



FEEDING THE HUNGRY – A service for a Sunday in Lent

The following resources are designed to be used in a service during Lent; they are suggestions for you to use or adapt in whatever way is useful for you and your context.

The theme of the service is 'feeding the hungry' and specifically relates to our calling as Christians to social action and uses as examples stories from the work of Church Urban Fund.

By taking a collection for the Church Urban Fund at your service you give vital support to its projects all over the country feeding the hungry and helping the most vulnerable.

In these resources you will find:

1. Non-lectionary readings
2. Notes for a Sermon or Talk
3. Alternative Collect and Prayers
4. Suggested Hymns and Worship Songs
5. Interactive activity for children

Non-lectionary Readings

Here are some non-lectionary suggestions for Old Testament and New Testament readings based on the themes which the sermon explores.

Isaiah 11:3-9

This passage gives us a vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God where hurts are healed, there is justice for the poor, peace and equality between powerful and powerless, and where the small and the vulnerable will be raised up to leaders.

Mark 6:30-44

This is Mark's telling of the story of the feeding of the 5,000 where Jesus models for us what our efforts today to feed the hungry might look like.

James 2:14-26

This well-known passage of James considers what it means to have faith without 'works' and how we are called to provide for our brother's and sister's bodily needs.

If you use the lectionary then the third Sunday in Lent might be an appropriate Sunday to use these resources when the Gospel reading is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:5-42).

There are some brief notes at the end of the 'notes for a sermon or talk' on this Gospel passage.

Notes for a Sermon or Talk

Below are some reflections you could use in a Sermon or Talk based on the theme of feeding the hungry, the suggested readings, and the work of Church Urban Fund. Although it flows quite comprehensively, it is designed to be adapted for your style and sermon length and is therefore in a bullet point format rather than a complete talk.



What's the reality of hunger in Britain?

- 21% of adults in the United Kingdom are experiencing some form of food insecurity. This means that millions of our neighbours are worrying about where their next meal will come from, or compromising on quality and nutrition, or in some cases going without food and experiencing hunger.
- Of our children, nearly 3 million are at risk of going hungry during school holidays, when they don't have access to meals at school.
- The data show that the situation in this country is getting worse, not better. The Trussell Trust reported that over the last 5 years their food banks have seen a 73% increase in the number of food parcels provided to people in crisis.
- In the world's fifth largest economy, how can this be?

How are Christians called to respond?

- Many passages in the Bible teach that when we come across others in need, we are called to act. From the act of creation, when God made all people in the image of Him, all humans were made equal, and yet inequality means millions of people in our communities in this country live in poverty. As Christians we are called to respond to this inequality.
- Our lesson from James 2:15-16 (If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?) is very simple, and it's the same lesson we receive again and again in the bible: feed the hungry / care for the widow / visit the sick / welcome the stranger.

What is CUF doing about it?

- Church Urban Fund runs over 200 food-poverty projects each year, everything from community fridges, to lunch drop-ins, to holiday clubs to food bank support.
- As well as projects which directly aim to offer food provision, CUF supports hundreds of others tackling the root-causes of food insecurity such as poor money management skills and helping people with the benefits system.
- Alongside direct provision, CUF knows that policy and advocacy work is also important in addressing the root of the issue and in making long-term change.

CASE STUDY 1: Feast of Fun, a project run by Church Urban Fund's Together Network, runs in different locations around the country. In Middlesbrough it supports over 1,500 children, young people and families in the area over the school holidays by offering fun activities, healthy food and family outings. One parent said: 'It's been a godsend. I would not have had any food today if I had not come here.' The food is important, but Feast of Fun provides so much more than this. There are day trips to places like the seaside and wildlife reserves, and hundreds of free books are given to children to take home and keep developing literacy skills over the summer. Children going back to school in September have loads of brilliant experiences from Feast of Fun to talk about, everything from dance classes to football games to days at the beach - otherwise they might not have had much to say about their summer holidays.



CASE STUDY 2: In Lancashire our prominent 'Darwen Gets Hangry' campaign championed a group of girls. Our advocacy for this group of young people who have experienced food poverty first-hand, resulted in wide coverage for them across the UK. They contributed to the Children's Future Food Inquiry, which was presented to Downing Street in 2019. The young people involved have grown in confidence beyond recognition and made a bigger difference than they ever could have imagined. They now understand that the way their lives have been affected by food poverty is not acceptable, and that they have a voice and can shout about it.

How are we feeding the hungry, here in this parish?

You might like to add in some reflections on your own social action work in your parish. Remember – by supporting CUF's work, you are expanding your impact from the local to the national.

What can we learn from Jesus feeding the 5,000?

The story of the feeding of the multitudes can be helpful when we think about how exactly we are called to feed the hungry. There are six important lessons about how we do our own social action in this reading:

- 1. Root our action in compassion.** The story starts with all kinds of people coming to Jesus with all kinds of needs. And it says: 'he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them'. This is our first lesson: all our social action must come from a place of compassion. When we look upon our brothers and sisters and are moved by compassion, we understand really what it means to love our neighbour. In moments of true compassion, we can relate the needs of others to our own needs and recognise our brokenness in the lives of others and their brokenness in ourselves. Jesus shows us this, not only here, but all through the gospels, and in fact it is the truth of the incarnation: God coming to earth as a man in Jesus is an act of ultimate compassion. When our social action is rooted in compassion then we find it emerges as love.
- 2. Recognise our own responsibility.** "When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.' But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." Jesus of course could have miraculously supplied and distributed all the food by himself, but he commands the disciples' participation, just as he commands ours. We must hear our own calling and recognise our own responsibility because in God's economy, there is no sending hungry people away.



3. Don't be paralysed by practicalities. When Jesus tells his disciples: "You give them something to eat." They say to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" They are paralysed by their own incomprehension about how they will afford to feed the thousands of people gathered. You can't blame them. How often we are paralysed by our own fear and hopelessness? When it comes to vast issues like homelessness, or child poverty – it is so easy to feel like we can't do anything to make a difference. Of course it is important to consider how we will resource the work we do, and to properly plan and prepare, but ultimately there comes a point when what is more important it to be faithful to God's calling on our lives than to be paralysed by practicalities.

4. Use what you've got. Jesus says to the disciples, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." He doesn't set himself up as the sole provider, he asks 'what do you have?'. Good social action recognises the gifts in individuals and therefore in communities and makes the most of the skills and capacities of local residents, groups and businesses to build stronger, happier and thriving communities. What Jesus models is a way of doing social action which isn't about dependency but is about empowerment. Good social action doesn't make a group of vulnerable people dependent on a powerful group of people, it empowers them to surface and use their own resources. When we use what we've got for our social action we often discover amazing resources in people and places, and we begin to build a culture of mutual empowerment.

5. Be amazed at God's provision. When we're doing God's work, we can expect to see miracles of provision, we can expect to be surprised by the outcomes, and lives and communities will be transformed around us.

6. When our work builds community, it builds the Kingdom. "Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties." So often we reduce the Jesus story to simply a personal one, but we need to remember it's also a social one. He built community, he gathered disciples and shared life with them, he prioritised spending time with people. Instead of sending hungry people away, he gathers them into communities, and they share food together. His focus is not only on meeting physical needs, but also on building relationships. By conducting our social action activities with the focus on building community rather than only meeting a need, suddenly we are ushering in the Kingdom through our social action. We have vision for our communities and neighbours inspired by God's vision for these people and places. We can undertake social action in a way which anticipates transformation, renewal and the in-breaking of the Kingdom.

In Isaiah 11 we are given a vision of the Kingdom of God where there is justice for the poor, peace and equality between powerful and powerless, the small and the vulnerable will be raised up to leaders, hurts are healed. Making this a reality is a task for all of us - we're all in this together, you, us at the Church Urban Fund, thousands of other Christians participating in social action around the country. We are all trying to address deep rooted issues of immense hurt in our communities – sometimes failing, sometimes succeeding, sometimes – by the grace of God – glimpsing the Kingdom in the work we do and Christ in the people we meet.



What can we learn from Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well?

In this interaction Jesus shows us that transformative encounters begin from a place of mutual vulnerability (he needs water from the well, and she has the means to reach it, she needs the living water which he can offer her).

Although the woman comes to the well for water, it is the conversation and meaningful relationship she forms with Jesus that change her life and the life of the community. Such encounters can offer healing to people with complex histories of hurt and broken relationships. In the same way, at CUF we support people with very real and complex physical needs (for example, hunger) but it is often the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with other people and sometimes with Jesus which changes their lives.

What our shared work is about is about making space for encounter, for relationship building, for conversations – as well as providing for physical needs. In this way, we are opening ourselves, others and our communities up to transformation. Suddenly we're not just feeding the hungry, but we're building the Kingdom of God and at the heart of this work is Christ, an overflowing wellspring offering us all the living water, in which we find healing and fullness of life.



Alternative Collect and Prayers

Collect:

Almighty God of bountiful provision,
Because of injustice and greed many go hungry.
Grant us the will and the way to feed our neighbours,
Give food to the hungry and give those of us with food a hunger for justice.
Through Jesus Christ our bread of life we pray, Amen.

Prayers:

Use this or another response:

Lord, meet us in our hunger

and hear our prayer.

God, who knows our needs and meets them, thank you for your promise that we need not worry and that by your provision we will be fed and watered.

Thank you for your abundant generosity in all you have given us.

Help us to use and share these gifts with your wisdom and to your glory.

Lord, meet us in our hunger

and hear our prayer.

God of compassion, our unequal society needs your healing.

We lift up to you our brothers and sisters who: are worried about where their next meal is coming from; are not able to buy or make nutritious food; who will not eat today. Guide them to people and places that can help, and be with them in their struggle.

Lord, meet us in our hunger

and hear our prayer.

God of justice, thank you for inviting us into your work.

Thank you for the ministry of the Church Urban Fund, and other organisations and groups seeking to live out their faith in action.

Bless and resource people and projects everywhere as they follow your call to feed the hungry and pursue your Kingdom.

Lord, meet us in our hunger

and hear our prayer.

God whose Kingdom is one of peace and prosperity, where the poor are raised up and hurts are healed. Give us your vision for our communities, soften our hearts and show us the way and give us the will to serve and love our neighbours with heartfelt compassion and resolve.

Lord, meet us in our hunger

and hear our prayer.



Suggested Hymns and Worship Songs

There are a range of hymns and worship songs suggested here on the theme of feeding the hungry and undertaking social action work as part of our calling as Christians. The music and lyrics are not provided for copyright reasons, but all can be found easily online and used with the correct permissions.

Worship Songs:

Build Your Kingdom Here, Rend Collective

Christ Be Our Light, Bernadette Farrell

God of Justice, Tim Hughes

God of the Poor (Beauty for Brokenness), Graham Kendrick

The Kingdom of God is Justice and Peace, Taizé

The Servant Song, Richard Gillard

Hymns:

For the Healing of the Nations, Fred Kaan

In a World Where People Walk in Darkness, Robert Willis

Make Me a Channel of Your Peace, Sebastian Temple

Teach me, my God and King, George Herbert

Tell Out, My Soul, Timothy Dudley-Smith



Interactive activity for children

This activity is on the theme of feeding the hungry and being amazed by God's provision – you will need to adapt it depending on the age of your group of children. [There are lots of crafts and colouring available to download from the internet on the theme of Feeding the 5,000 if you need to bulk this activity out.]

Reading: Tell the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000

Discussion: In this story Jesus performs an amazing miracle, making sure that all the hungry people were fed. He started off with just some bread and fish and in the end over 5,000 people were full up. Can you remember feeling hungry? How was it? What needs of yours does God meet?

Activity: Give each child a piece of paper and a pair of scissors (if there are younger children in the group who cannot use scissors then pair them up with older children). Ask the children to count how many corners their piece of paper has. (Ask one child to give the answer).

Now ask the children to cut off a corner of their piece of paper and give it away to somebody else. Now ask them again how many corners their piece of paper has. (Ask one child to give the answer).

Say: so, you've given a corner away, and yet you have more corners than you did in the first place?

Repeat this process a few times until a few corners have been cut off and given away.

Discussion: Your paper is a bit like Jesus in the story, the more times he divided the bread and fish, the more he had to give away. What surprises you about this activity? What is surprising about what Jesus does in the story?

Just like in the story many people in our country are hungry and can't always afford food to eat. There are ways we can help people – like the disciples in the story we can share food. What ways can we help people? (You can talk about food banks or things going on locally or you can use the case studies from Church Urban Fund in the sermon notes).