



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

January 3, 2010
Second Sunday after Christmas
Noelle Damico

RCL: Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:(1-9)10-18
LM: Sirach 24:1-2, 8-12; Psalm 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20; Ephesians
1:3-6, 15-18; John 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14

God's promises are more than simple generalities about peace, abundance, and justice. God's covenant promises to penetrate to the heart of our needs, satisfactions, and hopes. They are specific promises made and kept in intimate relationship with the people Israel and with Christ's followers. The comfort, guidance, and hope are worked out in particular ways for particular people in particular settings. God chose the people Israel and gave them a covenant through which they might live life fully and know God truly. As Christians we relate to that covenant through Jesus Christ, who has marked us by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians) and has given us grace upon grace (John).

Written during the Exile, our passage from Jeremiah encourages the people: they will return to their land, and God will shepherd and sustain them. The text imagines a return of weeping rather than triumph. As a stream of people walk back to the land, the writer says the blind and the lame will be in the lead, the ones who bear the memory of exile on their bodies. Following them are women who are pregnant and women who are giving birth, the ones who bear the hope of the new life in their bodies. So in love with the people God is promising to redeem and lead, God confesses simply, with a sigh, "I have become a father to Israel." A particular promise for a particular people languishing in exile—God's tender love continues and will, one day, lead them home.

In Psalm 147 the writer invokes the congregation to praise God for their blessings. The community gives thanks for strong walls that secure Jerusalem from enemies, for children being born who will continue the covenant community, for national peace and for an abundant harvest. Here the assembly gives thanks from a position of well-being, acknowledging that they have not created either their peace or their prosperity—God has. In this psalm Israel is able to articulate a sense of contingency and gratitude that prevents a false sense of social achievement and places their well-being in the context of their covenantal relationship with God. A particular promise for a particular people who are celebrating their well-being—all this has been and will be provided by our loving God.



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How do we, as God's people, understand God's love for us in particular times and circumstances? How does comprehending God's love for us in the midst of our despair, affluence, simplicity, and joy affect how we understand our relationship to others in exile and in wellbeing? How is God particularly calling us, our congregations, and our nation in this time and place?

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a man in New York City was asked how his life had changed since the attacks. He answered, "My life hasn't changed. I'm the same today as I was on September tenth—hungry and homeless." The United Church of Christ national offices received a letter from the bishop of the Salvadoran Lutheran Church following the September attacks. He wrote: "As Salvadorans we knew by experience the pain the collective death of many brothers and sisters provokes. We would like to encourage you to glimpse the hope that is on the horizon."

Personal and national experiences put each of us in touch with our own vulnerability and pain. But the question for us is, Where do we go from there? Will we allow such experiences to enlarge our understanding of the suffering of others? Will we, like the writer of Isaiah, imagine God into the midst of our despair? Will we, like the psalmist, remember God in the midst of our triumphs? For after all, as advocates for justice, we seek more than sensible public policy or effective development aid. Our advocacy is about how our faith helps us to see and act in love to assist our sisters and brothers in need and about how these same sisters and brothers are a part of God's family, bearing also to us God's promises and love. God's covenant is not a mere piece of legislation but a living guide within our hearts. Christ's grace is not simply a requisite for inheritance of the kingdom; it is that immeasurable love and longing that bind us together with the One who is the source of all that is and shall be. Our advocacy is a part of God's message of freedom from exile and want, a message of solace in the midst of despair, a message of contingency in the midst of abundance, a message of steadfast love that will not let the other go.

Children's Time [Larry Hollar]

The passage from John's Gospel speaks about believers in Jesus becoming "children of God." In the past weeks we've talked about Jesus being a child. The children in your church know what it's like to be a child. But even older people are God's children. It means that we rely on God, we trust God's promises, that God will be there to help us and that we can cry to God and laugh with God and share our anger with God. We never outgrow being children in God's eyes, because God always loves us as parents deeply love their children.



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Musical Suggestions

Now Praise the Lord—*The Presbyterian Hymnal* 255

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice— *The Presbyterian Hymnal* 28, *The United Methodist Hymnal* 224, *The New Century Hymnal* 129, *Lutheran Book of Worship* 55

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly— *The United Methodist Hymnal* 229, *The Presbyterian Hymnal* 37, *Lutheran Book of Worship* 44

Lift Every Voice and Sing— *Lutheran Book of Worship* 562, *The United Methodist Hymnal* 519, *The New Century Hymnal* 593, *The Presbyterian Hymnal* 563

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