



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

February 24, 2009
First Sunday of Lent
Jim Sundholm

RCL: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13;
Luke 4:1-13

LM: Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15; Romans
10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

In his article on “hermeneutics” in the Supplement to the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, J. A. Sanders states that engaging Bible texts stirs two foundational questions about our identity as people of faith: “Who are we?” and “What are we to do?”¹ The texts for this Sunday, particularly Luke’s account of Jesus’ temptations, raise such questions.

The passage from Luke talks about identity questions: about meeting “my” physical needs, “my” level of power and place, and “my” access or right to God’s special favors. These are questions that challenge our Western view of God, which is often so individualized: “Jesus loves ME, the Bible tells ME so!” Who is “the anointed” sent for—himself or the world? The Bible texts Jesus cites make clear that he is here first for God and others, and his work is to serve the good of the world community, not to satisfy his physical, privileged, and powerful self.

So then, how will we followers of Jesus put boundaries on our physical desires and our musings and lusts for power and place and privilege? These are the temptations that we (like Jesus) face, defining how we will relate to our sisters and brothers in this world community. Is it their or our physical needs and cravings (desires) that draw our focus? When is enough “enough,” so that we indeed share our bread with our earth family? Many in this worldwide family have stones and no bread; many have no place because all work for the place of a few; many long for a miracle to save their and their children’s lives, wondering if God might work a miracle of generosity in the hearts of God’s people. This is a family, as Paul says in our text from Romans, without distinction. “The same Lord is Lord of all . . . Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (vv. 12-13). The temptation is to think otherwise.

1. J. A. Sanders, “Hermeneutics,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976) 403.



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The text from Deuteronomy picks up a repetitive pattern of the words “giving” and “possess,” underscoring the tension in these words. The Lord gives and the people take possession. God is the initiator and giver. As the people possess what’s given, they’re instructed to take a portion and give it to God, in the context of the community of faith. As they do so, they remember who they are and who liberated them. Out of such an identity-forming experience of salvation memory, the word is—give! Out of this first-fruit sharing comes a celebration (vv. 12-15) that includes resident aliens, orphans and widows, a celebration of God’s bounty freshly communicated and revisited in the giving of God’s people.

Psalm 91 draws my comments in a somewhat different direction. It is about our identity, but our identity as “refugees.” On several occasions when preaching to hundreds gathered in refugee camps in and around south Sudan, I have referenced the fact that we are all “refugees.” We followers of Christ, first and foremost, find our “sanctuary” and safe place in God. We set up our “tent” in God, and that is where we dwell. We may think our sanctuary is America and that we aren’t refugees. But along comes cancer or a tragic terror attack, and quickly we lay claim to God as our safe place. This world is a whole lot more level than we often express. In the year 2000, while discussing this reality with several Sudanese people, one man said, “I see what you mean. When my village was burned and my parents and wife were killed, I just ran for one and one-half days. Finally I just stopped to sleep under a tree and prayed, ‘God, don’t let the lion eat me tonight.’ That’s when I was a ‘refugee’ finding sanctuary in God.” In his teaching I learned the lesson’s truth more fully.

Children’s Time

I’d be tempted to use a stone and simply state that some people get so hungry they wish they could eat this. It’s possible that Jesus felt like that after forty days without food. But whenever he used his power to provide food, it was to feed others (as when he fed more than five thousand in the Gospel story). Or bring in a “wildlife refuge” sign and talk about what makes a safe place for animals. Remind them that God makes a safe place for us. Then talk about a refugee from the continent of Africa or elsewhere who has found a safe place and describe how the word “refugee” applies to us all as we follow Christ.

Musical Suggestions [Larry Hollar]

Sanctuary—*The Faith We Sing* 2164

Sing Justice to the Wilderness—*Banquet of Praise* 187



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You Shall Cross the Barren Desert (Be Not Afraid)— *Banquet of Praise* 208

Help, O Lord, the Thrown Away— *Banquet of Praise* 150

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C
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