



## **Sermons** **from Northwood United Church**

**“Charity, Community and Justice”**  
**Exodus 16, selected verses, Matthew 25:31-40**  
**Will Sparks                      October 14, 2012**

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

Patrick came in out of the rain on Friday. First time I had ever met him. Out of work and out of money, he had let a friend stay over for a few days and there was no food left. Adriane, trying to get off drugs and still not able to pull together a working life just has a hard time making it on income assistance. Marcel lives with a mental illness which makes it difficult to maintain a working life, and comes in perhaps more regularly than the food cupboard can sustain but he is here and we are part of his life.

It is a nearly daily experience here at Northwood that people come in off the street looking for food, and I am so grateful to the community for so faithfully stocking the cupboard so that we have something to give to people. And most recently someone from the wider community has decided that Starbucks ought not to just throw away their food at the end of the day but ought to put it in a freezer, and she will gather it up and bring it here. A great little redistribution system of overpriced fancy goodies.

From its very beginning the church has been involved in food distribution. Rooted in what I call the manna ethic, that everyone will have what they need and nothing will be accumulated, and rooted in the belief that anyone who comes through our door ought to be treated as if they are the Christ: “Whenever you do this for the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do it for me.” We are involved in food distribution. We feed people. It is who we are.

However, how often have you been approached by someone on the street and asked for help, a few coins for a cup of coffee. This too is food distribution. And how does that feel? If you are like me you are flooded with questions: what has led this person into this kind of need, this kind of life? Where do they live? Will the coin actually go for food or something less sustaining? And there is something deeply unsatisfying about handing a coin to a person when you know that at best it will offer momentary relief from chronic pain- a band aid.

Ours is a complicated call. We are called to offer sustenance to those who need it, and at the same time we are called to work for a world in which everyone has what they need. It is a complicated call because when you feed someone you are adding a thread to the fabric of our society in which there are an increasingly rich few and an increasingly poor many. Feeding the hungry is a deeply personal act but it has political implications. It is about charity, and justice. It is about compassion, and it is political.

I find myself constantly of two minds about food banks for example. I believe they are necessary and I am so grateful for them because they provide real help for people in real need. And I don't believe in them at all because in this day and age, when there is enough for everyone, the fact that there are people in chronic need of food for their children is a damning indictment of our social safety net and our economic system. As long as there are food banks, those of us who have can feel good about helping those who do not, and we don't have to change our system to make food banks obsolete.

So here we are feeding people, engaged in a complicated mix of charity, community, compassion and justice. I have asked Christine Wolff and Rod Carter, both of whom are part of our food ministry to think about these things a little and to tell us something about what they do

in food ministry, and then we will take a minute to think about it in terms of charity, compassion and justice.

*We hear from Christine Wolff and Rod Carter.*

There is the small work in the midst of the great work. The small but profound work of compassionately offering relief to someone in need, offering bread for life, in the context of everyone bearing the image of the divine. But it is in the context of a great work for a world where everyone is treated with justice, not just compassion, where charity is no longer needed because justice flows down like water, and everyone has a place at the table.