

Works of Mercy: Feed the Hungry

Every Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter morning, Robert's parents would load their three sons into the family car and head to a soup kitchen that was open on holidays. Robert and his brothers would help out by putting napkins and flatware on the tables, then a hot meal would be served and gifts distributed to the patrons. Robert's dad sometimes dressed up as Santa Claus.

On the first day back from Christmas break one year during middle school, Robert's teacher asked the class what they had done over the holidays. "We served a meal at the soup kitchen in the morning, and then we came home and celebrated," Robert told his class. An awkward silence followed. Robert could tell that kids around the room were staring at him.

"That was the first time it occurred to me that this was not the way most of my friends spent their Christmases," Robert remembers. "One of my favorite parts about serving was that it wasn't a big deal. My parents really did a good job of integrating it into our holiday traditions. It was just something we did."

"Jesus summoned his disciples and said, 'My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way.'" (Matthew 15:32)

In six different stories across all four Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke and John), Jesus feeds huge crowds from only a few fish and loaves of bread. Jesus notices the hungry in his midst and does something about it.

As in Jesus' own time, we know that too many people go hungry

today in a world that produces more than enough food for everyone. The United Nations estimates that 795 million people in the world don't have enough good food to eat – that's about one out of every nine individuals. At the same time, up to 40 percent of the world's food is wasted each year! This is obviously not how God wants the world to be.

When we reflect on things such as hunger in the world, we have two choices: We can do nothing, or we can do something. Robert's family certainly did something – they wove Christ's care for the hungry into their own family celebrations, even when it was inconvenient or seemed weird to Robert's friends. We might not be able to perform miracles as Jesus did, but we can strive to emulate his compassionate action.

Feeding the Hungry Together

- Teach your kids to cook and talk about the importance of food in our lives.
- Make a pot of soup and deliver it to a neighbor who has been sick or a young family with a new baby.
- Volunteer at a local soup kitchen together.
- Carry a bag of bagels in your car. If you encounter a homeless person asking for money, give them a bagel and help them find a local shelter.