

“How the Good Grows”
October 5, 2025

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1
Galatians 6:1-10

I watched this past week as they harvested the soybeans just down the street from my home—a reminder, if we need it, that while this is *Iowa City*, it is still *Iowa*. For all of us, the planting, growing, and reaping are always nearby.

The words of Paul that we heard this morning seem to rise up from the fields and float down to us on this corner of this city: “Let us not grow weary in doing what right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.”

The summer has ended. The harvest-time arrives.

Secretary of Agriculture, Brooke Rollins, recently announced: “It’s biblical—we’ve got to produce our own food. The president has talked significantly about the importance of onshoring our manufacturing,” she said, adding: “We also have to onshore our food. We have...begun to import more than we export, whether it’s citrus or berries or even meat.”

Now, I’m somewhat familiar with the Bible. And I don’t quite understand what is “biblical” about a nation producing its own food. Ancient Israel was part of a vast international trading network. We are told that the capable woman of substance described in chapter 31 of Proverbs “brings her food from far away.”

We all do that.

Do you remember Martin Luther King, Jr.’s summary of your morning routine?

He asked: “Did you ever stop to think that you can’t leave for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world? You get up in the morning and go to the bathroom and reach over for the sponge, and that’s handed to you by a Pacific Islander. You reach for a bar of soap, and that’s given to you at the hands of a Frenchman. And then you go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning, and that’s poured into your cup by a South American. And maybe you want tea: that’s poured into your cup by [someone from China]. Or maybe you’re desirous of having cocoa for breakfast, and that’s poured into your cup by a West African. And then you reach over for your toast, and that’s given to you at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. And before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you’ve depended on more than half of the world.

King didn’t mention the countless undocumented workers who harvest our crops and pack our meat, but they, too, are part of what King called “an inescapable network of mutuality.”

There are some who don’t want to see or acknowledge our American dependence on more than half of the world. When we eat and drink, we see our connections with those who prepared the food, those who processed the food, those who harvested the food, those who grew the food, and the earth that produced the food.

The connections are there—and they are broken.

Rabbi Michael Lerner described the damage we have done to King's "inescapable network of mutuality" saying:

We've learned to close our ears when told that one out of every three people on this planet does not have enough food, and that one billion are literally starving. We may reassure ourselves that the hoarding of the world's resources by the richest society in world history, and our frantic attempts to accelerate globalization with its attendant inequalities of wealth, has nothing to do with...us. We may tell ourselves that the suffering of refugees and the oppressed have nothing to do with us... But we live in one world, increasingly interconnected with everyone, and the forces that lead people to feel outrage, anger, and desperation eventually impact on our own daily lives.

God cries out to us. God calls to us in our separation from one another through the words of Jeremiah: "For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me."

This morning, we hear the anguish of the prophet. We hear the anguish of God who calls us into life on behalf of the suffering world. We remember that our actions toward the least of our neighbors are our actions toward God.

All of this brings us to World Communion Sunday.

Liberal Protestants developed World Communion Sunday in the 1930's and '40's—during a time of economic inequality and uncertainty, during a time when the whole world sensed a gathering cloud of tension between nations and peoples, during a time when entire groups of people were dehumanized.

This day developed in a time much like our own. It continues to inform our lives in these days. This day shows us what we share with other Christians, with other people of faith, and really, with all people.

Today we hear Jeremiah speak to us with a disturbing directness: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

We speak theologically and say that we live in a fallen world—that we are alienated from God, from one another, even from the best in ourselves. In this fallen world, summers come and summers go and we are not saved, that is, we do not know the wholeness, the fullness of life that we seek. We continue to see the brokenness of our world.

It is hard to say who is speaking in the lesson from Jeremiah that we heard this morning. It could be the prophet. It could be the people of besieged Jerusalem. It could be God. But we hear words of despair: "The cry of my poor people is far and wide in the land: 'Is the Lord not in Jerusalem?'"

Where is God in the suffering that is so real?

Listen as Paul encourages us: "Let us work for the good of the members of the household of faith." Understand that this "household" is greater than our small, much-loved congregation. The word "ecumenical" finds its root in the Greek word for household—*oikos*. From its start in the twentieth century, the ecumenical movement has sought to establish bonds of compassion and mutual concern across and beyond national borders. Borders are important—and we are called to care for the worldwide household of faith.

This table, then, is where the seeds of goodness are sown and cultivated. This is where we begin the work of bringing healing, in every sense of the word, into the world. It is a spiritual healing. It is the restoration of right relationships between people. It is the healing of broken cities, the mending of nations. This table is where we return to be nurtured in that work, work that we are incapable of doing on our own strength alone.

We come to the table together. Each time, we find wheat ground down and made into bread; grapes crushed into wine. Signs of suffering. Signs that in Christ, God has joined all of us in our sorrow and suffering and still promises to be faithful.

We come to the table, not because everything is all right, but because we hurt, because we know others suffer, because the summer is over and still, we are not whole, the summer is over and still, the world suffers. We come because at this table the anguish of God meets our human suffering.

Because it reminds us of our deep, spiritual connection with people near and far, World Communion Sunday is far more important than we thought. This morning our adult education class continued its conversation about the book *Tyranny: 20 Lessons from the 20th Century*. Lesson 16? “Learn from peers in other countries. Keep up your friendships abroad, or make new friends in other countries.”

This is how the good grows: As we work for the good of the household of faith, the ripples expand outward. Paul’s full words are, “As opportunity offers, let us work for the *good of all humanity*, especially members of the household of faith.” While we seek to love one another in this congregation, while we continue to work with and pray for others around the world who gather around tables like this one today, we know that our real concern and our real calling is not so sectarian and limited. As far as we are able, we work for the good of all, so that good will grow and we will reap a harvest of life.

Food and drink, meal and table tell a particular story of the way in which God is bringing about a new creation through death and resurrection. And when we tell this story in this way, we are called back into relationship with all people who gather to eat at all tables and with all living things that are fed by the care of God.

This meal—in which bread is broken and wine is poured, in which we remember God’s mighty acts in Jesus—this meal nurtures our faith and our life together. It prepares us for the work that is still ours to do in these days of unraveling—weaving a new fabric of justice and well-being and compassion:

Feeding and advocating for the hungry as our government cuts funds.

Welcoming and advocating for refugees as our government seeks to further restrict entrance into what has long been a land of opportunity for so many.

Strengthening our own community of forgiveness and grace as revenge becomes the preferred way of life for many.

In these and countless other ways, the good grows as we seek to be a part of the realm of heaven that God is creating among all people.

The table is where we begin. The table is where we return to be nurtured as we work for the good of all. In our work, work that we are incapable of doing on our own strength.

In mercy, at this table, God does much more than help us to feel good again and get on with our lives as they always have been. God comforts us—that is, God gives us strength in adversity—so that we in turn might bring strength and consolation to others as God’s people in this weary world.

The harvest is coming.

Let us not grow weary in doing good.

From this place, from all that we have received, let the good grow.