungry through the Society of St. Andrew.

Sometimes a sale contract has fallen through; sometimes the market price bottomed out; sometimes the supply exceeds demand; one year it was broken cannery equipment that drove sweet potato donations. Often the potatoes SoSA receives are ones that don't meet the market standard; they are too big, too small, oddly shaped, or blemished—simply not pretty enough for grocery store sale.

The good news is that these potatoes can feed people in need. The better news is that ugly potatoes have the same great vitamins and nutrients as pretty ones!

**2**

# **New Testament**

## **John 21:1-13** (NRSV)

*After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup>Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. <sup>3</sup>Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.”*

*They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup>Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.*

*<sup>5</sup>Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?”*

*They answered him, “No.”*

*<sup>6</sup>He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.*

*<sup>7</sup>That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea.*

*<sup>8</sup>But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. <sup>9</sup>When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.*

*<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.”*

*<sup>11</sup>So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn.*

*<sup>12</sup>Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”*

*Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.*

# 6

## Breakfast

*After his resurrection, Jesus prepares breakfast for his disciples, on the beach.*

John 21:1-13

Verse to Remember: I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. (Romans 1:8)

### Background

Jesus' death has turned his disciples' lives upside down. Three years before, they left homes, families, and jobs to follow this charismatic rabbi, who preached and taught and healed, who spoke in riddles and had a knack for making people in authority angry. When Jesus spoke, his disciples knew in the core of their beings that he was the promised Messiah, and they were certain he would overthrow the Roman government and usher in God's promised Kingdom.

But it feels as though none of that has happened. At the time of the Passover, Jesus takes his disciples on a trip to Jerusalem, where things suddenly become chaotic and, almost before the disciples can imagine it, Jesus has been arrested, tried, and hanged on a cross. Their leader, the one they thought would be their Savior, is dead.

Simon Peter and the other disciples fear for their lives after Jesus' arrest. After his death, they hide away and grieve. Just a few days later, Jesus appears to a few of the disciples, and their despair and fear mingle with confusion—and hope and joy. But the truth is that they have no clue what is happening. They don't know what to make of their teacher who died, but now is alive, who sometimes is with them and sometimes is not. It is more than their human minds and hearts can comprehend.

So they struggle within themselves and with each other, knowing that decisions must be made and actions must be taken, but feeling utterly

without the resources to decide and act. It is at this point that Peter gets up and says, “Forget this! I’m going fishing.”

Fishing is what Peter has done from his youth. He and his friends know the boat, the water, the nets, the habits of the fish better than they know anything else in life. Fishing is the most routine thing Peter can do, really the only effort he can make toward restoring normalcy to his life. It is peaceful, calming, and restorative. But this night, though Peter and his friends row out to the best spot on the lake, there are no fish.

As morning dawns, a figure appears on the beach and commiserates with Peter and his friends that they’ve caught no fish. “Put the net down on the other side of the boat!” calls the man on the shore, “Then you’ll catch some fish.” It’s a crazy thing to suggest, isn’t it? But sure enough, just a few feet away are so many fish that the nets are overloaded and begin to break from the heavy haul. That abundance, more than the disciples could ever have imagined, is what opens their eyes to Jesus. They recognize their Master as the figure on the beach.

In one way and another, the disciples make their way to shore. Jesus is there before them, waiting for them to arrive. And Jesus already has everything they need. The charcoal fire is hot, and the fish are ready to eat.

## Reflection

- Can you recall a personal experience when you felt your world was turned upside down? What strengths did you find inside yourself to move forward? What resources did you find outside yourself that made a difference? How was faith a help or a hindrance in your turmoil?
- How does routine activity help restore balance and normalcy when life is chaotic?
- Put yourself in the place of Peter and the other disciples after Jesus’ death. What might you pray?
- How do you pray when you are at the end of your rope? Is that different from the way you pray when life is going well?

- Think of individuals or families or groups of people in your community whose lives are anything but routine right now. Choose one or many to bring before God in prayer. What is God calling you to do—is there an action you can take to share peace, help, wholeness, or health?
- Would it have been enough for Jesus simply to prepare breakfast for his friends? Why is the abundant catch of fish essential? What good news do you find in the nets filled to breaking?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus waits for the disciples to arrive and already has everything that they need? Can you believe that for yourself as well?
- How can you bring, show, or share God’s abundance with others?

## **Prayer**

God, we are so glad that you care for us. When we are worried or scared, when we can’t figure out the right thing to do, help us remember that you have everything we need. Amen.

## **Notes**



## **Farmer Brown**

After he retired from the game, former NFL football player Jason Brown wanted to make a difference in people's lives. He decided to raise vegetables for hungry people—so he bought a farm and learned how to grow crops by watching YouTube videos!

Brown planted acres and acres of sweet potatoes, but when the crops were grown, he needed help. There were too many potatoes for him to harvest alone, and he didn't have a good way to distribute the food. So he called on the Society of St. Andrew, and a great partnership began!

Several times each year hundreds of volunteers descend on Brown's fields to glean and bag sweet potatoes, all of which go to nearby soup kitchens, shelters, food banks, and food pantries. Each year Brown is expanding the acreage and variety of food he grows for others.

## **Luke 19:1-10** (NRSV)

*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it.*

*<sup>2</sup>A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup>He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. <sup>4</sup>So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.*

*<sup>5</sup>When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”*

*<sup>6</sup>So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. <sup>7</sup>All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”*

*<sup>8</sup>Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”*

*<sup>9</sup>Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”*



# 7

## Lunch

*Jesus has lunch with a tax collector.*

Luke 19:1-10

Verse to Remember: Love your neighbor as yourself.  
(Mark 12:31)

### Background

Tax collectors have a tough job in the ancient Roman world. They receive no salary, but take their pay out of the money they collect from the ordinary people. People dislike paying taxes then, as now, even though they like some of the things that taxes pay for, like roads and security. But what they dislike most is not having a set tax rate. They owe whatever the tax collector tells them they owe.

For a tax collector working in the Jewish communities, the situation is even worse, because the Jewish people chafe at Roman rule and long for independence. Coins with Caesar's face on them seem blasphemous, and the whole process of paying taxes feels like usury, which the Hebrew scriptures prohibit. Zacchaeus, the tax collector in today's passage, is described as "a son of Abraham," a Jew himself. His very choice of profession seems to indicate (to the proper Jews of his day) that he has turned away from his faith and his heritage.

You can read Zacchaeus' remark in Luke 19:8 either as Zacchaeus telling Jesus that he already treats people fairly and gives back to the poor, or that he is resolving to do so in the future. The tense used in the earliest manuscripts can be read either way. So Zacchaeus may or may not be "a sinner" as some in the story claim, but his profession certainly causes people to think the worst of him.

Those who grumble about Jesus eating with "a sinner" appear to

believe either that only sinners would associate with other sinners or that Zacchaeus' sinfulness will somehow "rub off" on Jesus. They imply that Jesus is already himself a sinner or will become sinful by association.

In the final verse of today's reading, Jesus says that his mission is to "seek out and to save the lost," He puts the grumblers on notice that associating with sinners is what he is all about—and that Jesus is transforming sinners; they are not transforming him.

## Reflection

- Most of us have, at some point, felt ostracized, left out, shunned, or falsely accused. Spend a few moments reflecting on such an experience in your own life. If, today, you could face the person or persons who ostracized you, what would you say to them? Has that experience/have those experiences changed you? In what ways?
- When have you found yourself in the place of the "grumblers" in today's passage? When have you been the person who turns away or leaves someone out?
- What are the risks of associating with people whom others ostracize?
- What does the phrase, "The church is not a playground for saints, but a hospital for sinners," mean to you?
- Scholars often speak of Jesus' "preferential option" for the poor: his special concern for widows, orphans, strangers, the disabled, the landless, etc. In fact, Jesus often speaks in opposition to wealth. Yet Zacchaeus is a wealthy man. What is it about Zacchaeus that, in spite of his wealth, makes him a particular focus of Jesus' concern?
- Zacchaeus tells Jesus about some changes he will make in his life and his business practices because he has met Jesus. What changes will you/would you make or have you made in your life because you've met Jesus?
- Read Matthew 5:43-44. "I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Have you ever tried that? What difference

did it make? For you? For your enemies?

- How can you be the hands and feet of Jesus in reaching out to someone who is ostracized? Think of a specific situation and a response that you have made or can make, to make a difference.

## **Prayer**

God, thank you for your son, Jesus, who showed everyone that your love changes lives. Open our eyes to see people who feel left out or unloved, and help us treat them as neighbors we love. Amen.

## **Notes**



## **Backyard Bounty**

Lots of homeowners in the Southwest or along the Gulf Coast have citrus trees in their yards, growing grapefruits, tangerines, tangelos, clementines, satsumas, lemons, limes, and more. Fresh fruit, right from the tree is a great perk, for sure.

Often, though, backyard fruit trees simply grow more fruit than the homeowner and their family can eat. They may pick what they will eat, but leave the rest on the tree. Eventually that rots and falls to the ground, bringing animal and insect nuisances into the yard.

The Society of St. Andrew invites people to share their backyard fruit, instead of leaving it to rot. Folks in Central Florida, for instance, can call the Society of St. Andrew and invite volunteer gleaners to come and harvest the excess fruit. Each year, in January, February, and March, thousands of volunteers turn out for special backyard gleaning days—sharing hundreds of thousands of pounds of nutritious, fresh fruit with hungry people nearby!

## **Luke 10:38-42** (NRSV)

*Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.*

*<sup>39</sup>She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.*

*<sup>40</sup>But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me."*

*<sup>41</sup>But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; <sup>42</sup>there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

# 8

## **Dinner**

*Jesus has dinner at the home of his friends.*

Luke 10:38-42

Verse to Remember: Live in harmony with one another.  
(Romans 12:16)

### **Background**

Jesus stops for dinner one evening at the home of Mary and Martha. (Though we can't be sure, we assume that these women are sisters, living in the village of Bethany, with their brother Lazarus. We meet this family also in the Gospel of John.)

It comes as no surprise to us that, in Jesus' day, certain jobs are reserved for men and others for women. And it certainly should not surprise us to find a woman in the kitchen, preparing the evening meal for Jesus. But this is not a story about comparing gender roles. Rather it is about hospitality, about being a neighbor, and about how worry separates us from God. This passage is, intriguingly, sandwiched between the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the teaching of the Lord's Prayer. So the questions at the forefront in this story are: What does it mean to be a neighbor? How should we welcome our neighbors? (And, even more specifically, how should we welcome Jesus?)

Mary and Martha have different approaches to hospitality. For Martha, it's important that the meal be cooked properly: perhaps that everything comes out of the oven at the same time; that there's enough food for everyone; that the table is properly set; the house is cleaned and vacuumed; and the children are neat, quiet, and in their rooms. Martha attends to her guests needs by seeing that everything is "right" for them. She takes a housekeeping approach to hospitality.

Mary, on the other hand, embodies the saying, "If you're coming to see me, come right on over. If you're coming to see my house, give me two weeks' notice." For Mary, hospitality is about spending time with the guests. She probably takes Jesus' cloak, washes his feet, and offers him the most comfortable seat in the house—swatting the cat off the chair and moving the newspapers to the side table in the process.

Martha's welcome is gracious. Mary's welcome is warm. Who's to say which is correct? To us, it seems a matter of taste. And perhaps it is to Jesus as well. What bothers Jesus is not that Martha is cooking a meal or setting a lovely table, but that Martha is so tied up with her preparations and her need to have everything "just so" that she is too distracted to be present with him. Jesus chastises Martha for her distraction and worry.

## Reflection

- Jesus prefers Mary's welcome to Martha's because, he says, Martha is worried and distracted. What other New Testament passages can you

recall in which Jesus cautions against worries and distractions?

- How's that working for you? Do worries and distractions ever separate you from God? Share an example.
- Put yourself in the place of Mary or Martha. How would you welcome Jesus to your home? What would you want him to see there? What questions would you ask him?
- What does hospitality mean to you? How do you demonstrate hospitality beyond simply welcoming people into your home—what other kinds of hospitality are there?
- Can you recall a personal experience where either showing hospitality or being shown hospitality was transformative for you?
- Re-read Matthew 25:31-46. In teaching about the Last Judgment, Jesus describes a more radical kind of hospitality expected of his followers—“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”
- To whom is God calling you to demonstrate hospitality? How can you/ will you respond?
- Does showing hospitality require financial resources? How can one who has little show hospitality to others?

## Prayer

God, sometimes we get so busy that we forget to think about you and to pray. Help us to slow down. Remind us to pray. Show us how to live in harmony with one another and be followers of Jesus every day. Amen.

## Notes



## **At the Farmers' Market**

Thousands of cities and towns across the United States have weekly, or even daily, farmers' markets. Farmers arrive early in the morning with fresh fruits and vegetables and set up to sell from their truck or booth at a park or parking lot in town.

At the end of the market day, farmers often have good food that hasn't sold. They may not want to take it back home, but they don't want to throw it away, either!

All over the country, every day, Society of St. Andrew volunteers glean at markets' end, gathering the good food that is leftover. Somedays it may be just a handful of tomatoes, other days it is hundreds of pounds of a wide variety of produce.

Volunteers take the food to soup kitchens and shelters nearby, where it can be cooked and used right away, providing healthy food for many, many hungry people.

## **Luke 11:5-13** (NRSV)

*And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’*

*<sup>7</sup>And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’*

*<sup>8</sup>I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.*

*<sup>9</sup>“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*<sup>11</sup>Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup>Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?*

*<sup>13</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*



# 9

# Midnight Snack

*Jesus tells a story about a midnight visitor.*

Luke 11:5-13

Verse to Remember: Welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you. (Romans 15:7)

## Background

In the ancient Roman world, and in Hebrew culture for centuries leading up to and beyond the time of Jesus, offering hospitality to guests is nearly imperative. Much more than simply a nice thing to do, extending welcome to strangers is a way to gauge friend vs. foe and to establish social position, following a particular set of customs and rules familiar to everyone in the time. The story that Jesus tells in our passage today touches expectations of both hospitality and neighborliness.

Travelers arrive late in the evening, perhaps unexpectedly, and their host is mortified to discover he has no food to serve them. Not offering food to guests is a terrible breach of protocol. It is considered a great rudeness and is likely to cause the host, at a minimum, significant social embarrassment. Should the travelers be enemies rather than friends, the consequences could be much worse for their host.

Midnight is no time for regret—and no time for cooking, either. The host weighs his options: is it better to be rude to the guests or to be a nuisance to his friends? Wisely, he chooses to run next door or across the street or through the meadow, getting to his friend's home as quickly as possible.

The complex rules of hospitality, though, apply only to welcoming strangers and people in power. Friends are friends, then as now. The host knocks on the door. He bangs on the door frame. He calls out for his

friend, awakening her out of a deep sleep. While the neighbor prefers sleep and tries her best to send the host away, the banging and yelling is finally too much, so she gets out of bed, shares her food, and sends the host back home.

Jesus says it is like this with God. We don't need to follow a complex set of rules to welcome God as a stranger; rather we should relate to God as our friend and neighbor, confident that God will respond whenever we ask for what we need, just as the neighbor gives bread to her friend in the middle of the night.

It is not coincidental that this passage follows on the heels of Jesus' visit to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. It is separated from that visit only by Jesus' teaching on prayer. As Jesus tells Martha, our relationship with God is not about the rules. God simply wants to be with us.

## Reflection

- What does it mean to have or be a neighbor? How can you (do you) “love your neighbor as yourself”?
- This story, especially Jesus' comments on it (Luke 11:9-13) speak volumes about our trust—or lack of trust—in God. “Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you.” In what ways is trusting God really that simple?
- In this country, millions of people do not have enough to eat. Asking, seeking, and knocking are not putting food on their tables and are not lifting them out of the conditions that cause them to be hungry. How would you explain this passage to someone who is hungry? Is it possible that we are God's response?
- What rules (either real or ones you “feel”) get in the way of your relationship with others? Your relationship with God?
- In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to ask, “Give us the bread we need for today.” What is the bread that you need for today?
- C.S. Lewis said, “Relying on God has to begin all over again every day

as if nothing had yet been done.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- At the end of this parable, Jesus talks about relationships between parents and children, focusing on the parents’ love for their child (“What parent would give a child a snake when the child asks for bread?”). Spend a few minutes considering those who may have difficult relationships with their parents: those who grow up with grandparents or other guardians; those who are in foster care; those who may have been removed from their parents’ homes by court order; and those whose parents are abusive, incarcerated, addicted, or mentally ill. Recognizing that parents sometimes do not act as Jesus describes here, how might you be sensitive to the needs and concerns of those in your congregation and community with such life experiences?

## **Prayer**

God, we pray for people who are strangers, for children and grownups who worry that no one will open the door or help them. Help us be neighbors and welcome them, as Jesus welcomes us. Amen.

## **Notes**



## **Harvest of Hope**

Every summer and fall, young people and adults from all over the country take part in Harvest of Hope mission workcamps with the Society of St. Andrew. In the mornings, they go to fields or orchards where they glean the good fruits or vegetables remaining after harvest.

In the afternoons and evenings, participants learn about hunger in the United States and in the world. They have hunger-focused Bible study and worship time. One day, they follow the food they've gleaned to a nearby food bank or soup kitchen, preparing and serving it to guests.

Before they leave to go home, each group makes a plan to do something about hunger in their own community, so that the mission doesn't end when the workcamp is over. Each year, Harvest of Hope participants save and share more than a quarter-million servings of healthy food!

## **Luke 14:16-23** (NRSV)

Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. <sup>17</sup>At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’

<sup>18</sup>But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’

<sup>19</sup>Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’

<sup>20</sup>Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’

<sup>21</sup>So the slave returned and reported this to his master.

Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’

<sup>22</sup>And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’

<sup>23</sup>Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.’



# 10 Party

*Jesus tells a story about a big party.*

Luke 14:16-23

Verse to Remember: Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

## Background

Thus far, we've explored the idea of welcoming those who grieve, those whom no one likes, friends, neighbors, and strangers. Today's passage, the Parable of the Great Banquet, has God's welcome (and ours) extending to everyone, rich and poor, masters and servants, the healthy and the sick, people of all times and places. In God's kingdom, we shall all eat at the "Welcome Table."

Jesus tells the Parable of the Great Banquet while he is, himself, at dinner at the home of one of the leading Pharisees. Jesus talks about places of honor at the table and about who should be invited to eat. He says that the Pharisees' welcome—and ours—should be like God's: freely extended, without any expectation of return or repayment.

What one eats and drinks and with whom one eats and drinks are significant points of contention between Jesus and the Jewish leaders of his day. Repeatedly, throughout his ministry, Jesus chooses welcome over tongue-wagging, and presence over protocol. The open table Jesus demonstrates throughout his ministry is a place to celebrate restored relationships, foreshadowing the Eucharistic (Communion) table and mirroring, however dimly, the heavenly banquet we look forward to in God's kingdom.

In today's parable, the dinner host is not identified. The host is just someone who plans a dinner party for the usual guests: friends, family, business associates, and people of power and wealth. What follows,

however, is entirely unexpected: the invited guests refuse to come! They make ridiculous-sounding excuses, leaving their host fuming. Neither canceling the party nor re-scheduling it will do—the invited guests have been so rude, have so dishonored the host, and have strayed so far from the customs of the day in refusing the dinner invitation, that the host permanently scratches them off his social calendar.

So the host throws his hands in the air and says, “Why am I going to this much trouble to be hospitable to my friends and neighbors who simply turn their backs on me? Let me, instead, show hospitality to people who can never pay me back, to people who could never imagine being asked to eat at my table.” He sends his servants out, telling them to gather everyone in, whoever they can find.

His table becomes a great welcome table, where all are invited, where the surfaces are laden with food that will not run out, and the best wines are shared with the poorest people in town. And as the people pile in for the party, the room seems to grow even larger, and the table gets longer. The host sends his servants out again and again, knocking on every door and peering into every street and alley to bring more people to the table, so that no one is left out, and so that the abundance he has prepared is shared with all.

## Reflection

- The host in Jesus’ parable throws wide his doors and invites anybody and everybody to his banquet. What are the risks? The rewards?
- To whom would you have trouble extending a dinner invitation?
- Which roles or characters do you identify with in the parable (host, invited guests, servants, people brought in from the streets)? In what way?
- In Luke 14:12-14, the verses immediately preceding Jesus’ telling of this parable, Jesus suggests to his own dinner host, a leader of the Pharisees, that hospitality extended only to those who can repay it, is

not hospitality at all. What do you think Jesus means by this? Do you agree?

- If you could paint a picture of a “welcome table,” what would it look like? Spend some time painting that picture, either with art materials, with word, or with song.
- How is God calling you to extend a welcome table?

## **Prayer**

Thank you, God, for caring about each one of us. Help us to care for others, too. Show us ways to make everyone feel welcome, and share your joy. Amen.

## **Notes**



## **Practice on the Field**

These Tennessee high schoolers go to football practice on the playing field at their school every morning in August. One day, their coaches invited them to practice on a different kind of field—a cornfield!

The farmer called the Society of St. Andrew when he had corn leftover. These were second and third ears on his stalks, that were just not pretty enough for grocery store sale. It was a perfect matchup when the football team volunteered to help!

36 players and four coaches headed for the field to glean, thinking they might harvest a pickup truck load of corn over the course of the morning. Instead, in just a couple of hours, they picked over 28,000 pounds of corn—nearly 37,000 ears! Hungry families and seniors across ten counties had farm-fresh sweet corn to eat that night, all because these boys went to practice in the cornfield.

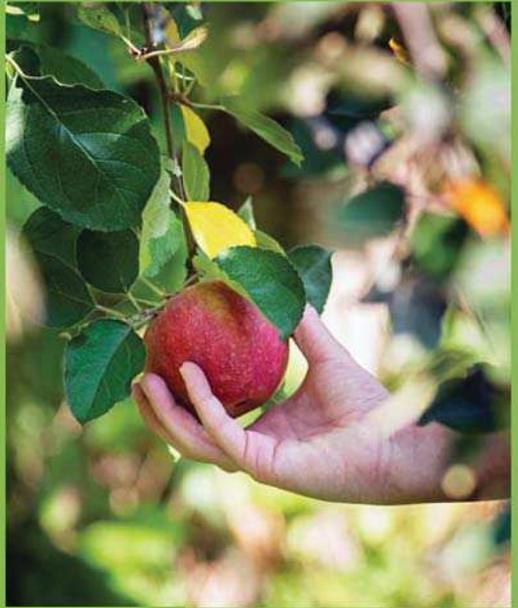
**Because of people like you who care about their hungry neighbors, good food like this doesn't have to go to waste.**

Your gifts to the Society of St. Andrew send volunteers into fields to glean (pick, dig, or gather) good food remaining after harvest.

Your gifts send large truckloads of fresh produce to areas where people need healthy fruits and vegetables most.

Your gifts improve the health of our hungry brothers and sisters. They send kids to school well-fed; and they help stretch tight budgets, so that there is nutritious food on the table all month long.

**Because of you, God's great abundance is shown and shared, day after day, all across the United States.**



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**Note “Society of St. Andrew” in the Memo line of your check**

Through your partnership in this ministry, you demonstrate our Savior’s special concern for the last, the least, and the lost, by reducing food waste and sharing healthy food with our hungry neighbors.

You may also pledge ongoing support for the Society of St. Andrew’s ministry by joining the St. Andrew Club, using the form below.



## St. Andrew Club

Share healthy food with hungry people all year long through membership in the St. Andrew Club. You will receive a “call” letter twice each year (spring and fall), inviting you to send a gift in the amount you have pledged. It’s that simple! Please indicate your pledge amount below. (You may opt out at any time.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ per year (half per installment) Every dollar you give shares 50 servings of nourishing food with people in greatest need.
- \$200/year (\$100/installment) will share 10,000 servings of food each year
- \$100/year (\$50/installment) will share 5,000 servings of food each year
- \$50/year (\$25/installment) will share 2,500 servings of food per year

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Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

*Mail to: Society of St. Andrew • 3383 Sweet Hollow Rd • Big Island VA 24526*

## *Hunger Relief Ministries of the Society of St. Andrew*

**Gleaning Network**—A hands-on mission program for all ages, getting healthy food directly from fields and markets to the hungry people who need it most. The *Gleaning Network* brings together farmers with excess produce, volunteers to glean (pick, dig, or gather) that produce, and agencies feeding the hungry. People in need glean alongside people with plenty in this community-based program, that engages individuals, congregations, and civic organizations in service.

**Potato & Produce Project**—A produce salvage program, providing direct food relief to our nation's poor, while addressing one of the major causes of hunger: food waste. The *Potato & Produce Project* salvages and distributes hundreds of tractor-trailer loads of fresh fruits and vegetables to food banks, soup kitchens, and other feeding agencies each year.

**Seed Potato Project**—A self-help program, providing seed potatoes purchased by Society of St. Andrew to impoverished rural communities, where people have access to land for gardening. Families plant, cultivate, and harvest their own crops, realizing a yield of about eight pounds of potatoes per pound planted.

**Harvest of Hope**—A hunger-focused work/study mission program. Participants glean and distribute produce remaining in fields after harvest each morning and learn about the realities of hunger each evening. Bible study and dynamic worship round out days of Christian community and service, providing a basis for on-going commitment to ending hunger. *Harvest of Hope* offers middle school, high school, and intergenerational events throughout the summer and fall, as well as *Alternative Spring Break* programs for college students.

Each year, the Society of St. Andrew distributes more than 85 million servings of nourishing food to hungry people throughout the United States.

*Society of St. Andrew, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, a grassroots, ecumenical and inter-faith ministry, has been working toward a world without hunger since 1979.*

**[www.endhunger.org](http://www.endhunger.org)**