

World Food Day 2006: Worship Resources



Talking about hunger is never easy - many people would prefer to focus on other things. Often those who draw attention to poverty do so in a way that demeans the people affected or suggests that poverty can be solved simply by donating funds for one child. Instead these resources focus on food as the means to sustain life for every person. Food is a necessity of life and World Food Day is an opportunity to renew our commitment to end hunger and invest in the lives of people.

In recent years Christian World Service has focused on the right of all people to adequate, appropriate and safe food. World Food Day as declared by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is October 16th, the day of its founding. It is immediately followed on the 17th by the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty - the two are closely linked. This year the theme is: "Invest in Agriculture for Food Security" as a means to combat the hunger that affects 845 million people. The FAO reports that seventy percent of the world's hungry live in rural areas where they depend on the food they grow or the payment they receive from employment in the agriculture sector. The FAO believes that investing in agriculture is one of the critical areas where a difference could be made in ending poverty. The amount of foreign aid invested in the critical areas of agriculture and rural development has almost halved in the last 20 years. In the early 1980s over US\$9 billion a year was invested but by the late 1990s it had fallen to US\$ 5 billion a year.

Alongside this marked decline in agricultural investment, small farmers and rural workers have faced an increasingly hostile economic environment. Governments, often under pressure from the IMF and World Bank, have consolidated farms, stopped farm support schemes, privatized collective sales and buying structures and diverted valuable land and water into growing for export rather than local consumption. International trade has forced down prices for commodities, concentrated production, export, processing and sales into the hands of huge conglomerates and opened markets to unfair competition, often with heavily subsidised imports.

Faced with the volatility of global markets and their inability to compete farmers have been pushed off their land. In India over 16,000 farmers take their own lives each year rather than face bankruptcy and the loss of their way of life. The focus on export earnings is often at the expense of families wanting to feed themselves and to produce food for others at a fair price. Also at issue is a desire to maintain a way of life and to have some degree of self-determination over their life as part of a rural community. In response to the growing pressures on farmers, CWS partners are developing extensive programmes to help rural people survive with minimal external inputs, instead relying on organic and traditional mechanisms for crop production. They are working towards the long term security of rural people and within a vision that puts people rather than agribusiness at the centre of a local, environmental sustainable economy.

"Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."

*Jesus in
Mark 10: 21b*

Produced by
Christian World Service
P O Box 22 652,
Christchurch
cws@cws.org.nz
www.cws.org.nz

Call to Worship

God of justice

We come knowing that there is much that is not right in our world

We come feeling the brokenness and suffering of everyday life,

We come forgetting that there are always others who are in greater need.

Help us to see more clearly,
to listen more closely,

To reach beyond what we know

And discover together the new hope that springs only from you.

In Jesus' Name we pray

Amen

Prayer of Approach

Symbol: A bowl of rice

O God the giver of all food

We seek the sustenance found in this bowl of rice, not just for ourselves but for the millions of people who do not have enough to eat.

We hunger after the truth that frees us from the captivities of this world that bind us with bonds of greed and selfishness

We long for freedom from the pain and violence that afflicts our relationships with others, those who we know and those of whom we have never heard.

Heal us

May we find strength in sharing with one another:

In feeding the hungry

In ministering to the sick

In visiting those who are imprisoned

And together we may build a world of justice and freedom where all people have a future filled with hope.

Amen

Children's talk

Use the bowl of rice as a focus of attention. Ask them if they know what it is or when they have last eaten it. Alternatively you might like to blindfold one or two children, and tell them that you are going to feed them with one of the most essential foodstuffs in the world. Then ask them to guess what it is. Talk to them about how important it is in the world, providing 20% of the world's dietary energy supply. Over 2 billion (one third of the world's population) depend on rice for 60-70% of their food intake. Rice is life but not everybody receives as much as they need. You may like to retell the story of the rich young ruler from Mark 10: 17-31 and how when Jesus asked him he was not willing to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor.



Bible readings

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

To read of Job's struggle on World Food Day is fitting. Job's lack of comprehension about what is going on in the world may be similar to our own. He disagrees with his friends who assume that he has done something wrong and has consequently invoked the wrath of God. Job sees himself as blameless and therefore begins questioning the way he has always looked at things. In the ancient world, and even some times today, the tendency is to blame misfortunes on an unacceptable action or thought. Job's view of God is as a sort of benevolent but divine patriarch who is predicable and above all, just. When his life (as tested by the *satan*, who functions rather like a prosecuting lawyer on God's heavenly council) comes under pressure Job starts to see that his understanding of God is too narrow. In 24:1-17 he goes on to describe the desperate situation of the very poor. Through his own suffering Job is enabled to see that others too are suffering and that things aren't right in the world. He begins to broaden his understanding of God, beyond that of his friends, to see God's order and love throughout creation.

Psalms 104: 1-9, 24, 35c

Scholars think that this Psalm is largely taken from Egyptian sources. The psalmist marvels at the wonder of the creation proceeding layer upon layer to extol the wonders of creation. By affirming God's involvement in the whole of creation from the heavens to the waters to all the creatures, the psalmist is honouring God's involvement in creating a generous world available for all who do not sin. (v 35)

Hebrews 5:1-10

The writer of the Hebrews discusses how Jesus fulfills the role of the high priest. The priest was appointed to deal with matters pertaining to God (v.1). The priest is one of the people yet appointed by God (v.4). In responding to God's call, Jesus embraced the suffering of the world, and in doing so offers salvation to the world.

Mark 10:17-31

There are few examples of Jesus engaging with people from the wealthy classes. In Jesus' time the only way of becoming wealthier was by war or by squeezing taxes from the peasant population. It was a limited economy where the family kinship group was all important.

The story begins when the rich man runs up to challenge Jesus. By calling him "Good teacher" (v 17), the man may be showing Jesus some respect and acknowledging his status. Most commentators think that the man was attempting to flatter Jesus, which in such a hierarchical society, also suggests that Jesus is implicitly trying to rise above his peers. Jesus successfully defuses the situation by declaring that only God is good,

but also accepts the challenge posed by the rich man. Interestingly Jesus picks on the last commandments which work to uphold the family and its values. The rich man affirms that he has kept these commandments, but says nothing about the first four which are about honouring God. In doing so he is giving priority to the family over God which in his case means ensuring that the wealth and family name are kept intact. In response Jesus is saying that he may not have killed anyone or stolen from them but he has upheld a system that helps create poverty. Jesus restates the commandments, "Go, sell, what you own, and give to the poor... follow me." Jesus sees the Biblical tradition as one with justice at its core. For the rich man to follow Jesus he would need to change his way of life, leave his family and let go of his place in the society.

In Mark's version (the story can also be found in Matthew 19:16-30 and Luke 18:18-30) Jesus "loves" him (v21) showing that the encounter is not marked by vengefulness or animosity. The disciples would have expected Jesus to show deference to someone of such wealth and privilege but instead he uses it to show how radical his message was, in that it turned not only the family but also the current economy with its implicit values on its head. The image of a camel (the largest animal in the Middle East) going through the smallest opening (a needle) is an example of Jesus' eloquence in debate that reinforces the reversal of social status for which he was advocating.

Take Action

As part of your service you may like to consider an "Offering of Letters". CWS has postcards available, entitled Take Action Against Poverty, asking the New Zealand government to increase its aid spending and to end the harmful condition on IMF and World Bank loans. Multiple copies are available or you may like to write your own. The NZ government has promised to meet the target of 0.7% of Gross National Income on aid but falls woefully short, with just 0.27%.

Intercessory Prayer

Loving God

We pray for the world that you have created. It is a world with food for everyone and with abundant resources if used wisely and shared generously.

We pray for those who work to provide food, especially the millions of small farmers and farm workers who live from what they grow. May they have good harvests and the means to continue to live in the way that best suits them. We especially pray for those who have been made most vulnerable from disaster and economic policies.

Loving God

May all people find the means of life

We pray for those who have no food, who lack nourishment on a daily basis and who may have been pushed far from their homes. We pray for those who have the power to help: for good governments who care about poor people, for development agencies that they provide appropriate assistance where it is needed and for those individuals, who like the rich young man, can give of their surplus.

Loving God

May all people find the means of life

We pray for ourselves, as people who choose on a daily basis how much we can share. May we find the grace to be as generous in our giving as you have been in loving us.

Loving God

May all people find the means of life

In Jesus name, Amen

Benediction

God of Food

Giver of life and hope

Strengthen us in your work

To care for the creation

To care for each other

And care for ourselves.

In Jesus Name

Amen.

Food facts

852 million people do not have enough to eat.

Rice provides 20% of the world's dietary energy supply

Over 2 billion people in Asia get 60% to 70% of their food intake from rice

80% of the world's rice is grown by small farmers in developing countries

1 billion people are employed in rice production.

In the 1980s and 1990s the World Bank and World Trade Organisation pushed for greater liberalization of rice production and trade, undermining household food security for small farmers and forcing them off their land

Definitions

The FAO states that *food security* exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Food Sovereignty is the democratic right and power of all countries and communities to determine the production, distribution and consumption of food, according to their own preferences and cultural traditions.

Further information:

Food and Agriculture Organisation www.fao.org/

MONLAR <http://www.geocities.com/monlarslk/>

Rice is Life

Christian World Service's partner, MONLAR, the Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform, has been studying why the farmers and rural people with whom it works are getting poorer. One factor which they have identified is the role of the World Bank in their country. They organized a march in the capital to protest against the enforced liberalization policies at the time of the Annual World Bank and International Monetary Fund meetings in September. More than 2,000 people from over 70 community groups, including farmers, fishermen, plantation workers, industrial workers, academics and members of the clergy participated, wearing headbands with the slogan "No More World Bank". One rice farmer, Chandra Wimalasiri, aged 50 travelled for six hours by bus to participate. "The World Bank and IMF have destroyed our traditional ways of farming and because of the privatisation policies farmers have to take loans to buy pesticides and fertilizers. Some farmers get into debt and some have even committed suicide because of this," she said at the time.

MONLAR presented a letter to World Bank officials detailing how its policies promoting privatization and an inappropriate model of economic growth are harming poor people. Instead of investing in people's lives and their livelihoods (including the paddy sector), they have withdrawn existing funding that supported the country's capacity to feed itself. In the letter they called for the withdrawal of the World Bank from their country because it has increased poverty and has proven that it cannot change. Rather than fighting the World Bank they want room to implement their own plans for the eradication of poverty. They prepared the following information:

Destroying a Way of Life

In Sri Lanka rice is life. Two million metric tonnes is consumed every year. Rice is eaten every day. Most families consume more than 40kg every month. Two million metric tonnes is produced every year. Rice is grown in small plots covering one sixth of the total land area.

About 40% of the total population depends on rice farming for their livelihoods. Rice is also culture. The history of rice consumption and rice farming goes back thousands of years. Rice is a symbol of prosperity. Key moments in life from the day a child eats its first solid food, through coming of age, marriage, laying the foundation stone of a new house and many more occasions are marked by ceremonies with rice at their heart. The World Bank believes that rice should not be grown in Sri Lanka. It wants resources, particularly land and water, shifted to other uses, like growing gherkins for export. It has been using its power to destroy a means of living and a way of life.

Policy and prescriptions

The importance of rice has always been recognised in policy in Sri Lanka. In recent times, major efforts have been made to build irrigation schemes that open up new areas for rice cultivation, to ensure that all people would have enough to eat and to provide more livelihoods. Thousands of families have been given land to cultivate. They have been supported through research to develop seeds and farming methods, through provision of credit, and through training. After the introduction of chemicals during the green revolution, when prices of fertilisers went up, they were supported with subsidies. Throughout, there has been a system of buying, processing and selling rice run by the state to ensure a decent livelihood for the farmer and a reasonable price for the consumer.

The World Bank has set about dismantling these mechanisms using the standard set of reforms that it tries to impose on all countries and in all sectors: liberalisation, privatisation and commercialisation. It has been supported by the Asian Development Bank. Through conditions on loans, through projects and through advice to governments, they have insisted on the closing down of the state marketing board for rice. They have required the selling of state seed farms, rice mills, stores and distribution networks. They have also demanded the elimination of subsidies.

The World Bank has also been trying to get governments to introduce fees for water that has always been considered a public good and to withdraw restrictions on the sale of land that were introduced to ensure people did not lose the one resource that could sustain them. These efforts have been the subject of popular protest for years, but they continue unabated.

Rice is now synonymous with crisis in Sri Lanka. Farmers regularly spend more in production than they earn selling their rice in the market. They are caught in the grip of monopolistic traders. Many have fallen into debt and some have even committed suicide.

"My husband killed himself in March. When he died, the rice had still not been harvested. In those days, my husband seemed to be in deep thought. He had taken a cultivation loan from the bank for Rs. 30,000 (about £150). He constantly talked about how he would never be able to repay this loan. He said the bank was sending him persistent reminders about repayment. I think my husband killed himself because he was afraid he could not repay his cultivation loan. After his death, we paid the bank Rs. 40,000 (about £200). But the gentleman at the bank said Rs. 40,000 would only cover the interest on the loan. We still have to repay the capital."

MG Yasomenika, Sri Lanka

MONLAR, a long term partner of CWS, is calling on the World Bank to stop pushing these policies and start listening to farmers and other people of Sri Lanka.