

DAILY BREAD

“Grain of Hope : Slice of Heaven”

FAMINE

In Time of Famine

A woman's skeleton with lower spine
Deformed, toes buckled. Bones long fleshless, dead
Cry out a life spent crushing seed with stones.
Lord, give us today our daily bread.

A man weeps as his field turns to a bog;
Elsewhere, a burning sky that cannot shed
The longed-for rain; black mildew, locusts, blight;
We dare to dream of a world where all are fed.

Human greed: food snatched out of the hands
Of those who work the land. A countryside bled
Of insects, flowers. Prices set by the few.
Lord, give to each of us our daily bread.

And now Covid: warnings of a famine
'Of Biblical proportions'; now the dread
Of hunger spreading virus-like, unchecked:
And yet we speak of a world where all are fed.

Always the imploring hands reach through our screens;
But recently, for no good cause, we sped
In panic, emptied supermarket shelves;
Forgive us, Lord, who hoard our neighbour's bread.

Once a possession-less man spoke to the poor,
Invited outcasts to a table spread
in a conquered land, to God's abundant feast:
He dared to dream of a world where all are fed;

Giving his body to be shared by all;
Our grasping greed flouts all he did and said:
We must do more than dream of a whole world fed:
Shame us, O Lord, to share our daily bread.

Diane Pacitti, 2020

Around the world, hunger remains 'deeply entrenched and rising' says UN Secretary-General, António Guterres.

According to the annual UN report State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, tens of millions of people have become chronically undernourished in the past five years due to conflict and climate change. Sustainable Development Goal 2 (eradicating world hunger, food insecurity, and all forms of malnutrition by 2030) looks increasingly out of reach. The International Fund for Agricultural Development calls the coronavirus pandemic a 'wake-up call':

'We cannot continue thinking of agriculture, the environment, health, poverty, and hunger in isolation. . . World problems are interconnected, and the solutions are intertwined.'

'The problem is not production. Persistent and chronic hunger is the result of poverty, inequality, conflict, poor governance, and marginalisation of the most vulnerable.' *

The problem is not production – yet. The UK wheat harvest is likely to be down by about one third this year, the worst result since the 1980s. Cast your mind back across this year's weather: the wettest February on record (including named storms Ciara, Dennis and Jorge) made sowing difficult and germination poor. This was followed by the sunniest Spring since 1929 so young wheat crops suffered from drought. Growing conditions were good across much of the summer but ended with the record-breaking mid-August heatwave – the longest period of daily temperatures over 34°C since comparable records began – and catastrophic thunderstorms at harvest time. While the UK generally produces about 80% of its own wheat, this year we are likely to be net importers. This year there will probably be enough worldwide for those who can pay to import. Other countries are not so lucky. Erratic weather has triggered locust plagues of 'Biblical proportions' in dozens of countries including Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Somalia, Eritrea, India, Pakistan, Iran, Yemen, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Agriculture continues to be devastated and whole regions propelled into starvation. The UK imports food from every one of these countries (and 180 others).

Whose Daily Bread are we talking about?

* themes from a Church Times article of 17th July, written by our own Maddy Fry

Photo above.

The American 'dust bowl' was a period of severe dust storms and heatwaves that produced the worst drought in North America in a thousand years, destroying midwest crops. From 1933 to 1939, wheat yields declined by double-digit percentages, with vast economic and societal consequences, eroding land value throughout the Great Plains states and displacing millions of people.



St James's Church
197 Piccadilly
London
W1J 9LL

