

Your Daily Church Epistle

Thursday, 30 July 2020

Hello Church!

“What’s for supper?” is an every-morning question in my life. The habit of asking it was established sometime in early 1989 when I joined Mother’s Club at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church. Mother’s Club was a UMW sponsored program specifically for stay-at-home moms, the UMW provided childcare for weekly meetings we moms ran ourselves. Every week we moms discussed a different subject. If a woman missed because of a sick child or giving birth (as I did one day), you only missed one session, not the flow of a series. Once every season, meal planning was a topic led by a more experienced mom in the group. “Experience mom” in our group meant a woman had more than one child and her youngest child was potty trained.

The first meal planning session I attended at Mother’s Club stressed planning a week’s worth of meals including using up leftovers already in the fridge (leftover Sunday roast chicken makes great Tuesday stir-fry), having select pantry staple meals (spaghetti with jarred sauce, freezer meatballs, and peas), a weekly major shopping trip preferably without children, and most importantly—checking your meal plan for supper every morning. Why? Well, because over a week things have a way of changing and no one makes supper decisions well when exhausted at 5 in the afternoon. Everything I have read on meal plans since then all stress beginning with what is on hand, have a pantry reserve meal, and check your meal plan for supper every morning.

Now as I read again the six gospel stories of Jesus hosting thousands for supper, it strikes me that the men and women (Luke 8:3) traveling with Jesus as disciples did not have a plan for dinner. They had experienced both Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14ff) and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) as homemakers with plans for feeding them whenever they showed up. But they did not seem to think that supper planning applied to them. In both the feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14:12-21) and in the feeding of the 4000 (Matthew 15:32-39) the disciples have no clue where supper is coming from.

Both times the disciples jumped to going shopping without a plan.

Both times Jesus, asked them “What do you have?”

Obviously, Jesus had a plan. And Jesus’ plan began with what was on hand.

Both times what they had on hand was a common lunch for a daily worker—some dried or smoked fish and some bread. A ready to eat lunch made for them by someone that morning. John's version implies a boy had a lunch his mom may have made. (See John 6.)

In all six stories, Jesus took that lunch that was offered into His hands, gave thanks to God, had the disciples serve it, and then asked the disciples to gather up the leftovers. Lots of leftovers. Enough leftovers for a bread giveaway.

There are several sermon classics in these stories of Jesus for us as Christ's disciples now. Today's classic is this: are we prepared? Do we have a plan for what we "know" will come? And in case what we think we know will come doesn't, do we have a reserve plan?

Some of life's most important lessons are learned through the discipline of daily work. Many young moms' daily work includes cooking suppers so often that they have habits around using their leftovers, keeping a pantry, and asking themselves every morning "What is for supper?" long after the youngest child left home. For some young moms, this feeding people can lead to a career. For other young moms, an aspect of cooking becomes a passionate hobby. And for some young moms, cooking supper daily is a successful habit only so they can get on to other "more interesting things."

I am in the third group, and God bless my husband for liking plain food cooked in a crock pot or reheated from the freezer. Also, as a member of that third group, my "more interesting things" have benefitted because by learning to feed our children well, I learned the discipline of planning must include a backup plan, procurement, and flexibility. Those disciplines are always beneficial no matter what any task on any day requires.

This is especially true in our Christian ministry. Effective church leaders have a plan that begins with what is on hand, a procurement plan, an alternate plan, and a routine to evaluate the plan as it goes on. Church leaders are more than just the pastor. Church leaders include all who accept their call to help "Thy (God's) kingdom come."

Right now, we are in one of those times where we need to remember to ask ourselves what is for supper every morning, both literally and rhetorically. We can expect the COVID-19 pandemic to go on for at least four more months, and by now we have mastered planning in a pandemic fairly well.

What we need to remember is that all pandemics pass, eventually. It is what we sing in *Hymn of Promise*, "From the past will come the future . . ." (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #707, Natalie Sleeth.) When the 1918 flu pandemic was over, so was World War I. What came next? The Roaring Twenties. When the COVID-19 pandemic is over, what will come next? ". . . The future, what it holds a mystery, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see."

While we do not know the specifics of what will follow COVID-19, we do know from history is a pandemic's end is usually followed by significant cultural and economic change, often accompanied by spiritual growth. We hope the struggles of 2020 will lead to recovery in 2021. And we can plan for recovery whenever it arrives so that when Christ says to us, "Feed Hudson" we can say to him "Well, Lord, here is what we have on hand."

Knowing we need to be prepared for the end of this pandemic is like knowing hungry people need supper every evening. What is our plan as Christians who pray "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done"? What do we have on hand to begin our work with, what skills do we have to make things happen? What are our pantry meals? What leftovers need to be put to good use? What will we hand to Christ so he can bless it and make it so much more?

For God's glory and our best future—let's figure out who has the makings for supper.

Grace always,

Rev. Dawn