



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

***September 5, 2010***

***Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time***

***Lehoma Goode***

RCL: Jeremiah 18:1-11; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Philemon 1-21; Luke 14:25-33

LM: Wisdom 9:13-18b; Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14-17; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33

People working for justice sometimes feel frustrated when it seems that things will never change. Jeremiah may have felt the same way, but he remains faithful, though not always popular or successful. Jeremiah in the potter's house is a story that shows God can reshape history. It calls people to declare that truth to those in power. What happens to nations is not fate, but the result of their own actions. Nations have the opportunity to change their actions to bring them in line with the good that God wants for all people. God's people in turn are responsible for calling the nations to do good and not evil. Although the language of this passage can seem threatening, the image of the potter shaping the clay is an important one for Christians. There is an intimate relationship between potter and clay, suggesting that God wants to give both nations and individuals another chance.

Psalm 139 treasures the close relationship between God and each individual person. God's presence is comforting, but God's thoughts are awesome and are beyond human thoughts. God is in charge and knows the psalmist completely. In times of disappointment, anger, or despair, those in such a close and trusting relationship with God may hear God's voice say, "I am leading you to something better" or "I will not leave you alone." Such a relationship provides a foundation for prophetic discipleship. Advocates for justice can trust the God described in this psalm to understand their motivations, give them hope, and assist them in their discernment.

The book of Philemon shows Paul, a skilled advocate, appealing for a transformed relationship. Paul wants to bring the apparently runaway slave Onesimus into a new status with Philemon, as a beloved brother. Paul's gentle but firm argument shows that he is a caring tactician, using all his resources to advocate for one who is marginalized and in danger. Philemon has supported Paul's ministry and the church personally and financially, yet this challenge would take him a step further in his discipleship. For Christians with a good track record on charity, advocacy for social change can be such a risky next step. It amounts to a new and freer way of seeing, a change in relationship.

In our congregation we have looked for ways to link the "next step" of advocacy to things we are already doing. We have held an Offering of Letters during Wednesday night fellowship suppers or refreshments after church. We requested permission from Sunday



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

School teachers to show a Bread for the World video in their classes and ask their students to write letters. In mission groups already committed to proclamation of the Gospel and charitable projects, we presented Bread for the World materials and invited these groups to join the hunger committee in advocacy education and writing to public officials.

The passage from Luke challenges Jesus' followers to realize that discipleship means reordered relationships. The challenge to "hate" ("detach from, enter into tension with") one's family suggests that for disciples, definitions of family may change. Those who are in need become family to us. The passage calls for counting the cost of our actions, remembering that some disciples have given up their possessions, or even life itself, for the Gospel. Advocacy for justice will cost us something, even if it is simply the courage to speak out.

In the Roman Catholic Lectionary, the Wisdom writer and the writer of Psalm 90 contrast human limitations with God's power. This disparity does not mean that humans should attempt nothing, but that we are not responsible for everything. Perhaps Christians, like Esther, are called "for such a time as this" to identify clearly the tasks to do at certain points in our historical lifetimes. Discerning these tasks calls for wisdom and counsel from God. Advocates seek God's guidance in planning their work, and God's love and support, often felt through each other, bring joy to the task.

### *Children's Time*

If possible, give each child a piece of clay. Demonstrate how clay can be shaped into something that the potter wants to make. Point out that clay can be reshaped if we're not pleased with what we first make. Talk about what kind of life God wants us to live. What can we do to help become that kind of person? Let the children know that when we make mistakes in life, we can learn from them and try again.

### *Musical Suggestions*

Spirit of the Living God—Banquet of Praise 102, 103

O God, Our Help in Ages Past—Banquet of Praise 123, Gather Comprehensive 614

Be Thou My Vision—Banquet of Praise 99

We Lift Our Hands, O God, in Praise—Banquet of Praise 171

Lord, When You Came/Pescador de Hombres—Gather Comprehensive 696



**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.