



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

November 14, 2010

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Fred Morris

RCL: Isaiah 65:17-25; Isaiah 12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

LM: Malachi 3:19-20a; Psalm 98:5-6, 7-8, 9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12; Luke 21:5-19

One of the major problems church folks have in facing terrible things like hunger and poverty or so-called acts of God like tornados, hurricanes, and earthquakes is that we have a strong tendency to want to assume these things happen because God wants them to. We often use the phrase “thy will be done” as an escape clause to help us deal with what we call “unanswered prayer.” We want to maintain God’s sovereignty, which is commendable, but in actual practice it can lead to a kind of conformity with the way things are.

Isaiah makes it abundantly clear that God’s will is not for bad things to happen but rather for a world of joy and abundance and fulfillment. God’s reign includes plenty of everything for all. And we, as God’s people, are called to work toward that goal at all times, even as we await God’s action in history to complete that dream. We can never sit by and quote Jesus out of context by saying, “The poor will always be with you.” Poverty does endure, but Isaiah makes it clear that this is not the way God wants things to be and that we are called to work toward a world where all enjoy the abundant life.

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul insists that we have a right to eat, even though the specific case he discusses is about people who wanted to live off the efforts of others. Clearly we are called to “toil and labor. . . so that we might not burden any” (v. 8). But in today’s world many people labor long and hard and still go hungry.

The growing movement in the United States working for a Living Wage testifies eloquently to the scandal that millions of people in this, the world’s richest country, work forty hours or more a week and still live in poverty because they are not paid a living wage. In other parts of the world people starve while looking at vacant land that belongs to a few incredibly wealthy families that hoard their land for a “rainy day” and won’t allow its cultivation to feed hungry people. Both cases are a clear call to God’s people to take part in the struggle for justice in permitting all to work so they can eat. Except for exceptional cases of physical or mental disability, nearly all people are happy to work for their and their family’s “daily bread.” But the structures of our societies too often do not allow them to do so.

Luke’s Gospel talks about the end time, which has always been a problem for the Church. We believe firmly that God will someday complete the establishment of God’s



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reign—a place where all will enjoy justice and abundant life. But there is a lot of confusion about when, where, and how.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, spent most of his life traveling on horseback across England to share the Good News with people who were not welcome in the Church. He tells in his journal that one night, after preaching to about five hundred people gathered in and around a cottage in a village in the countryside, he was walking toward the home where he would spend the night. A small group approached him and said: “Dr. Wesley, this is our Sister Mary, who is a prophetess. She has received a revelation from God that the world is going to end tonight at midnight.” To which Wesley responded by saying, “I’m glad to meet you,” and with a tip of his hat he started walking off toward his host’s home. The group ran after him, saying, “Dr. Wesley, you didn’t understand, the world is going to end tonight! What are you going to do?” “Well,” replied Wesley, “I’m going to bed. You see, if our good Sister is correct, I will wake up in Glory with Jesus. But if she is mistaken, I must get up at four-thirty and ride thirty miles on horseback to the place where I am to preach tomorrow evening. Good evening.”

It is exciting, and sometimes comforting, to think about Christ’s Second Coming, but Wesley was right: we have a lot of work to do in the meantime.

Children’s Time [LH]

Draw on Isaiah 65:21 to underscore for the children the importance of housing and food for all God’s people. If your church is involved with Habitat for Humanity or other housing improvement projects, lift up those ministries by bringing a hammer and some nails. If your mission program is connected to soup kitchens or food pantries or a food bank, bring some canned food or other edibles to illustrate that. Remind the children that the prophet Isaiah pointed to secure homes and reliable access to food as two characteristics of the restored community when Israel was in exile far from home. God wants those things for everyone.

Musical Suggestions

It Is Well with My Soul—The United Methodist Hymnal 377

Behold a Broken World—The United Methodist Hymnal 426

For the Healing of the Nations—The United Methodist Hymnal 428

What Does the Lord Require—The United Methodist Hymnal 441

There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy—The United Methodist Hymnal 121



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