

ON THE TABLE
[written in oral form]

Ezekiel 34:17-31; James 3:18
Peace Sunday: Food justice and sustainability

November 10, 2019
Gordon Allaby

The Ezekiel passage presents people being wasteful and destructive to the environment--God's creation.

We do not know if the carelessness is by accident, from ignorance or from selfish disregard. It matters little in the end.

The consequences are devastating.

God does reprimand the affluent and greedy who's actions are causing a terrible imbalance; therefore hurting everything and everyone less powerful.

They took from the land, and destroyed it for others.

They drank from clear water, and polluted it for everyone else.

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God declares that God will judge the rich and powerful because they have stolen from others and used their power to abuse the weak, making them weaker.

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The rest of the text presents God's way of Justice and Peace.

God is for balance, for all receiving what they need, for justice to the exploited and abused, and for wholeness in the system - peace.

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We are the affluent.

Our environment has been and is being abused.

And, OUR food system is contributing to that destruction.

The Climate Crisis is a serious problem, and we are contributing to that problem.

We must do better, and this includes our involvement with the food system.

Our choices, including from ignorance, affects Food security and Food Sovereignty. Both are justice issues.

First, we must NOT regard food as a commodity. A commodity benefits the affluent, causing the food system to be out of balance.

Instead, we need to consider food as a public good, equally accessible for all.

A commodity usually comes with convenience, and likely in a nice box or "plastic" container. And, these days, we often have a whole meal delivered to our door.

Consider all the foods we consume ....and their containers.

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In addition, food must be ecologically sustainable with a much smaller carbon footprint.

Transportation is a significant part of that footprint.

Realizing that this requires that we change our buying habits and consumption, may cause a degree of tension.

If so, that is good.

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We must be conscientious food consumers.

We must be conscientious eaters. This also means that we must nurture a healthy spirituality of eating. Instead of focussing on ease and convenience, may we consider the source, the life forms and the farmers with gratitude.

And yes, we need more farmers as peacemakers. Small family farms care for the land; which brings wholeness - peace.

We can no longer afford giant argi-business, industrial farms.

Those corporate operations are too often destructive and unjust.

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Unfair / unjust practices in food production breeds social unrest and conflict. Consider the situation in Central America, for example.

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Being a conscientious food consumer demands that we must know the source of our food, how far it travelled and how it was produced.

Many of us know this, especially younger adults.

In our luxury, we tend to take food for granted. We want it easily available, and too often want it processed for our ease.

We expect selection, and if we can afford it, we buy it.

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Food is life. Our regard for food can be gluttonous and dismissive, and **that** attitude for **life** surely alters our spirit and diminishes wholeness.

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How did we get to this point?

Here is my theory:

For most of human history, food security was of utmost importance.

Humans struggled with nature. There was a constant tension.

Food was a precious priority.

The industrial revolution started to tilt the scale.

By the mid 20 century, humans were able to defeat nature with chemicals and industrialization.

This removed the tension in the balance for survival, but imbalance caused stress..... which increased for us and all of creation.

Food became a commodity, a processed commodity, in most cases.

Even *produce* was altered, genetically, so it could endure shipping and have a longer shelf life. The flavour was sacrificed.

To compensate for that, processed food was artificially coloured and flavoured.  
I could go on. But will simply add, the alteration of nature does not need to continue.

We can choose a better way.

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We can choose a better way.

I think we Mennonites are already engaged in this.
For some time now, we have valued "Eating Simply in season".

Being a conscientious eater is Not that difficult.

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Hesitantly, I will use myself as an example, just to show how doable it is. I say, hesitantly, because I fail in many ways and in other areas.

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A few years ago, I stopped buying mammals for food.
Raising cows, pigs and sheep produces a lot of carbon.

I am not a vegetarian, nor am I a purist.
If I am a guest, I will eat what is served.

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Also, I try very hard to limit the source country to either Canada or the US, in order to reduce transportation distance. When possible, I buy local.

I have two exceptions: coffee and bananas. I am pondering eliminating bananas.

I am NOT pondering whether to remove coffee from my diet.  
I do buy Fair-trade, organic coffee.

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As you can imagine, many foods are only an option for me when they are in season.
This conscientious buying was an adjustment, including loss of selection during certain seasons.
However, I discovered great joy when items come into season.

I love blueberries, and 9 months out of the year, they are Not an option. But, it is a joyous occasion when they are in season.

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I think eating in season is more natural. It forces us to be more in touch with life's ebb and flow. There is a spiritual aspect to this, too.

Moreover, it motivates us to have our own gardens, and to store/preserve our own food,.... which is very organic & natural.

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I started growing lettuce indoors during the winter months, which is fun and tasty.

Nevertheless, I must do more, including writing to food corporations.
I must to do and consider more.

This means that all just and sustainable options must be on the table.

It is not just food on the table. It is life. Life as food and the life of those who grew it, and of course, the life of our planet.
That is what is on the table.

All considerations and consequences must be on the table.
We must hold that tension as we choose and strive to do justice and peace.

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By our choices, we all need to enhance a just and sustainable food system. This requires that we must be informed.

We must do our homework. The days of buying food without regard to how it was produced and its source, Must end.

To be sure, this causes tension in our food process.

That's okay because tension is natural. There is tension in nature.

We must live in that tension,....which is part of the wholeness of life.

That is nature.

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Wendell Berry said:

We cannot live harmlessly or strictly at our own expense;

we depend upon other creatures and survive by their deaths.

To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation.

The point is, when we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, ..it is a sacrament; when we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, ..it is a desecration.

In such desecration, we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness,...[and causing] others to [live in] want.

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Humans have moved themselves outside of the balance of nature, with grave consequences to ourselves and all of creation.

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By 1930, all the wolves in Yellowstone National Park and all of the surrounding area had been killed. Humans were conquering nature.

The suffering ecosystem went mostly unnoticed.

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In 1995, wolves from Canada were placed in Yellowstone.

That year, there was only one beaver colony.

The reason was because the Elk population had mushroomed.

They lived without tension / without fear from a dominate predator.

The Elk were over grazing by all the rivers and streams.

Those were ideal locations--sources of food and water.

They consumed small willows, aspens and cottonwood trees, preventing them to mature. Beavers need those trees.

Within a few years of wolf's return, biomass along the waterways increased 10 fold. No longer could the elk casually linger by the water. And, there are now 9 beaver colonies, instead of one.

Their dams have controlled erosion, and provided more water sources.

The carrion the wolves leave behind feeds countless other animals and birds.

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The elk? Their population has dropped by 50%, and is now stable.

Ah, you may be thinking, "Well, reintroducing the wolves was not a good thing for the elk."

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Life / nature was not just about the elk. Just as life and nature is not only about us humans. We are merely a part of the whole.

Moreover, the elk population is healthier.

They live in tension because of the wolves. They must keep moving, and be ever mindful of the wolves.

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When there is a balance [ ] there is tension.

Tension is good. It keeps thing moving and vibrant.

There is a big difference between tension and stress.

Tension is the elk being mindful of the wolves existence.

Stress is being surrounded by wolves.

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When life is out of balance, the scale tips, and things can get ugly and stressful.

We humans have tried to remove ourselves from nature's equation.

We have extracted, trampled and soiled nature, and caused stress to all things, including ourselves.

In regards to food, we must be keenly be aware that meat was a once living animal. All food was/is a living life form.

Moreover, it takes a lot of work to produce food and raise animals.

We must live in that tension of awareness.

When we buy food we are enabling the production, the process, the distribution and the death.

No longer can we take that lightly. No longer can we ignore it because there are grave consequences if we do.

For the sake of our planet and our own soul, we must seek and cherish wholeness -- Peace!

We need to live in healthy tension.

We need to know there are consequences to our choices.

When we do evil and destruction, there are consequences.
This is clearly stated in the Bible and in the Gospel lessons.

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What is so good about the Good News?

Thanks to Jesus, we are reminded of the consequences of NOT following God's way....and the beauty and wonder when we do follow God's way.

The spiritual tension is the pull between good and evil....  
....between creation and destruction.

The Good News reminds us of that tension, and that is good.

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May we all do justice, and walk humbly and **tenderly** with God.

God is in the wholeness of creation, and we must be there, too.