



MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

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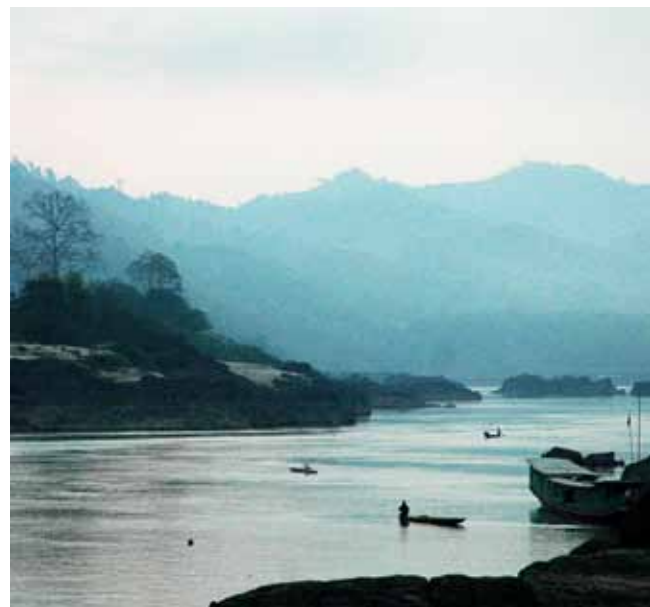
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Fate in the balance: the Mekong River just downstream of the proposed Xayaburi Dam. Photo: Pianporn Deetes/International Rivers

News from Manna Gum

2011 has begun with a flurry of activity on the Mekong front. As mentioned in our January letter, the first of the proposed Mekong mainstream dams - the Xayaburi Dam in Laos - is at a critical phase in the decision-making process. The project is currently being reviewed by the Mekong River Commission, which will provide recommendations to the Government of Laos as to whether the dam should be built or not. This review process is being funded by the Australian aid program.

As many Mekong watchers had feared, the public consultation element of the review was a sham - no consultation was conducted in Laos, the key project documentation (such as the Environmental Impact Statement) was not made public, and few people got to participate.

Manna Gum, working closely with Oxfam, has coordinated two NGO sign-on letters to Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd since January, asking him to do his utmost to ensure the Australian-funded review process is fair and transparent. To its credit, the Australian Government has responded by taking a strong position on the need for good process. Thank you to all those who wrote to Mr Rudd at this time.

Nevertheless, the Xayaburi project, and the livelihoods of millions, still hangs in the balance. A final recommendation will be handed down on April 22, and then the Government of Laos will decide whether it will proceed or not. You can follow developments on the Manna Gum website: www.mannagum.org.au

Your kingdom come, your will be done ...

Living in the kingdom of God

by Jonathan Cornford


When I was a child growing up in a Western Australian mining town, we used to try to intimidate an opposing sporting team by declaring, 'We're going to knock you all the way to kingdom come!'. Only looking back as an adult did I realise that we were, in an odd way, drawing on a teaching of Jesus. I never thought about the meaning of this phrase at the time, which I picked up from my thoroughly irreligious school mates, however, it clearly referred to something a long way from here and now. I now wonder whether this innocent and ignorant misuse actually reflects the broader Christian community's attitude to the idea of the kingdom of God: that it is something remote and only vaguely relevant to our present life and action.

The idea of the kingdom of God is subject to a number of sometimes contradictory confusions. In some parts of the church the difficult and challenging nature of what Jesus taught is circumvented by entirely spiritualising it – teachings about enemies, debt, money and forgiveness all become interpreted as matters of inward attitude rather than outward conduct. Other parts of the church have domesticated the idea of the kingdom of God by almost entirely secularising it: it becomes something *we build*, largely through incremental political development, with God's role relegated to that of a figurehead. As Lesslie Newbigin has pointed out, such an interpretation of the kingdom of God is little more than the Enlightenment idea of progress with a religious veneer. Still others have relegated the kingdom of God to practical irrelevance by interpreting it as something that only comes about at the end of the age, entirely accomplished by God, and therefore having little to say about how we live here and now.

So if we are to reclaim an enlivening understanding of the kingdom of God we need to clarify some basic questions: (i) what does it require of us; (ii) what is our part in it; and (iii) when (and where) is it? And here we have a further interest in asking specifically what the kingdom of God has to do with our economic conduct.

The kingdom of God is not just *a* teaching of Jesus; it is really *the* teaching of Jesus. For Matthew and Luke, the most succinct way that they found to summarise what Jesus was doing, was to say that he was 'proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God' (Mt 4:23, Lk 4:43). Likewise, when Jesus sends out disciples, the summary of his instructions is that they are to 'proclaim the kingdom of God' (Lk 9:2) or to pronounce that 'the kingdom of God has come near' (Lk 10:9) From the structure of the first three gospels, it is clear that everything Jesus did – whether teaching, healing, performing signs, receiving the lowly or challenging the authorities – was either an instruction about, or an enactment of, the kingdom of God.

There can be no doubt that for Jesus, the gospel writers and the early church, the language of the 'kingdom of God' held powerful political overtones. The Greek word that we translate as 'kingdom' - *basileia* - is the same word that was used to describe the 'empire' of Rome. In the mouth of Jesus and in the ears of early believers and enemies, such language about God's kingship was a direct



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challenge to the claimed authority of Caesar. And, just like the Roman Empire, Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God demanded obedience in this world. So already we can see, without having discussed any of the content, that the language of the kingdom of God brings us into direct tension with the established order, a fact which is amply borne out in the life of Jesus.

In both Matthew and Luke, the generalisation that Jesus was 'proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God' is soon followed by a (perhaps *the*) major set of gospel teaching – the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (ch. 5-7) and the corresponding Sermon on the Plain in Luke (ch.6). It is clear that the writers have placed these teachings here to unpack for the reader in some detail what is meant by 'the good news of the kingdom'. Immediately what these teachings make clear is that kingdom of God is fundamentally concerned with our actions towards others, and that participating in this kingdom will inevitably come at a cost for us.

A very quick summary of the Sermon on the Mount illustrates the point. It begins with a definition of the 'blessed' state; that is, being in 'the right place', the place closest to God and to reality. According to Jesus, this 'blessed' state consists of being humbled and humiliated, feeling the pain of the world, forgoing personal gain, showing mercy, yearning for justice, being undivided in purpose, seeking peace and suffering persecution. The purpose of those in this state (those in the kingdom of God) is to be of benefit to rest of the world ('salt' and 'light'). From there, Jesus goes on to discuss, among other things, anger and hostility, sexuality and marriage, keeping your word, suffering oppression, refusing to retaliate, giving freely, love of enemies, prayer and fasting, debts, forgiveness, wealth and possessions, and judging others. If it is not already clear that this teaching requires a radical reappraisal of how we live in this world, Jesus drives the point home by stating that *you cannot have two masters* – you either follow the teaching of the kingdom or the system of empire. He then finishes the whole teaching by emphasising (twice) that those who are part of this thing are the ones who are *doing it*. Actions, not ideas, are what count.



To which system will we entrust the welfare of our children? '... for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.' (Matt 19:14) (Photo: Patrick, Amy & Mhairi having some good clean fun.)

This new social order announced by Jesus, necessarily included the economic arrangements that exist between people.

Thus far, we can see that the kingdom of God has two essential components: (i) allegiance to God rather than any earthly authority (or system); and, flowing from this, (ii) the enactment of a whole new social order 'in which grace and justice are linked' (John Howard Yoder). Just as in the Old Testament, where Israel is called to be an alternative economic community that demonstrates the character of God (see *Manna Matters* Nov 2009), Jesus' announcement

of the kingdom of God reconstitutes the call to form an alternative community, but this time defined entirely by its ethics and practice rather than by national identity. As Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker Movement liked to say, it is a new society in the shell of the old.

This new social order announced by Jesus necessarily included the economic arrangements that exist between people. How can a new social order have any meaning unless it also takes account of the basic facts that most directly determine peoples' everyday wellbeing? At its core, Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God calls us to abandon our obedience to the dictates of *Mammon* (Matt 6:24; Lk 16:13; 'Mammon' appears as 'money' or 'wealth' in various translations). Too often, this challenging teaching has been sidelined in the church by characterising Mammon as merely an unhealthy idolising of wealth. 'Phew, that's not me', is the unspoken reaction. But the term Mammon means much more. It really means *the system of money* or 'the economic

system', with the connotation that it is an unjust system. To put it in a more current form, Mammon refers to the 'economic realities' which are universally acknowledged as the system within which we must live, and by whose laws we must abide. The power of Mammon is that *whether or not you want it or like it*, you feel that you have *no option* but to obey it. This is the true definition of an idol.

But along comes Jesus saying, 'Forget the system you know. There is another system, a *different way*, that you can participate in. The rules in my system are generally the opposite of those in the system you know, but believe it or not, you'll find that it is actually the place where you will find life. But you cannot live in both systems. *Trust me.*'

Let's be honest, this is a scary proposition. Moving towards the kingdom of God requires abandoning the system whose rules we know and understand, even if we don't like them. It is even more scary when you factor children into the equation. C.S. Lewis, reflecting on the story of Abraham and Isaac, taught that the god you *really believe in* is the one to whom you are prepared to entrust your children. This brings us to the crux of our belief: the proclamation of the kingdom of God challenges us to think hard about what things we really believe are *actually good* for us and our children.

So at its core, participating in the kingdom of God requires us to let go of all of the received wisdom about how we structure our economic affairs. Within this framework, the gospels specifically address issues of standards of living, economic security, mutual support, debt and credit, giving, hospitality, commerce and much more. These are all issues that will be explored further in future editions of *Manna Matters*; it will have to be sufficient here to acknowledge that the idea of the kingdom of God drives to the very heart of our economic lives, turning everything upside down.

There is one more matter we must address: when and where does the kingdom of God take place? In the gospels, Jesus is clearly concerned to stress the *nearness* of the kingdom of God:

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'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'
(Matt 10:7);
'the kingdom of God is among you' (Lk 17:21).

This language echoes Moses' summing up of the *Torah* (instruction in God's way to live) in Deuteronomy, where he emphasises its attainability: 'But the word is *very near you*, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it' (Deut 30:14). Nevertheless, it is also apparent in the gospel story that the full realisation of this kingdom is something that has not happened yet. This is most poignantly put in Jesus' last meal with the disciples: 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.' (Lk 22:15-16)

This was always explained to me as a mysterious paradox: a kingdom which is both here, but not yet. However, I have now come to consider that the nature of the kingdom's presence among us is not mysterious at all, but rather quite straightforward. The key lies in fully grasping the nature of what it means to make God king, and the simple formula lies at the foundation of the way that Jesus taught us to pray: 'Your kingdom come, *your will be done.*' (Matt 6:10)

The reality of the kingdom of God among us is merely a matter of degrees. The extent of the kingdom's presence is precisely the extent to which we have made God king (which includes the extent to which we are no longer bound by the dictates of 'economic reality'), which is simply the extent to which we have enacted God's will. The greater the extent to which we follow God's will, and the greater the number of us who do so, then the greater the reality of the kingdom of God among us.

What does this reality look like? That is no mystery: wherever the least are becoming first, the hungry are being filled, the broken are being healed and the tormented are being freed from their demons; whenever people forsake the lure of wealth, or ignore the pressure to be financially secure for the sake of giving more freely to the world; wherever people are willing to stand against oppression and injustice, even to their own cost; there and then, God's throne has come to earth.

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... in Cambodia, as it is in heaven.

The nonviolent struggle against land grabbing

by Chris Baken-Evens



A forced eviction in Sihanoukville in 2007. The use of violence and intimidation by the police or military is common. In 2009 mass evictions displaced about 27,000 people across Cambodia

Fifteen people were packed into a two-bed hotel room. Each person from Pursat province, north-west of Phnom Penh. And each one telling the same story: “The company is clearing our land. If we oppose them they come and hit us, take us to court, put us in jail, make us afraid.”

Brother Long invited me this evening to discuss ways I might be able to support their community. I was already in Phnom Penh to co-lead a workshop and we happened to be in the capital city the same week. I sat and tried to listen and ask questions, to understand their situation and what they see are the available solutions.

“Two weeks ago we were so fed up with the company and our local authorities that we blocked the main road to Battambang to make it clear we have a complaint. Look, here are the nine demands we gave them.”

I was impressed with the energy and initiative of this group of rural Cambodian farmers. Most of them have primary-level education and here they are taking on a well-connected and well-financed Cambodian corporation. What courage!

“But it’s not enough. There are six districts affected by the land concession and only one district is complaining. Before, the company would clear our community land right in front of our homes, now they are more cunning. They clear land far away from our homes where we don’t see it for many days - up by the mountains and deep in our forests.”

Many rural Cambodian communities rely on a mix of

agrarian practices and forest gathering. I’ve been to some communities in the deep of the Cambodian forest and each time I’m amazed at what can be harvested from the trees, bushes and roots. Once I was served what I thought was tapioca pudding. It was made from the seeds of a local bush. There is a deep sense of serenity there. And when a company is bulldozing fields right by your house it’s a call to action. When they bulldoze land far away you might not notice it for days, weeks even. The large majority of the community, then, was simply not interested in getting involved when the problem was “out of sight, out of mind” and the cost of resistance seems too high.

While I sat in that small room listening to the stories of this community I was encouraged by their experience, courage and hope. Yet there was fear and despair, too. There are very few “success stories” of communities winning their land back from companies and government officials. And many communities’ are feeling worn down and frustrated. The likelihood of spontaneous violence is ever-present. It’s therefore vital to maximise the community’s knowledge and skills of active nonviolence.

In response to that meeting I teamed up with two local Cambodian organisations and a national community-based network of land activists. We collaborated on a workshop developing nonviolent strategies for long-term change. The key goal being the nonviolent recovery of their land and the nonviolent expulsion of the companies from their respective communities land. This workshop ran in December last year (2010) with about 25 participants from four different communities. Those who joined left with a greater



Omlaing villagers protest against their land being cleared.

understanding for an overall strategy, and we hope to follow up with further training and coaching.

Jesus' confrontation of the economic, political and religious authorities throughout his ministry came at a high cost. He could have run away. Instead, he faced events as they unfolded, became a knowing recipient of violence (in response to his nonviolent provocations of healings, accusations and demonstrations), and therefore offers all of us an opportunity of transformation - either to walk away from our desires to control others, of getting what we want in life without consideration of the consequences on other people and the world around us, or to nonviolently walk towards those who abuse us. In short, Jesus gives us space to work towards reconciliation between all those we currently and formerly have tried to control for our benefit (or vice versa). We are no longer conformed to the world, but transformed!

What I am seeing in the community in Pursat - and many others in Cambodia - is an answer to a prayer prayed by just about every Christian who has ever lived: "Our Father who is in heaven, your name is holy. May your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" Here, in the midst of despair, the struggle of Brother Long and his community for nonviolent change gives me glimpses of the kingdom coming.

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Waking up to our mess

The problem of e-waste

by Dave Waterworth

About six months ago I was invited to take on the management of Green Collect's warehouse space, which primarily involved taking responsibility for corporate collections of e-waste. Green Collect, a not-for-profit environmental charity, provides a range of environmental services to Melbourne businesses that promote recycling and waste minimisation.

In Australia, electronic waste (e-waste) is the fastest growing source of waste, growing three times faster than regular waste. There are an estimated 9.2 million computers in use around Australia. It is expected that in the coming year a further 2.1 million computers will enter the market, while 3 million will end their life. Presently only 3% of e-waste in Australia is recycled; the rest is shipped overseas or disposed of in landfill. Land filling e-waste is hazardous to the environment and to human health because substances such as arsenic, cadmium, lead, mercury and nickel can leach into the ground and water. These substances have been associated with diseases such as cancer and neurological disorders.

Due to the toxic nature of e-waste, Green Collect outsources most of the breakdown process to e-waste recyclers. Most, if not all, of these recyclers will ship waste created in this process overseas to countries such as China, Nigeria and Indonesia.

There are limits on what these companies can send as Australia is a signatory to the Basel Convention. The convention aims to protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects resulting from the generation, management, transboundary movements and disposal of hazardous waste. It was initiated in response to hazardous waste trafficking from the wealthiest to less wealthy countries. Despite this convention having 175 signatories, the majority of e-waste is still dumped in China. For Western countries shipping waste to China is up to 10 times cheaper than disposing of it under Western safety and environmental standards.

It has been difficult to secure an assurance from recyclers that our e-waste would not go overseas. There is mistrust within the e-waste sector and a culture of tearing down the reputation of a competitor's claim of best practice.

Adding to this growing e-waste calamity, at the end of 2013 the government will switch off the analogue television signal across Australia. This is what you'll find on the Australian Government website:

There's no need to wait — in most areas you can switch to digital TV now. However you do need to be ready by the time the switchover is completed in your area, or you won't be able to watch TV.

The obvious question is what happens to all the obsolete televisions and radios. The short answer is landfill. It is estimated that 1.5 million televisions are dumped each year, and this figure is expected to spike in the next 18 months. Lead and mercury are just two of the many toxic components of a television set that can have extremely dangerous effects on humans and the environment. The process to safely recycle and dispose of one television is costly.

Who will pay that cost? At present, the cost is paid by the environment and the Third World? Who should be paying the price?

The electronic equipment we purchase today is designed to be hard to upgrade, easy to break and costly and impractical to repair. The eighteen or so months we use these products are just a blip in their entire life cycle. This is a key strategy of electronic manufacturers. Bad design produces goods with limited life, which are quick to throw away with no consideration of the cost of disposal. Often these products are assembled in the Third World where workers are not adequately protected from toxic compounds and chemicals. Most of the issues associated with e-waste can be solved with a more whole system approach and encouragement of more responsible design.

Until such a time I believe we are reacting to a growing issue that many of us are unaware of. For instance, just last week we received 30 CRT monitors from a local primary school. CRT monitors are bulky and take up a lot of space in comparison to newer technologies such as plasma and LCD. CRT monitors are considered old technology, which is why we receive such large quantities. The monitors were made redundant due to their age and were being replaced by new flat screens. In all probability these monitors are still in good working order. We don't test these machines as there is no resale value and we are not equipped to safety tag for possible sale as the cost is prohibitive. Our process for all equipment received is resell, reuse, refurbish





or recycle. When we receive CRT monitors they are stacked in a growing pile in the hope that a viable recycling option will present itself.

Our attempts to safely break down these monitors has convinced us that the health risks are too great. Furthermore, the process is very labor intensive and we are left with materials which are difficult to sell on. In terms of outsourcing the recycling process, one company we have used in the past has not met with our criterion of transparency whilst another openly admitted they would dispose of them in landfill. For the past 10 years it has been illegal in the US to dispose of CRTs to landfill or incineration. Currently there is no national framework or policy for the responsible collection and disposal of e-waste in Australia. The mountain grows each week.


A similar scenario applies to single-use batteries, or alkaline batteries. We collect batteries from our shops, from our corporate members and our hospitality clients. More than 8000 tonnes of batteries per year end up in landfill in Australia. Alkaline batteries that are recycled are sent to France and Belgium for processing. The only option for disposal for batteries in Australia is to contain them in concrete and bury them in landfill to help avoid toxins leaching. Australia has no national recycling scheme. It has been considered too expensive and not commercially viable to recycle alkaline batteries. In the UK, producers of batteries are responsible for the cost of collection and recovery of used batteries. We currently have several tonnes of alkaline batteries that will cost more than \$8500 to have placed in concrete and buried in landfill. We currently have no choice but to stock pile alkaline batteries.

These two forms of e-waste highlight inadequacies in design, in governance and ultimately in our consumer habits. Bad design is responsible for the creation of products with built-in obsolescence whilst using compounds producing toxic and hazardous waste. Better design and the use of proven recyclables would alleviate much of the e-waste issue. As we have seen from overseas examples, government and regulatory bodies are taking action and passing e-waste legislation with effect. In Australia, it would seem we are largely ambivalent about e-waste, and this ambivalence extends to our policy makers and regulatory bodies. Extending responsibility to the manufacturer for disposal is an obvious place to start.

Ultimately, however, the problem is our rate of consumption. The combination of obsolescence, rapid growth of technology and our insatiable desire for the next new thing drives demand for these products. How do we weigh our perceived need for a new product against the cost to lives and the environment? Can we do without an upgrade? Can we avoid using batteries? Consider using rechargeable batteries, which are easily recycled, longer lasting and over time more cost effective. Avoid toys which require batteries. Pay more for longer lasting and more thoughtful product design. Resist the urge to upgrade when the next best thing comes along.

If you are interested in further information, a useful resource is a short documentary found on the internet called 'The Story of Stuff'. I can highly recommend it.

www.storyofstuff.com



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How do we weigh our perceived need for a new product against the cost to lives and the environment?



Waste not, want not

Urban gleaning

by Kim Cornford

One of the most fun and fruitful activities I have enjoyed in Footscray over the past few years has been gleaning. Some people call it urban food foraging, but I really like the idea of gleaning. I've become quite fond of picking up my long-handled hook, jumping on my bike with Mhairi on the back, and filling my front basket with lemons.

In fact, when travelling through Footscray with friends, I often find myself excitedly pointing out the beautiful nectarine tree I found last summer while jogging, the amazingly abundant apricot tree around the corner, and of course the multitude of lemon trees that furnish our pantry with lemon cordial year round.

Summer time often brings excited conversations with local friends about the latest fruit tree discovery in the neighbourhood. It is also a time of sharing abundance with each other, eating, preparing, and bottling fruit together. And the sharing continues through the year as we eat our way through the pantry. It really was a treat opening jars of figs preserved in port through the winter.

Over the past few years we have attempted to get 'closer' to our food. That is, we have been trying to become more aware of where our food comes from and how it is made. As we learn more about how land and resources are used in modern agricultural systems, the impact of how we live is illuminated such that the question of how we feed ourselves, becomes increasingly important. Our disconnection from land, farming, and food systems is not sustainable for ourselves, let alone our children.

And then there is the matter of waste. How many trees laden with fresh fruit are left abandoned every summer? The amount of food waste from supermarkets is shameful, so it's no wonder we walk straight past food growing in our streets.

I found the nectarine tree last year when I squashed one underfoot on the footpath. I went back a few days later and knocked on the door of the house to ask if I could pick some of the fruit. Of course, said the owner, and brought me out a ladder and plastic bags to fill. We have another tree out the back, she said, so take as much as you like. This has been my experience several times over. Approaching people was a little daunting at first, but seeking permission to enter someone's property is a good idea. When I've found fruit hanging from back fences down alleys and the like, I've just made a common sense call on whether or not permission seems necessary. The apricot lady, Carol, around the corner came to *our* door last year asking why we hadn't been over to pick yet? We have traded the abundance from our passionfruit vine with her each summer. Sometimes I've given a gift of jam or bottled fruit to people.

Why is God interested in urban fruit tree picking? Well, it certainly offers a great opportunity to get to know our neighbours, and it is definitely making good of His earthly

abundance. Importantly, it also sheds light on the system in which we normally operate and reminds us that there are alternatives. Power and ownership over our food and food systems is largely in the hands of a few very powerful multinational companies.

God gave the Old Testament laws to his people to ensure their wellbeing. The laws were given to frame social and economic behaviour, as well as spiritual. This includes the law around gleaning. Leviticus 23:22 says: 'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them there for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.'

The law for gleaning ensures that there is a system which usefully distributes its abundance, rather than seeing it go to waste or concentrated in hands that can no longer appreciate its full value. Leaving gleanings is another way of making sure there is enough for all.

Gleaning has been common in many cultures around the world for thousands of years. Over the past century, however, we have seen farming become mechanised, and operating systems become concerned for efficiency and productivity, leaving little or no opportunity for gleaners. Corporate ownership of agriculture and legal liability has increased, making food recovery next to impossible, even now when there is crop wastage.

Sometimes the urgent questions of food security in our country, and around the world loom large and seem overwhelming. But when I open up my pantry cupboard and see jars full of fruit labelled Anita's apples, Dom's figs, Carol's apricots, Michelle's cherries, Sunshine plums and Edie's peaches, I am hopeful.



Kim and Mhairi gleaning lemons overhanging a Footscray lane.



LEMON CORDIAL RECIPE

Juice of 6 or more lemons (gleaned from your neighbourhood)

1.5-2kg sugar

30g tartaric acid

60g citric acid

8 cups boiling water

Put all ingredients and lemon juice in basin and add boiling water slowly. Mix to dissolve, cool, then pour into sterilised bottles and seal.

Serve diluted with water or soda water, according to taste.



Support the work of MANNA GUM

MANNA GUM seeks to live within the economy of God – frugally, ethically and through the generous sharing of abundance within the community of faith. If our work resonates with you, please consider becoming a financial supporter.

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About Manna Gum

Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation that seeks to:

1. Provide resources for Christian groups to understand and practise the social, economic and political implications of the Gospel of Christ; and
2. Stimulate critical thinking on issues of aid and development, poverty and wealth, and to undertake research and advocacy on matters concerning Australian aid and development involvement overseas.

Please contact us if you would like more information about our work or to find how we could support you and your group/organisation to explore some of these issues.

www.mannagum.org.au

Post to MANNA GUM, 14 Essex Street, Footscray VIC 3011, call 0468 967 131 or email us at jonathan@mannagum.org.au