

## World Food Sunday - 'Buy Without Price' (Oct 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Have you ever been captivated by something? So much so that you just can't get it out of your mind.

Maybe there is a book that you are reading, or a movie that you watched – or perhaps, like me, during the pandemic you binged watched a series – or maybe 2 or 3! It somehow draws you in, and you play it over and over in your mind, trying to figure out the intricate plot twists.

I think scripture can be like that too.

Isaiah 55 had me at the first two lines:

*Hear, everyone who thirsts; come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!...buy without price.*

How do you buy without price? How do you eat without price?

In Canada, food prices are rising, pushing more and more people to the brink. In a report released in June of this year by [Food Banks Canada](#), it predicted that one in five Canadians will be going hungry. That's about 7 million people that will be going hungry at least once between March 2020 and March 2022. Back in June, CEO, Kirstin Beardsley, said:

*"This summer will be the toughest Canada's food banks have ever experienced in our 41 year history. The majority of food banks in every region of Canada are already stretched to their limits, with demand expected to remain high throughout the summer months as more and more Canadians struggle to cope with rising inflation."*

And those words of prophecy have proven to be true.

And let's not fall into the trap of thinking that food banks are only used by the unemployed or by the homeless. No!

1 in 3 Canadian households earn less than \$50,000, and they are finding that they just do not have enough income to feed a family. The rising cost of inflation, and especially the rising cost of housing and affordable rent, has meant that many with regular low-income jobs are now accessing food banks.

Students who are living on government loans that they will need to pay back, are frequent users of food banks.

Seniors who find that their pension only pays the rent and bills, are now forced to use food banks.

Food banks Canada reports that:

*"In the past, people would turn to food banks during times of job loss, or due to lower wages — but over the past six months, most regions of Canada are experiencing an influx of Canadians visiting food banks for the first time. Canadians are telling us that they are running out of money for food because of rising housing, gas, energy and food costs."*

This is an indication that we need to find new longer-term solutions to fight hunger and food

Insecurity, here is our own backyard.

One: Hear, everyone who thirst; come to the waters ... (join with me)

**ALL: .... And you who have no money, come buy and eat! ... buy without price.**

These verses in Isaiah 55 were addressed to displaced people, Israelites who had been forcibly deported to Babylon when Jerusalem was destroyed. They were not well fed. In fact, everything about their lives had been turned upside down.

And here God is offering water, wine, bread, milk—all the essential “goods” of the promised land—all for free!

I remember when I first arrived in Canada on a temporary work permit. I knew no-one here, had no relatives here. I had no regular job – just a few freelance contracts. And I had no permanent roof over my head. I depended on the hospitality of strangers.

I would move from town to town with my work, and sometimes, if asked, I would put my car license plate number down as my address!

It was a little tough to make ends meet – but looking back, I remember the generosity of strangers who would invite me into their homes – many became lifelong friends.

Perhaps you have similar stories of when you have been touched by an invitation?

Instead of telling people living in poverty to go away, in the Isaiah passage God issues an open invitation to:

*“come.” “Come to the waters.” “Come buy and eat.”*

And there are other imperative verbs in these short verses like:

*“Listen,” “Call upon” and “Seek God.”*

These aren’t harsh orders. They are more like persistent invitations extended to everyone regardless of financial means.

Some commentators interpret Isaiah 55 in a symbolic way. They believe the food referred to in the passage is spiritual rather than material. Yet, it’s very difficult to know where one ends and the other begins.

The passage reminds us that God is concerned with both physical and spiritual hunger.

One: Hear, everyone who thirst; come to the waters ... (join with me)

**ALL: .... And you who have no money, come buy and eat! ... buy without price.**

I think Isaiah 55 is profoundly economically subversive.

Let’s consider the line *“Buy without price.”*

Isn’t it annoying when you go to a store and get to the cash only to find that there is no price-tag on the items you intend to purchase? You know how it goes. A salesperson is called to go

searching while everyone in line behind you mutters under their breath and glares holes in your back.

Wouldn't it be a shock if the cashier told you the food you were about to purchase didn't have a price because it's free! And, wouldn't everyone else in line change their tune if they found out their purchases were free, too?

Wouldn't you think "What is going on here?"

What's the point of specifying "buying" and then adding "without price"?

Isaiah was imagining an entirely new system. A system where all of the essentials are available equally for everyone.

A system where food, water, shelter is available to all!

Food security has always been an issue, but the pandemic as well as wheat shortages resulting from the war in Ukraine have catapulted us to the brink of a massive hunger crisis.

Right now, more than 50 million people are facing starvation—almost double the number in 2019.

We have never needed to hear Isaiah's words more:

One: Hear, everyone who thirst; come to the waters ... (join with me)

**ALL: .... And you who have no money, come buy and eat! ... buy without price.**

Isaiah's vision lifts up hope for a renewed world.

His is a vision guided by deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice.

This vision has still not been realized, which is why approximately 12% of the world live in extreme poverty. But it is a vision that shines before us, a kind of holy beacon, drawing us toward love.

The work of the United Church Mission & Service partners is a way that we contribute to that vision. The funds that we donate support agencies that meet immediate needs by:

- providing emergency food hampers in times of crisis,
- stocking shelves at food banks,
- serving good, healthy meals through various outreach agencies.

We also help provide longer-term change by:

- supporting education opportunities,
- seeding community garden initiatives,
- helping neighbourhoods set up systems to cope with the impact of conflict and climate change on their food systems.

These are all ways that your Mission and Service dollars are making an impact in the world when it comes to food security. I know that Lori and Roger will talk more specifically about the work of Mission and Service in our Minute for Mission later – so I won't steal their thunder!

I believe that this community of faith at Huron Shores also seeks ways to live out Isaiah's vision of hope and a new world.

The work of the Free Store on Friday and Saturday was an example of that. The countless hours of the volunteers who sorted and managed the Free Store were definitely a labour of love. Many things were given away to people who had a need for them – and we will find out later how much we raised - money that will go back into the community to provide support for those in need!

The Caring Casseroles are an example of sharing love through the hospitality of food. A warm homecooked meal goes a long way to sharing God's love. It build relationships.

And, your response to the Mayor's One Bag Challenge also addresses the issue of food security. I invite you now to bring forward any bags of food.

**(choir sings VU549 For All Your Goodness God)**

Thank you to all – and I know that many more of you donated financially, or you helped to spread the word. I know that some spread word beyond this community, and foodbanks in need across the country have received donations.

Thank you.

Let's take a moment to bless this global outpouring of food:

**Creator, we give thanks for these gifts of food, and for the financial donations given here, as well as those given at many other locations across the country. On this World Food Sunday, we are reminded to live into the vision to create a world where all have access to nutritious and sustainable food sources, and where none will live with scarcity or food insecurity. Mobilize us to be a part of a world response to foster equitable resource sharing. Cultivate our resilience and expand our imaginations, so that we might continually find new ways to answer the call to end hunger—until all may flourish. Amen.**

One: Hear, everyone who thirst; come to the waters ... (join with me)

**ALL: .... And you who have no money, come buy and eat! ... buy without price.**

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations created World Food Day on October 16, 1945. The goal is to free humanity from hunger and malnutrition, and to effectively manage the global food system.

Today, people just like you and me in over 150 countries are recognizing this day alongside us. We all share Isaiah's vision, where there is enough to go around and an open invitation to the table.

Let's not be daunted by the enormity of the vision, but let us be committed to continue to do our part to make it a reality.

Together we *can* build a better world. Amen!