



Why are there beans in the church garden?

By Jane Döbler

[Frankfurt, Germany, June 2013]. Anyone who has recently visited the garden to the left side of the church may well have asked this question. The answer is quite simple – because the senior youth group planted them!

Over the past year, we have talked occasionally about *The 5 Marks of Mission* of the Anglican Communion, and in particular, about the 5th Mark: *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth*. Being a honeybee keeper, this topic is particularly close to my heart.

In a book, which I have recently read, called “Sacred Acts: How churches are working to protect Earth’s climate”, twelve authors write on twelve aspects of this topic, ranging from food, energy, economy, advocacy, immigration and even green burials! It is a great, if somewhat disturbing book.

The chapter on food got me thinking! This usually leads to “one of Jane’s wackier ideas”, which is how I introduced the topic to the youth.

“Hey there! All who are thirsty, come to the water! Are you penniless? Come anyway—buy and eat! Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk. Buy without money—everything’s free! Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy? Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best; fill yourself with only the finest.

Isaiah 55:1-2 (The Message)

“The prophet Isaiah, taking on the role of a street vendor, calls from his stall, giving away the good, nutritious abundance of God in the midst of a Babylonian market selling the junk food of empire. He is inviting God’s people to a free feast, a filling, tasty and healthful meal that won’t leave them hungry. And yet many walk by, unwilling to accept the abundance offered, preferring to pay for junk food instead of accepting the delicious food and drink prepared by a loving God.

In our own age, we find ourselves in a not-too-different predicament. All around us are the offerings of a global food system that increasingly dominates and homogenizes our food choices – under the illusion of more choice. This food system is built upon the same extractive economy that is fueling the rapid and troubling changes in our climate.”

Ragan Sutterfield, author of this chapter on Food, Faith and a Catechesis of Taste, opens the discussion with these paragraphs above. What follows is not an attack on McDonald’s, but a critical look at the global food system, the distortion of the art of husbandry (care of animals in or close to the home) towards “animal sciences” providing “protein solutions” (which the rest of us call meat), use/abuse of fertilizers, carbon- intensive farming, and other scary topics. This all leads to the questions: “How are we to live in abundance and eat the free food

and drink the free drink of God? How are we to move beyond the junk food of the empire? How are we to tell the difference?”

Sutterfield suggest some steps towards solutions. Firstly, by learning to taste! Education is needed to help generations of people appreciate good cheese or beer or wine or even vegetables.

Secondly, by humility. By living fully in touch with the earth (humus) and in the full reality of our humanity, we need to dig into the humus, appreciate the miracles of the tiny seed that grows to become a tomato and the tiny, perfect leaves that shoot from a bean.

Thirdly, by learning to eat together. We need to change our role from passive consumers of food to co- producers. Even if we do not have a garden, we can buy fresh ingredients and learn to cook, mold, knead, and chop. And lastly, to prepare for the Supper of the Lamb. “As we learn to eat together in community, to become co-producers of food, as we gain the humility of working with the soil, we are changing ourselves so that we will be ready to enjoy that final meal that will be set before us.”

In all of this, churches can play a leading role. Sutterfield reports on numerous projects, headed by parishes, for community gardens, or soup kitchens serving locally grown produce, or cookery courses held in the parish kitchen, or field trips to organic farms. The opportunities are many.

The paragraph that sent me running for seeds and poles is this: “What if churches followed the movement that has started in many suburban neighborhoods, and which one book has make into a slogan: “Food not lawns”? That doesn’t mean churches should simply tear up grass and turn it into rows of corn. Instead, the church’s landscaping could be transformed into a place filled with perennial vegetables and beautiful flowers through permaculture gardeningImagine a beautiful garden, filled with food-bearing plants that would require less watering, no mowing, and simple maintenance that could involve all ages – and would serve as a place for both harvest and prayer.”

As I prepared some teaching material for our SYG session, I found myself reflecting on the posters from the WWII years “Dig for Victory”. During those years of scarcity and rationing, people were encouraged to dig up all available green spaces and plant vegetables. So, in that spirit, in our world of excessive abundance where climate change is a scary reality, the youth and I picked up our forks and trowels and “Dug for Victory” for the Planet and all of God’s Creation.

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