



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

***September 19, 2010***

***Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time***

***Mark Nygard***

RCL: Jeremiah 8:18–9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

LM: Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; Luke 16:1-13 or 16:10-13

How striking, in the passage from Jeremiah, that the prophet identifies so passionately with his people in the disaster they're enduring (here probably a drought). He declares that he is sick at heart, grieved, dismayed at their misfortune, actually experiencing their hurt. Twice in three verses he calls them endearingly "my poor people." How striking, because they are far from a sinless people. In previous chapters the prophet repeatedly names their idolatries and calls them to repent, lest the Lord's fierce anger make the land a desolation.

Would that we were as passionate about people in our day as those described in this Sunday's texts. Are we passionate about those who trample on needy people and bring those who are poor to ruin for the sake of the only thing that counts, namely, profit for themselves (Amos)? Are we passionate about those whose bodies are left as carrion for the wild animals and whose blood is poured out like water (Psalm 79)? Passion about the issue of hunger combines concern for "the oppressor" and concern for "the oppressed." Our concern is for those whose lifestyle creates the hunger cycle as well as for those whose lives wither because of it. Our concern extends to the impending consequences of a hungry world for those responsible, as well as the realized consequences for those who are its cruel victims. Can we passionately address the sated, "my poor people," while we see the dangers of an imbalanced world come upon them? And can we passionately address hungry people, likewise "my poor people," as the prospect or reality of hunger twists their lives before our eyes? Would that we were that passionate.

Prayer is the vehicle of passion in 1 Timothy. Prayer for those who are poor means prayer for government—for "kings and all who are in high positions." Once again, the concern is multilevel: not only for the people affected, but for the people who are in a position to change the way they are affected. The yearning is for a "quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" for everyone (v. 2). This down-to-earth definition of humankind's goal is strongly connected to what follows by the introduction to verse 3. It suggests that the salvation of verse 4 and the Savior of verse 3 should not be divorced from well-being in this earthly life. Christ's works in verses 5 and 6, as "mediator" and "ransom," have this-worldly implications, and our world-to-come definitions of salvation must be broadened to include wholeness here as well.



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Luke 16:1-9 is probably one of the preacher's trickiest texts in the church year. It is tricky because, at first blush, Jesus seems to condone the dishonest steward's double-mindedness, as he uses his master's authority to cancel debts and thereby curry favor where he can. The point of the story is not the character of its "hero," the dishonest steward, but rather the urgency of the situation, which requires quick action like the steward's to set things aright. Jesus' parable lifts up the steward's awareness of this urgency and his rapid response.

Passion and urgency go together. When we realize that hunger destroys people's lives on both sides of the poverty line, our imaginations should reach new levels of determination and creativity. Maybe boundaries of propriety need to be crossed in the effort to end hunger. Maybe international debts actually need to be reduced (Luke 16:6-7). Maybe the accepted structures of economic exchange actually need to be reexamined. Maybe the urgency of twisted lives requires an unorthodox and passionate response.

If we are passionate for God and God's people, then we will use all our means (including money, influence, and power) for God and God's people. If our passion is for wealth or for other things, then we will use what we have accordingly. Our faithfulness or unfaithfulness in stewarding even modest resources (vv. 10-13) will identify our master, the driver of our passion. The gospel text invites us to search our hearts and calls us to account for the passion that is in us. The text also encourages us to consider whether the Lord, who is concerned for those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, and sick and who cares for strangers and those in prison has his unique place in our hearts.

### *Children's Time*

I wonder how many of you know what it means to be "passionate" about something? [Conversation time.] Passionate means that you care very deeply about someone or something. [Now open a box containing a mother cat with kittens, or a hamster with its babies, or maybe a bundle containing a real baby.] How do you think a mother feels about her little ones? Wouldn't she do just about anything to help them because she cares so deeply about them? That's the way God feels about people who are hungry or poor or sad. He invites us to be passionate about helping them.

### *Musical Suggestions*

Shine, Jesus, Shine—With One Voice—A Lutheran Resource for Worship 551

Where Restless Crowds Are Thronging—Lutheran Book of Worship 430

Christian Hearts, in Love United—Moravian Book of Worship 673

Rise, Shine, You People!—Lutheran Book of Worship 393



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Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C

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