



The entire material universe speaks  
of God's love  
His boundless affection for us.  
Soil, water, mountains:  
Everything is, as it were,  
A caress of God.  
- Pope Francis

Word has it that down on the farm where I grew up, harvest season is well underway, except some pauses due to ill-timed precipitation. The farm has been in the family for several generations now, and I can still remember hearing the story that as my grandfather gradually handed over the reins to my father, the very last thing he would dare give up was the combine. After all, there was so much riding on that intricate process of lifting crops from the ground. Now, as the years have gone by, the unbelievable sophistication of technology has carried over to the agricultural realm as well, where GPS coordinates, among other things, can be used in combines to ensure staying on specific paths and maximizing the output from the fields.

Safe to say, the times have drastically changed down on the farm from those of the prophet Amos, who we heard this morning rail on the people for not taking care of the poor, including “tak[ing] from them levies of grain.” It’s not that simple today. For my father, who plants and harvests corn and soybeans, many days and nights, this time of year, will be spent overseeing the fruit of the soil going through a combine into a huge wagon and then taken off to some random grain bin or into town, where it will be transported to God knows where after that. It’s not quite as simple as people going directly to a farm or a garden and getting their needed food.

However, our wider church of the ELCA has an absolutely wonderful program through ELCA World Hunger called Good Gifts, in which an individual or a congregation as a whole can donate pigs or goats, even a fruit-tree seedling, a community vegetable garden and more. And to raise awareness of this ministry that impacts children of God in nearly 80 countries all over the world, ELCA World Hunger instituted a Global Farm Challenge a few years ago. So, there was this youth group out of Zion Lutheran Church in Greensburg, Pennsylvania (about 30 miles southeast of Pittsburgh), who wanted to join in. But it wasn’t just about doing all these random fundraisers that youth groups have such a consistently cute way of reeling in support from the adults; it was also about learning how a single animal can serve so many purposes on a farm.

Soon enough, that youth group in Pennsylvania helped in providing five goats to a Ugandan farmer, named Nsamba Fred. The story so goes about Fred, that he was a father to six children.

*Like many fathers, [he] want[ed] his children to learn and be healthy. But after his wife died in 2017, he lacked the resources to support their education. With no income source, Fred and his six children ate [only] one meal per day.*

*Then his family...received [the] five goats that changed their lives. [ELCA World Hunger not only made sure the goats were provided, but connected with a local rural organization to teach] Fred innovative techniques to grow plants for food, how to maintain a kitchen garden and how to care for his goats.*

*Now he and his children grow their own vegetables for food. When the goats began to multiply, Fred sold them, helping his family meet their needs while sharing resources with his [small farming] community. [Because of] the Global Farm Challenge [and a youth group from Pennsylvania], Fred’s family has food security—and his [children] are back in school.*

I have a feeling such a story would not only warm the hearts of the prophet Amos, but of farmers, who want to do their part in feeding their family and people all over the world. But, safe to say, it isn't just up to them to ensure the gifts of Creation get to where they are needed. The harvest does not stop with a combine and a wagon and a grain bin. It continues with us. It's magnified by God, who insists on cultivating our hearts in raising our awareness not just of the magnificent eye-catching beauty of the earth that surrounds us each day; but to realize the tremendous impact the Creation has on caring for us, for entire communities, and people far, far away from us: people who are just as adored by God as anyone else.

The prophet Amos didn't just want the levies of grain to get to the poor so that they would be fed. He wanted to shape a community with love and compassion and basic human respect, as if all children of God should never go to bed hungry, that they should never feel alone, either. It just so happens that's what Jesus came for, too: to shape an entire world with love and compassion and a basic understanding that no one should not only not go to bed hungry, but that no child of God is meant to go through this life alone; to cultivate a new outlook on our life: that we are worth dying for, we are worth coming back to life, we are worth being fed not only with tangible sustenance, but with an even more sustaining grace to carry us throughout this life and into all eternity. For that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

Source: Hindrey, Rachel. "Global Farm Challenge Connects Youth and Farmers." *Living Lutheran* (July 17, 2019)