



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

August 15, 2010
Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Rev. Jeremiah Wright

RCL: Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Hebrews 11:29–12:2; Luke 12:49-56
LM: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; Psalm 40:2, 3, 4, 18; Hebrews 12:1-4; Luke 12:49-53

While growing up poor in Philadelphia, I never could understand why our church lifted offerings for the “poor.” I did not understand why we had mission offerings for hungry people in Africa and India when there were hungry people right in the community where I lived.

My father, who pastored the church in which I grew up, explained to me that God cares about those who are poor and that God expects everyone who loves God to do something about poverty. God does not expect only the “haves” to take from their resources and make sure that the “have-nots” are able to eat. God expects *all* God’s children to make sure that all the rest of God’s children have something to eat. My father’s words have haunted me for almost six decades!

As much as middle-income Americans hate to hear it (and rich Americans refuse to hear it), God cares very deeply about poor people. Psalm 40 in the Catholic Lectionary says it clearly, and the reading from Isaiah echoes the same truth. God expected justice from those made in God’s image, and bloodshed is what we gave God instead! God expected righteousness, and because we were greedy and not godly, all God heard was a cry for deliverance from those whom we defrauded.

The Lord of Hosts is exalted when justice prevails. Our way, however, does not honor or exalt God; in fact, our way of greed embarrasses the Lord of Hosts. The Lord of Hosts is a giving God; we are a greedy people.

The song of the vineyard shows, however, that there are consequences for dishonoring God. There are consequences for injustice and unrighteousness. Our behavior, like the behavior of the Northern Kingdom, brings about our own devastation, and as a result of our misbehavior, we end up asking for help after raising hell!

We deny others access to God’s good things. We face the consequences for our own choices and then ask God why God has done this to us, when the truth of the matter is that we have done “this” to ourselves! We do not ask God’s guidance before making bad choices, yet we ask God’s deliverance when we suffer the consequences of those choices.



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us of the ongoing nature of the process we are engaged in as a people of Promise. We are in a race, and in this race there are no time outs, no intermissions, and no rest stops. The race is ongoing, and we are encouraged to run the race with perseverance.

Sometimes we find ourselves asking soul-searching or existential questions like “Is this a rat race? Is there any purpose to this process? Am I on a treadmill going nowhere faster and faster?” Yet we find out that this indeed is *not* a rat race, but a righteous race because our encouragement comes from the great “cloud of witnesses” who have finished the race and who now sit (or stand) cheering us on in the grandstands surrounding us as we continue the race.

Many prisoners of South African apartheid on Robben Island did not see the promise fulfilled. They did not live to see the end of the apartheid system or see Nelson Mandela released and then elected. They were poor. They were black. They were hungry. They were denied. They watched their children die, or they saw their children killed, but they kept on running the race. And now they are in the grandstands cheering us on and encouraging us not to give up, not to stop running, not to lose hope!

The gospel passage asks us, in light of the end of apartheid, in light of the sanctions (and wars) against the world’s poorest (Iraq, Cuba, Afghanistan, Rwanda), as we run this race, can we interpret the present time? Where is God in the midst of this madness? Where should we be as God’s people?

Children’s Time

In the Special Olympics a few years ago, something happened that demonstrates the truth in today’s epistle reading in a marvelous manner. The Special Olympics is a group of games provided for persons who have physical challenges. There was a race in this particular year for children who had physical disabilities when it came to walking, running, or using their motor skills. It was a hundred-yard dash, and all the children were excited about being asked to run in the race.

When the starter gave the sign to go, all the children took off, trying their best to reach the finish line. One young boy with multiple sclerosis, however, stumbled and fell about five steps into the race. As the other children kept running, a little girl noticed that he had fallen. She stopped and yelled for the other children to look. They paused and watched her as she turned around to go back to help her fallen comrade get up. She put his arms around her shoulder and started out again for the finish line. All the other children came back to join her, to help her, and to make sure that their fallen comrade finished the race. They all crossed the finish line together!



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

What those children demonstrated in that year's Special Olympics is that the race we are in is not a race designed to see who finishes first! The race we are in is a race designed to make sure that all finish successfully!

We run in this Christian race to make sure that all God's children can get to the finish line. In that way we run with patience, and we run with perseverance. We are cheered on by those who have run ahead of us and who are happy to see that we have learned the lesson that it is not who finishes first, but that all finish together!

Musical Suggestions [LH]

Rejoice in God's Saints—The United Methodist Hymnal 708

O Day of God, Draw Nigh—Chalice Hymnal 700

For the Faithful Who Have Answered—The New Century Hymnal 384

Standing at the Future's Threshold—The New Century Hymnal 538



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C

© 2006 by the order of Saint Benedict, Inc.

Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Reprinted with permission.