

## FROM THE MINISTER

---

Our daughter was in tears in the floor of Freeman Hall, sobbing as I held her. It became a powerful learning experience for me.

The occasion was the recent “Hunger Banquet” sponsored by our Children and Youth Religious Education program and made possible by the youth and their mentors in our Coming of Age program. After paying for the meal, each of us selected a slip of paper on which was written a brief narrative describing our identity for the evening. Both Annie and I drew narratives that relegated us into the impoverished group, representing the significant percentage of the world that experiences food insecurity, housing challenges, deep threats to the fulfillment of their most basic needs.

Nearby was a table of the “wealthy,” just a few participants who’d drawn the fortunate narratives that allowed them to sit at a table, be waited on, have their choice of beverage, enjoy a full meal while being serenaded by musicians.

There was another table of those who were barely getting by. They had jobs, housing of some kind, but were very vulnerable, one lost job, one health challenge, one mishap away from joining those of us in the impoverished camp.

The context was set, a few narratives were read, some jarring statistic offered then the impending meal was described. Again, those deemed “rich” were informed that they would get a full meal with choices. The middle group was told that they would get basic bean burritos, a decent enough repast. Those of us on the floor were told that our entire meal for the evening would consist of a bit of rice and a cup of water.

With that, the tears came. To a five-year-old this seemed completely unfair, cruel even. She had to hear what others were getting, had to watch as they got their food, then had to join the long line of us waiting for a little bowl of rice. She sobbed, clearly deeply bothered by being put in a situation of abject inequality.

After she regained her composure, we ate our rice sitting on the floor in Freeman Hall alongside many others who were deemed poor. We heard some of the other narratives read; got to reflect on our own experiences of poverty. And then, we joined hands to conclude, singing a song of hope that deep in our hearts we would one day overcome this reality.

I’d done this sort of thing before. I’ve read all of the statistics. I’ve seen abject poverty, witnessed it face-to-face. I’ve preached on hunger, given to organizations that fight hunger. The information, the reality wasn’t new to me at all.

What was new was holding a sobbing daughter, so distressed, so confused about what was going on. I had a whole different experience. What if this wasn’t just an educational exercise? What if I actually had to face a daughter who was hungry and who couldn’t understand why she couldn’t have what she saw others getting? What if despite my best efforts I couldn’t find a way to provide adequately for her?

**“My heart broke a little on that recent evening in Freeman Hall. I got just a tiny little glimpse into what life is like for so many in the world, in our country, in our own city. It was a powerful experience.”**

My heart broke a little on that recent evening in Freeman Hall. I got just a tiny little glimpse into what life is like for so many in the world, in our country, in our own city. It was a powerful experience.

I’m grateful to my colleague Kathleen Carpenter for her leadership of a substantive, expansive program for our children and youth, and, on occasion, their parents as well. I’m grateful for all of you who make this program possible and for the amazing and profound difference you make to our kids. I’m grateful to all of the families here who understand how important participation in our CYRE program is and how what we offer here will change their kids’ lives and their family’s life forever.

I’m newly appreciative to be blessed with way more than enough. In a season so tainted by raging and outrageous consumerism, I’m grateful to be offered a strong, powerful message by my congregation, one that counters the cultural expectation of more and more and more. I’m grateful for all of those in our congregation and beyond who are committed—with your time and your energy and your finances—to help create a more just and equitable world.

I hope this season offers you occasions to pause and be grateful. I hope its many and varied messages of peace and goodwill help you continue to believe that we are co-creators of a world that is becoming a more just and equitable place. I hope, in the depth of winter’s darkness, you see some rays of hope, some star, perhaps, pointing the way.

Peace, Jay