



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

March 14, 2010
Fourth Sunday of Lent
Ed and Lou Brandt

RCL: Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

LM: Joshua 5:9a, 10-12; Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Are God's gifts enough for all people everywhere? This Sunday's readings amplify what we heard last week.

The writer of Joshua recounts the story of Israel's people eating the Passover in the plains of Jericho and the next day beginning to eat the produce of the land—unleavened cakes and parched grain. Manna, one of God's wilderness staples, ceases. God's providence does not end; it simply comes in a different, settled form.

In the book *Manna and Mercy*,¹ Daniel Erlander reviews how the people of Israel carry a box, the ark of the covenant, containing stone tablets of the law and a jar of manna. Looking frequently at these covenant gifts, they remember the lessons learned in "wilderness school." Entering their new home, the tribes divide the land according to need. None has too much or too little, and they understand that land is now their "manna."

How would "manna economics" look today, especially regarding landowner and stewardship? Consider ground used to provide fresh produce. Is it the property of family farmers, or is it corporately owned? Are workers who tend it paid a living wage? Is it providing for the local common good?

In Psalm 32 God fulfills the promise to deliver the people from trouble. We acknowledge our sin and turn to God, trusting in divine forgiveness and surrounded with steadfast love. Manna for the soul—provided daily!

1. Daniel Erlander, *Manna and Mercy (A Brief History of God's Unfolding Promise to Mend the Entire Universe)*, (Mercer Island, Wash.: The Order of Saints Martin and Teresa, 1992).



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Psalm 34 relates how the writer glories in the Lord “that the poor may hear and be glad” (v. 3). The Lord delivers from all our fears, misfortune, and distress, and takes special care for those who are vulnerable.

The apostle Paul, in the passage from 2 Corinthians, speaks of God in Christ becoming our sin, delivering and reconciling us through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Thus Christ’s family are ministers of reconciliation, sent to entreat all to seek renewed relationship with God our Creator.

How does this message of deliverance come through in a country like the United States of America, which has so much? Political leaders end their addresses to the American people with “God bless America!” God has blessed and continues to bless this nation with great abundance. Yet how many of us grab on to God’s gifts and claim them as “ours,” not to be shared with others who come to the U.S. to find food and work? As blessed people, in a country of plenty, it is our commission and responsibility to welcome sojourners and to share with one another, trusting that the Giver will continue to provide for our needs. We are all “guests” who share in God’s marvelous creation.

Pharisees and scribes complain that Jesus welcomes sinners and “eats with them,” prompting our Lord to speak the parable of the forgiving father and two brothers, one the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). God’s unconditional love never runs out, for either son. God provides enough, and we never need to worry about sharing God’s gifts for fear of being left empty. As Jesus enlarged his table to include outsiders, how can we do the same? Listening to those who are poor and standing with them as they speak for empowerment are important ways to do that!

In the book *Nickel and Dimed*,² Barbara Ehrenreich notes, however, that the U.S. working poor have become invisible to most middle- and upper-income groups. A professional writer, Ehrenreich toils in six different minimum-wage jobs in Florida, Maine, and Minnesota—waiting on tables, cleaning homes, and selling women’s wear—trying to provide her own clothing, food, health care, housing, and transportation. Her account of this struggle makes a challenging reflection/discussion guide for middle- and upper-income folks. Many of us are unaware of, or insensitive to, low-wage workers, who frequently are marginalized by inadequate education and vocational training and by cultural barriers, and who lack reliable, reasonably priced transportation, child care,

2. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Owl Books, 2001).



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or places to live. How can U.S. social classes share more space to become more responsive to one another and to share their common struggle for economic justice?

Children's Time

Bring in some fresh basil. Tell the children that it is fun to grow plants to eat, like this basil, a very tasty and aromatic herb (offer them a smell). There are so many ways to enjoy the leaves after you pinch or cut them—on sandwiches, in soups and salads, or dried in spaghetti. A wonderful thing about herbs is that you can take leaves and they grow back, to be enjoyed again and again, week after week. Throughout the Bible, God shows time after time that there is plenty for all. Examples? Manna in the wilderness for Israel. (Daniel Erlander says, “Hoarding stinks! Recall what happened when Israel tried to keep more manna than it needed.”³) Jesus and his disciples feeding five thousand people with a little bread and fish. The wonderful capacity creation has to grow and renew! Think and talk about some ways that God gives you and all the world's people what you need, how to enjoy it and share it with others.

Musical and Liturgical Suggestions

Help Us Accept Each Other—*Banquet of Praise* 186

The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor— *Banquet of Praise* 109

Praise the Living God Who Sings— *Banquet of Praise* 118

Trav'ling, Trav'ling over the World (Break the Bread of Belonging)—*Banquet of Praise*
189

Affirmation of Faith— *Banquet of Praise* 35

3. Erlander, *Manna and Mercy*, 8.



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