

FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY

MARCH 9 - APRIL 20

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Week 1: Food for the Journey

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything that made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Share a meaningful experience you have had in the context of a meal. What made it so memorable?
3. Did you grow up reading the story of Elijah? If so, what did the story make you think and feel?
4. Read 1 Kings 17:1-16.
 - Have you ever experienced an unexpected source of provision in a difficult time? How did it impact your faith?
 - What might these stories tell us about “outsiders” and hospitality?
 - What might they suggest about the interconnectedness of people?
 - Do you think they have any application to the issue of immigration? Why or why not?
5. Read 1 Kings 19:1-15.
 - Elijah spoke truth to power, but he also struggled with pride and self-righteousness. How can we ensure we approach justice issues with love and humility?
 - Theologian Walter Brueggemann wrote, “as often happens to the zealous, Elijah has overvalued his own significance.” Have you ever had a time when you realized you were not as alone or as essential as you thought? What did you learn from that?
 - Elijah expected to experience God in dramatic acts (wind, earthquake, fire), but after the silence, Elijah heard the same voice asking the same question as previously. What do you think we can learn from that?
6. Where are you witnessing or experiencing injustice right now? Take some time to share and pray with one another.

Practice for the week: Providing for those in need

On Sunday, we heard about the freezing of foreign aid and the dismantling of USAID and many smaller federal development agencies. Take some time to pray for the disadvantaged communities overseas who will be impacted, and for those with the power to influence decisions to act with integrity and compassion.

Then take one practical step to be part of God’s provision for someone in need—overseas or close to home.

Week 2: Food for All

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Have you ever experienced strong feelings of hunger though intentional abstinence or decreased intake of food? Have you ever experienced hunger because of lack of availability or access to food? Share your experience and how it impacted you.
3. The forty days of Lent is a season we traditionally associate with Jesus' time in the wilderness. Read Matthew 4:1-4. Why do you think Jesus quotes this Hebrew scripture (Deuteronomy 8:3) specifically when he is so physically hungry? What do you think he means?
4. Jesus often uses the human experience of hunger both literally and metaphorically. What do you think he means in each of the following scriptures: Matthew 25:37-40 and John 4:31-34? How do each of these relate to the fourth beatitude in Matthew 5:6 (as translated in the New Catholic Bible version)?
5. The Hebrew scriptures are full of calls to act justly on a personal level and to create a just society on a systemic level:
 - Read Leviticus 23:22 and Deuteronomy 24:19. What might these scriptures have to say to us today as regards access to food for all, how we care for immigrants, and the import we might place on efficiency over generosity?
 - Read Leviticus 25:8-13. This is a description of the Hebrew law of Jubilee whereby land was returned to its original family owners every 50 years. The intent was to prevent the imbalanced accumulation of wealth and redistribute land (the means of food production) more justly. What do you think about this cultural practice? What might be the benefits and challenges of implementing it? What are some modern-day examples of the call and struggle to redistribute and realign resources?
6. What struck you most about Tinica and Jenna's discussion in the message on Sunday? Take a moment to review this week's Lenten Justice flyer about food justice (www.crc.org/lenten-justice-food-justice). Discuss how you feel compelled to respond and then spend some time praying for one another in these endeavors.

Practice for the week: Providing food for all

Take some time this week to take action on the issues you personally identified with in the Lenten Justice flyer (www.crc.org/lenten-justice-food-justice). Take a moment each day to pray for the hungry in our communities and for more just and caring access to food for all.

Week 3: The Final Banquet

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything that made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. One of the themes this week was about the trajectory of history and looking to the future. Do you tend to feel hopeful or pessimistic about the future? In your own life personally and in the world as a whole, what reasons are there for hope? What reasons are there for pessimism?
3. Our theme this week is "The Final Banquet," a metaphor used in scripture about the trajectory of history. Read Isaiah 25:6-9. How does this passage make you feel about your own view of the future? What about this passage feels like a destination or end? What about this passage feels like a new beginning rather than an end?
4. Jesus seems to reference this banquet motif in Luke 14:15-24. Read this passage and, assuming that Jesus is also using the story about a banquet as a metaphor for the future, discuss the following:
 - In what ways is it inclusive and what is the basis of inclusion?
 - In what ways is it exclusive and what is the basis of exclusion?
 - What might be modern day equivalents for the excuses people use not to come to the banquet?
 - How might we exclude ourselves from the banquet?
 - Who might be modern day equivalents for those who actually come to the banquet in the story?
5. Read the first part of the second Hebrew creation story in Genesis 2:4-20. The Hebrew word used for "man" is *adam* which is the same root as the Hebrew word for "ground" which is *adamah*. What does this poetic use of language suggest about the identity of humanity? Look at verses 7, 9, and 19. What do these verses suggest about our connection to nature? What do they imply about how we should treat nature and how nature might treat us?
6. Read Revelation 21:1-5 in light of the discussion about "The Final Banquet" in the Isaiah and Luke passages. In what ways is this an end or a new beginning? In what ways have "Heaven and Earth" been changed? What human inclusivity do you see in this passage? What are the implications for how we should care for the environment?
7. What struck you most about what Melanie shared about environmental justice in the message on Sunday? Take a moment to review this week's Lenten Justice flyer about food justice (www.crc.org/Lenten-Justice-environmental-justice). Discuss how you feel compelled to respond, and then spend some time praying for one another in these endeavors.

Practice for the week: Care for our planet

Take some time this week to take action on the issues you personally identified with in the Lenten Justice flyer (www.cccc.org/Lenten-Justice-environmental-justice). Take a moment each day to pray for the human communities, animals, and plants that are impacted by environmental injustice.

Week 4: Dinner Interrupted

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What was difficult for you?
2. How do you feel about the idea of different authors of Scripture adapting stories for their own purposes? How does that impact how you read the Bible, if at all?
3. Read Mark 14:3-9. What catches your attention from this story?
 - Use your imagination to put yourself in the scene. If you were the woman, how might you have felt when you entered the room? When you heard the criticisms? When Jesus spoke to you?
 - If you had been a guest at the dinner, how would you have felt as you watched this scene unfold? What might you have thought, said, or done?
4. Read Luke 7:36-50.
 - What similarities are there with Mark's story? What difference are there?
 - What points do you think Luke is making for his readers?
 - How have you experienced a connection between forgiveness and love?
 - Who do you identify with most in this story, and why?
5. Read John 12:1-8.
 - How does John use this story differently to Mark and Luke?
 - The speaker on Sunday suggested that mention of the fragrance of the perfume filling the room (v. 3) intentionally contrasts with the expected stench of death from Lazarus' tomb (11:39). What might be the significance of this comparison?
 - What lessons can we draw from this story about how we should live today?
6. Read again what Jesus said to and about the woman:
 - "She has done a beautiful thing" (Mark 14:6)
 - "She did what she could" (Mark 14:8)
 - "Her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown" (Luke 7:47)
 - "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48)
 - "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50)

Prayerfully consider whether any of these resonate with you. Take some time to share with the group and pray for one another.

Practice for the week: Loving self and others

In John's telling of this story, Mary, a beloved disciple, gives an extravagant gift to Jesus as oppressive political and religious forces close in upon him. Jesus sees and affirms the meaningfulness of Mary's gift. In these tumultuous times

- Decide on one thing you will do to express love and gratitude for someone else this week.
- Think of one way you can celebrate life this week, knowing that you, too, are a beloved disciple.

Week 5: Making Room at the Table

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything that made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Have you ever felt excluded by other people's actions and/or views about you? Describe the experience and its impact on you. Can you describe a time when you felt a deep sense of belonging in a community or with someone? What impact has this had on you?
3. Read the passage in Luke 14:1-14 and discuss the following:
 - Jesus was being "carefully watched" by the Pharisees (verse 1): What are they watching for? Have you ever felt "watched" by people or authorities?
 - Jesus is also watching (verse 7): What is Jesus looking for and what does he notice? How could we pay more attention in this way?
 - Jesus references "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" (verse 13) not as people who are lower than others in his view, but as people who the authorities often deemed to be a lower class, responsible for their own plight, and blamed as problems for society in general. What might be modern-day examples of the people with whom Jesus expresses solidarity? What challenge does that pose us for inclusion and equity, both personally and structurally?
4. In Ephesians 6:12 and Romans 7:14-20, Paul writes about the impact of powers on our lives in ways that might not always be apparent to us or even readily within our control. How do you relate to this on a personal level (Romans 7:14-20)? How might this influence how we consider the impact more cosmic or structural powers (Ephesians 6:12) have in society, and that we might not always see clearly?
5. Read Colossians 1:15-20. What does this passage say about how Jesus takes on the structural powers? How does this relate to what Jesus does personally in John 13:1-5? How might this challenge us to use whatever power we have?
6. What struck you most about what Sarah and Hubert shared about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the message on Sunday? Take a moment to review this week's Lenten Justice flyer (www.crc.org/Lenten-justice-DEIB). Discuss how you feel compelled to respond and then spend some time praying for one another in these endeavors.

Practice for the week: Breaking down barriers of exclusion and inequity

Make a point this week to take action on the issues you personally identified with in the Lenten Justice flyer (www.crc.org/Lenten-justice-DEIB). Take a moment each day to prayerfully take

the posture of Jesus as one who breaks down barriers of exclusion and inequity. Invite God to open your eyes to what is both visible and invisible so you can participate in justice and healing.

Week 6: Celebrating the Passover

1. This week we celebrated one of our "Community Sundays." How did you experience the various ways in which we expressed community together (both during the service and afterwards at our potluck)? How would you like to get more involved in our community? What do you think you need to do to experience closer community? Is there anything that obstructs you, and how could we all help with that?
2. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything that made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
3. This week was also Palm Sunday when we celebrate Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem before Easter. Jesus came with his followers along with thousands of other pilgrims to celebrate the Passover, a festival where the Jewish people celebrate their liberation from slavery in Egypt. Read the story in Luke 19:28-48 and discuss the following:
 - a. What emotions do the crowds express and why? What do you think is their hope?
 - b. What emotions do the religious authorities express and why? What do you think is their hope?
 - c. What emotions does Jesus express and why? What do you think is his hope?
 - d. How do you relate to each of these expressions? How do they challenge you?
4. The 40 days of Lent are traditionally associated with Jesus' 40 days spent in the wilderness. Towards the end of this time, he underwent an intense period of testing. Read about this in Luke 4:1-13. What do you think each of these temptations represents? How might they have helped prepare Jesus for his eventual destiny in Jerusalem at the time of Passover? How do you experience these same kinds of temptation personally?
5. Read Luke 9:51-56 and Luke 13:31-35 (where Jesus repeatedly sets a resolute posture on his journey towards Jerusalem) and discuss the following:
 - What potential distractions from his purpose do you see here and how does Jesus respond to them?
 - What emotions does Jesus express and why?
 - What emotions do others express and why?
 - How do you relate to each of these expressions? How do they challenge you?
6. As we approach Easter in the coming week, take some time to look back over this season of Lent and our series "Food for the Hungry." We've experienced food as a source of community, support, and encouragement. We've reflected on food metaphors and stories in the scriptures as a way of embracing the challenge to pursue justice in our society. What has stood out most to you? In what ways do you feel most challenged? What change does this call for—how do you need to resolutely reset your "internal center" on Jesus and his

way? What sustainable change in your life and practice do you want to nurture and how will you go about this? After sharing, take some time to pray for one another.

Practice for the week: Centering on Jesus

As we approach Easter this week, take a moment each day to reflect back on the final discussion above and specifically how you need to resolutely reset your “internal center” on Jesus and his way. Sitting in quietness and solitude, consciously let go and surrender to God’s presence. Invite the Spirit of Christ to partner with you. Lean into that love and let it move you. On Friday, come experience our Good Friday stations based on the Last Supper (anytime between 6 and 8 p.m.) Then celebrate hope and resurrection at our outdoor Easter service on Sunday April 20.