

Thanksgiving Eve Service
2006

the Rev. Deborah M. Warner of Church of the Messiah
delivered at John Wesley Methodist Church
November 22, 2006

Reading the Sign

In terms of signs, there is nothing particularly spectacular about them. There are two: one on top of the other – fastened to two wooden posts that have been sunk into the dirt. They are located about a mile from here by the edge of the road that, while not the main road, is a good alternative – especially if you want to get from one part of Falmouth to another and not get bogged down in a summer traffic jam.

The first sign, which I suppose measures somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 inches by 40 inches, has a grey background with blue lettering. The logo of the organization is on the left: five people – figures only, no faces. The one below is much simpler: white background with black lettering. Both are made of treated wood – and have now hung in the elements long enough to begin to pass the test of time.

The top sign says this: *Falmouth Service Center* and beneath it, the words *Helping Neighbors in Need*. In a few minutes, one of my colleagues will speak about this organization and some of what it stands for.

I am going to focus on the sign below this one: the one that simply reads

Our Community Food Pantry

On one hand, these four words are pretty ordinary, run-of-the-mill, nothing special words. On the other hand they say an enormous amount – not only about one piece of an extraordinary social service agency, but also about this community of Falmouth.

Our Community Food Pantry.

I don't know about you, but when I think of Falmouth, people who are hungry or in need of additional resources just to make ends meet are not the first ones who come to mind. Instead, more often than not, when I think about Falmouth, I have a "*Chamber of Commerce*" picture. You know the one: blue sky, sunny summer day, wind off the water, boats sailing by, kids playing in the sand, a cyclist riding the bike path. You get the picture.

I don't think about people in need.

At least not off the top of my head.

But now, having lived here now for a little more than a year, some of what I am seeing is beginning to change. In looking around I don't just see

- The beautiful tree lined roads which meander not far from the beach, but also the folks who have their own kind of beauty whose lives are hidden from public view;
- I don't just see kids wading in the water's edge, but older members of the community who are trying to wade through what surely seems like endless paper work relating to health care which they may or may not be able to afford;
- I don't just see young people who by the end of the summer are practicing soccer every waking hour in hopes of scoring a goal at the team try-outs, but also the young person who has long since given up practicing anything, much less setting a goal for him or herself.

Like many of you, I am beginning to see and know some of the different dimensions of the town.

That's one reason why I was particularly moved when I paid closer attention to these signs which are posted by the new home of the Falmouth Service Center on Gifford Street.

What they say, of course, is that this food pantry is where people who are hungry or in need of additional food to supplement their diets and income, can come and know they will not just be helped, but served.

Cared for. Recognized. Paid attention to.

In the world in which we live where it can be easy to look past or through others in order to arrive where we imagine we need most to be; being seen, being listened to, having someone care means more that any of us would dare to imagine.

That's why those four simple words are so important. "*Our Community Food Pantry*" ***Our Community.***

That may not sound like a big deal... but think about it. It means everybody here in this community, in this place is entitled to be here. This community, this town is not just for "us" or "them" but *all* as in everyone:

- Those who look like they have it all together and those who don't have a clue;
- Those who were born and bred here and those who have just arrived;
- Those who have more than enough and those who are living under the poverty line.

All have a place at this pantry table.

Given the world in which we are living, that is a mighty big deal.

The concept of having enough and sharing what we have is not news. The writer of Deuteronomy puts it this way when writing about the Promised Land to which the people

of the Exodus were being led: *“a land where you may eat bread without scarcity; where you will lack for nothing.” (Deuteronomy 8:8)*

The author of the Letter to the Romans captures the call of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth to be a people of justice and compassion this way: *“rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another.” (Romans 12: 15 – 16.)*

Having a place at a table, having food on the table is not new news. Nonetheless having it a reality here and elsewhere across this Commonwealth and nation is still a pretty big deal.

The truth of this came home to me once more about six weeks ago. It was the time in the service when I give the announcements. I asked for a couple of kids to come up and help with one of them.

About eight sets of hands flew up in the air. I chose two that belonged to two young boys who had been coming to the parish on and off for a little more than six months.

They tried not to race up the center aisle, but demonstrate some degree of control. They marched up the three steps to the cancel. I gave them two boxes and quietly asked them to try to hide them.

They agreed and covered over them.

I looked out over the congregation and talked about the parish being a place where dreams are shared and sometimes even realized. I said that one of our members had a dream that we could bring in 120 boxes of breakfast cereal for the Falmouth Service Center.

And then I confessed what any of my clergy colleagues also know... sometimes when we look out over the congregation committed to our charge various things are going through our mind. That morning I was counting how many folks were there – and if each of them brought a box or two of cereal we could make the dream of our parishioner come true easily.

It was at that point that I turned to my two partners and asked them to show the two boxes of cereal that I was donating.

“Okay, friends. Only 118 to go.”

And then the older of the two boys asked quietly if he could have some of the cereal. I said, “Well, you know what? We are going to give this cereal to people in this town who don’t have any cereal.”

“Really?” he replied.

“Really.” I said.

“Cool.” He beamed. “Cool.”

He’s right. It is cool. It’s cool when we share what we have at a worship service or when we drop by unannounced mid-week. It’s cool to share what we have when it’s Thanksgiving Eve and the evening of morning of any day. It’s cool to share what we have when it is freezing cold outside or hotter than all get out.

It’s always cool to share what we have.

And it is especially so – when, my friends, we come to a town like this that freely and openly says there is a place where those in need can come and take food from our own common pantry.

Amen.