

Sunday 24 January 2011 [after service]

It's nice to be back in front of you.

Where's the Beef? What's the G[r]ain?

I planned, originally, to give this talk after our harvest service but misunderstood the arrangements for that weekend and had to postpone it: but I saved my material and am glad to have the opportunity to present it, in updated form, this morning. I hope this will be the first in a long series of events [not just talks] that will become a feature of Sunday mornings and make use of the space we have created by combining our worship services at 10.30am.

A part of what we are about at the present time is identifying those areas in which we can do useful missionary work with the resources that we currently have available and expect to have available in the immediate and medium term future. Our church membership is smaller than it used to be and we are not all as active as once we were, but that doesn't mean that we must give up on our missionary work. Instead, we have to match what we attempt to the resources available. Crucially, it means getting more for less, so that we punch above our weight.

I've been pleased to hear from some of you how much you enjoyed the service recently led by Rev'd Rod Hill, the District Mission Enabler. He will be returning in the coming months, to lead worship again and, also, to help us with workshops and other activities when we will explore in greater depth, firstly the sort of mission in which we think we can engage and, secondly, the resources we will need to fulfil that mission, whatever it might be.

Let me remind you about some of what Rod Hill had to say. He based his service on three scripture readings: firstly from Genesis 1 relating part of the creation story; we also heard about the collection for the saints in Jerusalem as recorded in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians; and the gospel reading told of the feeding of the five thousand as recorded in John 6. Rod had a number of points to make arising from those verses, but I want to dwell for a moment on the feeding miracle. Essentially, it teaches that our resources are often more than we recognise and that with the blessing of God small resources can be put to good and very effective use to achieve results out of all proportion to what might have been expected.

This morning I am asking you to join in a simple task that will cost you nothing more than the effort of signing a letter and a petition, but the outcome may be a life changing and, potentially, life saving benefit for people across the world, including here in the UK.

But before we get to that point let me tell you a little about the background to the need for the letters and the petition I will ask you to sign. We've all heard about bankers being the bad guys in society for speculating vast sums of money that we as individuals, or through our pension funds, have deposited with them. The out cry against them has been driven by, amongst other reasons, the discovery that they have been using our money to fund risky investments and paying themselves huge bonuses when the risks have paid off; but asking for still more money, this time in the form of government bail outs paid for from our taxes, when their gambles have failed. The most publicised gambles have involved mortgages and other

money securities, but how many of you realise that the banks have also been speculating, and still are, on the price of food and other basic commodities including cotton, coffee, wheat etc., that are essential for the well being of ordinary people across the planet. Of course, these items have been traded ever since mankind developed settled communities and produced surpluses that they were able to exchange for things they didn't have; and the merchants expected some profit for their efforts; but the speculative activities of the banks and other financial institutions that I am high lighting this morning have nothing to do with people exchanging their surpluses one with another or, to put it in more modern terms, exchanging a surplus for cash with which they can they buy something else; and everything to do with using money belonging to other people, that is you and I, to intervene in standard commodity markets to buy up vast quantities of food and other goods that they have no use for themselves, in the hope of selling it shortly afterwards to make a large cash profit. The net result is wild fluctuations in the availability of those products and dizzying increases in their cost to the consumer with very serious and sometimes devastating consequences for impoverished individuals and communities.

These speculative activities are immoral. They have no proper place in the markets they affect and do nothing to contribute to either the smooth running of those markets or the good of those who depend on them for their livelihood. Neither do they facilitate the smooth and economic transfer of goods from producer to consumer. They are purely predatory activities designed to rob society of its wealth for the benefit if those who participate.

So the *beef* is that speculators are exacerbating shortages of *grain* and other food products [and the reason for those primary shortages is another story] by intervening in the market place for their own *gain*.

The World Development Movement [WDM] is in the forefront of campaigns to curtail and, if possible, end this sort of speculative trading with the aim of achieving a stable and dependable market that is able to deliver foodstuffs and other essential commodities at a fair price to those who need them. It needs your help to put pressure on organisations and governments that have the power to make a difference. You can play your part by signing a letter addressed to your MP and a petition addressed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, both calling for them to press for the changes so badly needed to bring relief to all those, at home and abroad, who otherwise will be driven further in to poverty and find it difficult to meet the essential needs of their families. Don't think this is a waste of effort. Campaigning pays dividends as others here, including Margaret [McFarlane] who has been involved in WDM campaigns for many years, will testify. You will find the petition and letters in the foyer. Please sign them on you way out. Thank you.

[Copies of these notes are available in the foyer for anyone who wants a copy. They will be posted on the church website and, if the editor allows, published in the next edition of Focus. Further information available at www.wdm.org.uk/stop-betting-food/what-problem]