

Tomorrow, on Memorial Day, we remember those who have died in service to our country. They gave the ultimate gift, their lives, for the betterment of others. Perhaps they gave voluntarily. Perhaps they were forced by being drafted and ordered into action. Whatever the case, the sacrifice was the same.

I'm told the favorite Bible verse of soldiers is John 15:13, "No man has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends." Many servicemen scratch John 15:13 on the back of their dog tags as a reminder. It is of course a quote from Jesus, who was referring to his own death on the cross.

As people living today we have to remember that the benefits we enjoy have come at the expense of others. I laugh every time someone says that somebody is a "Self-made man." Hardly! Yes, this guy certainly worked hard. And he is to be credited for that. However, he only had the opportunities he had at the sacrifice of others. If it hadn't been for other people fighting for freedom, justice, fairness and equality he

wouldn't have been able to do what he did. Ultimately we know that the freedom from the tyranny of sin we enjoy as Christians has come at the price of Jesus.

It follows that because we benefit from the sacrifice of others we too should be willing to give of ourselves too. And that gets at one of the great truths about life on this planet. Ultimately doing what is good and right brings about great rewards. Maybe or maybe not for the person doing the good, but certainly for others. If we don't believe this then our lives as Christians is a real sham.

The Bread for the World organization that we focus on today seeks to work for the ultimate good and right. Bread for the World is a Christian organization that is the cooperative effort of many major church denominations. Our own ELCA is a part. Our hunger ministries work in cooperation with Bread for the World. Bread for the World is not a direct aid organization. They do not give out food to starving people. Bread for the world is also not primarily interested in getting your money for their work. That's unusual for any charity in this day and age.

Bread for the World works for legislation that will end the root causes of starvation in the world.

I don't know how many times I heard from my parents at the dinner table, "Eat your food. There are starving children all over the world who would love to have it." What a guilt trip! True, there are starving children all over the world, but if I ate less it didn't mean someone else would have more.

Bread for the World recognizes one important truth: There is plenty of food in this world to feed everybody. The root causes of hunger aren't a lack of food. They are: war, economic manipulation, and political corruption.

Bread for the World lobbies the US government and major corporations to develop strategies to alleviate hunger at its roots. We are a powerful country. Our domestic and international policies have a tremendous impact on what goes on in our world. Bread for the World seeks to channel that power for good. But that is easier said than done.

Greed for power and money has been around forever, and it seems to not go away. In our gospel reading we have the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. In it a lowly widow eventually gets justice from a corrupt and godless man. How does she do it? Is she clever? No. Does she blackmail him? No. Does she find some powerful political ally to help take him down? No. She does it with dogged persistence. Eventually justice is done. While Bread for the World doesn't seek to be a political nag, it knows that constant pressure is needed.

You've all heard the saying, "If you want to feed a man for a day give him a fish. If you want to feed him for a lifetime teach him how to fish." It's a good saying. But let's say you need food and I decide to teach you how to fish. I bring all my fishing gear and teach you. Now you can fish and get food on your own. There's only one catch. I'm a manufacturer of fishing gear and now the only way you know how to get food is to buy my fishing gear.

That doesn't have to be a bad thing but I've opened the door for exploitation wide open. I understand things like that have happened and are happening right now in Afghanistan.

Several years ago a multinational force invaded the country. In order to provide stability that multinational force also went about rebuilding the Afghani infrastructure. Companies like Cargill and ADM saw the opportunity to both help with these efforts and do some manipulation. Organizations like Bread for the World noticed that while these companies appeared to be helping, they were really just digging for profits. The agriculture practices they were teaching would require Afghani farmers to continue to buy seed, fertilizer, pesticides, and a whole host of equipment from those same companies.

The prospective of Bread for the World says, 'Look, we're fine with you exploring new markets for your products. But are you really helping when you've made someone dependent on you? Ultimately they're just going to rebel. Wouldn't it be better to help the Afghani people farm the way they already know how - just with more knowledge and a little bit of start-up support? Why should they need to continuously buy genetically modified imported seeds when their own native ones have been working for centuries? How about if we help them develop their own self-sustainable agricultural practices?'

Bread for the World asks you to do two things. First, pray about hunger. The parable of the widow and the unjust judge isn't ultimately about justice after all, it is about prayer. It is about nagging God to get something done. When you pray to God about hunger several things happen. First and foremost you've invoked the supreme power in the universe to take on your cause. That's a pretty big deal!

You've also opened yourself to hearing God's word to you. When you pray about hunger you think about hunger. When you sit down at a meal you think about it and are more thankful for it - even if it's Brussel sprouts and you're a kid who doesn't like them. You're more in tune with the food you buy and what it took to get it to you. You'll find yourself supporting companies whose practices are more ethical than others.

And having the hunger of others be on your mind more often also guides you to act. Bread for the World does not ask you to attend a rally or march or demonstration. They do ask you to write your congressional leaders. It is still said that the most effective way to influence legislation is to write a letter and send it by 'snail mail'. They get far more attention than

emails because most congressional leaders don't have enough staff to read all the emails they receive. They figure if you write a letter you're serious about it.

We have many blessings in our lives. Many of them have come about from our own good decisions and ethical living. Many of them have also come because of the sacrifices of others. Let us honor their sacrifices by appreciating what we do have, being willing to make sacrifices of our own, and doing as the prophet Micah says, "Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God." This brings about a blessing for ourselves and makes us a blessing for others. Amen