



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

**October 17, 2010**

**Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Warren Clark**

RCL: Jeremiah 31:27-34; Psalm 119:97-104; 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5; Luke 18:1-8  
LM: Exodus 17:8-13; Psalm 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8; 2 Timothy 3:14–4:2; Luke 18:1-8

The passage from Jeremiah describes God’s new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (v. 33). This covenant is not one that priests will mediate but is a direct connection between God and the restored people.

In the text from Luke, Jesus tells the story of the widow who persistently holds up her vision of justice to a judge who is not really interested in dispensing fairness. She wears him down and finally gets justice.

These passages urge us to be persistent and patient as we speak and to act in ways that call into being the vision of basic justice that we have learned from Scripture, study, and stillness of Spirit. One of my favorite stories, *Rafts on the River*, illustrates this theme: There once was a nice town by a big river. The closest town upstream or downstream was a hundred miles away. One day a raft with twenty children on board beached near the town. The children were hungry and in rags. It was beautiful to see how the townspeople rushed to pick them up, carried them into their homes, and cared for them as their own.

About a month later another raft of hungry children arrived. Several families who hadn’t taken a child the first time offered to do so this time. At a town hall meeting they tried to decide how to pay for the care of the children. They decided to raise their taxes. It wasn’t pretty!

When another raft arrived a month later, people ran down to the riverbank. Some began yelling, “We can’t handle any more poor children! They must be sent down the river!” Others shouted, “But if we do that, they’ll surely starve to death!” Finally, the town took in this last group of children.

Guess what happened the next month! Sentries were posted up the river. When the alarm sounded, everyone in town rushed to the shore. As the raft with more hungry

1. Phillip Bosserman and Stanley Parker, *More of Us than You Think: Searchers for a Post-Capitalist World* (Warner, NH: Silver Books Press/Writers Publishing Cooperative, 2003).
2. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2004*.



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children came around the bend, several people with long poles waded out into the river. The children on the raft pleaded for help. Factions of people on the shore screamed at each other as the men with long poles pushed the raft out into the current. While the raft slowly floated out of sight, fighting broke out on the shore. Never had the town been so divided. But in all this time, not once did the townspeople think about sending a canoe upriver to find out why all the hungry children were floating down the river. Not once did they think about trying to find out what could be done to head off the problems.

Perhaps that town felt isolated, not realizing that others cared. A recent book points out that many people are working for change, which should give us courage and hope<sup>1</sup>.

When we write letters to our elected officials about hunger, homelessness, and poverty, it's like sending a canoe upriver to Washington and our state capitals. It's a way to get at the causes of the problems our communities face, generation after generation. Just like those rafts that keep coming down the river, more than 10.6 million people live in households that experience hunger in the world's richest nation!<sup>2</sup> For generations, migrant farm workers have worked unbelievably hard but can't always feed their children. Our letters say to our elected officials, "We care about these real human problems. We have solutions. This is what we want you to do about it." It takes persistence. It is our way to hold up to the people in power the vision of basic justice that we learned from Scripture, study, and the "still small voice."

Former U.S. senator Paul Simon once said, "Someone who sits down and writes a letter about hunger almost literally has to be saving a life." That's because so few people write on hunger and poverty, and so many millions of dollars—and lives—are at stake. An empowering moment is when people in poverty write letters from their lived experience on behalf of others who are poor! Many non-profit human service programs and congregational outreach efforts (like food pantries and SHARE distributions) provide excellent opportunities for people to write from their own experience with poverty, low wages, and inadequate social services. "I got a letter back from Senator Graham!" said Mrs. Klemm. "When they write me back, I know it's done some good."

### *Children's Time* [LH]

Trying to summarize Warren's story about children floating down the river may be too traumatic for your children to understand. Try bringing a letter you or someone else has written to Congress, and the reply you've received, to illustrate Senator Simon's point that when we speak out for justice, every letter counts. Our nation's leaders can make a

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big difference in making sure that our country's laws are just and help provide poor people with enough to eat. Children can write to Congress too—remind them of that!

*Musical Suggestions* [LH]

Sois la Semilla (You Are the Seed)—The United Methodist Hymnal 583

Deep Within—Gather Comprehensive 399

Live Into Hope—The Presbyterian Hymnal 332

Sing Hey for the Carpenter—Gather Comprehensive 692

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C  
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