Hunger and how it impacts you and me. (based on the book **Hunger & Happiness,** Augsburg, 2009)

A presentation at Hope College, by Shannon Jung

Let me start with a simple question: What did you have for supper tonight? Can you remember?

Where did it come from? How many bushels of grain were used to produce the meat in your meal. What sort of fertilizer was employed? Did any of that drift into the Lake or one of the river systems that feed into the Mississippi.

Let me be clear: I am not trying to make you feel guilty.

That is not helpful.

I am very much trying to get us US to face up to what is going on.

Continuum from

No Regrets------------------------------------------------Contrition--------------Guilt------------Shame

This continuum will become significant in about a half-hour.

Before I set the conundrum before you however, let me say a word or two in defense of eating.

We all eat and most of us really enjoy eating. Maybe even over-enjoy it. God even arranged things so that we would enjoy eating.

Calvin, he of the dour reputation, writes that God made food far more delightful that God needed to in order to gladden the heart and delight the soul. Indeed, food is one of the great gifts of God and our capacity to enjoy food is another.

So, no matter what else I say or you hear tonight, let me reiterate that food is a great gift and greatly to be enjoyed. In fact, I think I can prove biblically that God had two basic purposes in mind when food was created: to foster our delight, and also to promote our sharing.

What I want to invite you to think about this evening is nothing less than how we can, at the same time, assist the hungry to feed themselves, and to nourish our spiritual well-being. I will not insult you by reiterating what I wrote and many of you have read – at least not too much.

Food is huge these days. What is the situation in your region, or state?

There are few areas of our lives together that food is not a part of. Most importantly, perhaps, food is what sustains us – we can live 5 weeks without food (only 5 minutes without oxygen and 5 days without water). We take in food and those nutrients enable us to study, to run, to play tennis, to converse with each other, and to kiss. We make food and food makes us. We are an input system and we also are an output system. So that, we are food, we are what we eat. How healthy is our food? Well, we have a choice about what we eat in some ways, but not in others. How your food is grown and what it does to your body is in some ways beyond your control. Food is all about the environment. How was your supper grown? Where did it come from? How many miles did it travel to get to your table? And, then, food is about economics. What does it cost you to eat? Who gets to eat? Do you and I get to eat healthy food? Well, that leads into international relations and war. And to health care policy. And to poverty levels. There are few areas of our lives together that food is not somehow a part of.

What I will do towards the end of this presentation is present you some conundrums. I want to ask how you see hunger and other issues tied together. For example, how is our energy policy in this country related to our agricultural practices? Then, once you have addressed that one, how might you make a difference, here and now?

As you know, the cheap food policy of the U.S. – or the so-called “cheap food” policy has been quite destructive. ……

Why bother?

Indeed. Reasons:

1. Cheap food comes at a high cost – to the poor but also to ourselves. We the affluent. (Less affluent than we were. Drop in median income from $51,112 to $49,777, with the biggest drop occurring in the Midwest, according to the Census Bureau.)
2. Cheap food is not healthy for the poor in this country or the world.
3. Cheap food is bad theology. God of abundance not God of scarcity. Deep roots of this. What is neighbor love in this situation?
4. Consumption is a false God. It promises meaning and identity that it cannot provide. It seems to offer a way of life that will be satisfying. But we find that….

Here I need to offer an extended contrast between the values of consumerism and the vision of Christian life. Start with desire. Hunger. We all hunger for many things.

1. Vision of true desire.
2. Feeding the hungry and assisting the hungry to feed themselves is a Christian mandate.

Why it is so is an important consideration. My answer to that is that we were created to share the most creative love we are capable of with others. That is, we are to share the love of Christ with others. What in the world does that mean?

We were created for communion with each other and with God.

1. Nourishing our own souls by re-educating our desires and caring for our neighbors is the most spiritually nourishing way of life.
2. Contrition

Contrition is different from guilt in one vital way. Like guilt it is a recognition of the fact that we are sinful and unhealthy people – that we fall short of what we know to be right. We act in ways that are immoral. But unlike guilt, contrition knows that there is forgiveness with God. We are saved from being crushed under the weight of our disease, our sinfulness, by the knowledge that God is merciful and can transform us. So, contrition itself is a form of grace in a way that guilt is not. And that makes all the difference.

When we are contrite, we are released from our past wrongs, and sling-shot into a transformed life. Not miraculously but graciously. There is a change of attitude. We can do something about the futre. Ouir desires are transformed. Whereas formerly we wanted to grab everything for ourselves, we are now concerned that there is enough for all. That our policies reflect an inclusive concern, a love of neighbor if you will.

1. Paths towards health.

What does this mean? How can we foster this contrition in a way that moves into joy.

Let’s start with the example I asked you about before. How is energy policy in the U.S. tied into agricultural practice? Could you imagine yourself or your group (say, at a college or a church ) addressing this in some way?

How are consumption of consumer goods (clothes, automobiles, restaurant meals) related to immigration policy? What might you do that could respond to the problematic aspects of this?

How are income levels and obesity related? Is there some way that people in Holland, Michigan, could begin to improve the nutrition of everyone in the community?

In what ways is Hope College tied into the food system of Western Michigan? What does that mean about the food that is served in your refectory or cafeteria? Or that you buy at the grocery store?

How is poverty related to diet? Are there alternatives for poor people here in Holland?

Do you ever experience the affluent life style that you and I enjoy as problematic? In what ways? Are there any ways that our spiritual health can be improved?

Are you in any way responsible for those in Mexico or the Democratic Republic of Congo who do not have enough to eat? Is there any way of improving their situation?