



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

May 2, 2010
Fifth Sunday of Easter
Mary Newbern-Williams

RCL: Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35
LM: Acts 14:21-27; Psalm 145:8-9, 10-11, 12-13; Revelation 21:1-5a;
John 13:31-33a, 34-35

In May 2002 four members of Sheppards and Lapsley Presbytery in Alabama (where I served at the time) undertook a mission trip to Oaxaca, Mexico, to meet with Church officials and to plan a covenant relationship. We learned a great deal about the country, its people, its history, and its plans for the future. The powerful stories they shared with us have remained in my soul. The Church officials who told these stories have devoted their lives and their ministries to the fight for justice and religious freedom.

One of those stories lifted up Jesus' and Peter's words in today's lessons. We learned that many years ago a slave ship sank near the southern shore in Mexico. When the Africans on the ship made it to shore, the indigenous Indian people welcomed them. The Africans remained in that area, learning to live among their sisters and brothers who had accepted them into their land. The area, Santo Domingo, is part of the Presbytery of Oaxaca. The people are proud of their heritage, and the presbytery is proud to claim this area within its geographical and faith boundaries. This story illustrates the love that people can hold for one another and how our work for peace and harmony can be embodied in human kindness.

The world is still embroiled in the struggle over race, gender, age, and religious freedom. In some parts of the world, slavery still exists, and those who are victims see no way out. Numerous other struggles demand our attention. Although we have made many strides, we have not arrived. Therefore the struggle continues, for as long as inequalities exist, human beings will engage in the fight for justice. Marginalized people will continue to keep the struggle at the forefront, in hopes that the new heaven and the new earth to which Revelation refers can be realized, even in this lifetime. John's vision points us to the need for continuing the struggle for justice and the knowledge that God in Christ empowers us with the strength to be victorious.

Can that amazing vision occur on earth, in the life as we know and experience it now? Can we take to heart and treasure Peter's words in Acts, which urge us not to make distinctions between people of diverse backgrounds? "The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us" (v. 12). Can we refrain from judging



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others and comparing them with ourselves? How do we really view people who are different in culture, lifestyle, or race?

It is possible for human beings to reach that place of “shalom” as we live out our lives in today’s world. As long as human will supersedes God’s will, peace will not occur. As long as nations fight against each other without realizing the devastating effects that conflict has on people, we will not enjoy the beauty of learning from one another. When human beings assume that some are superior to others or allow a portion of the community to live in poverty, John’s vision in Revelation will not occur on earth.

We are reminded daily of the privileged circumstances in which many of us live. We enjoy conveniences that others do not experience or possess, living in comfortable homes, driving to and from our places of business, enrolling our children in good schools, and helping them plan for their futures. It is crucial to accept these things as gifts and never to take them for granted, remembering that God has placed us into positions in which we can effect change, advocate for others, and pray for their well-being. As people who are often considered “privileged” by many standards, we are called to care for others. Caring for others is a means of responding to Christ’s unconditional love. Even in an imprisoned state, John never stopped sharing his vision with the seven churches. God still empowered him to envision a better day and a new heaven and a new earth.

We are responsible for working with those who struggle with issues of inequality, poverty, and injustice, and to associate with organizations committed to justice and equality. When we do this work, we show the love to which Jesus referred in John 13: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (v. 34).

Children’s Time [Larry Hollar]

Ask the children if they are all alike. In some ways they are, but in many ways they are different. Note some of those ways. If there is racial diversity among the children, include that among the ways that God’s beloved children are different. Tell a story about ways in which God’s people live together peacefully despite their differences. There may be a story locally in your area, or Mary Newbern-Williams’ shipwreck story is an interesting one. Think of ways in which children can celebrate diversity in their midst.



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Musical Suggestions [Larry Hollar]

Brothers and Sisters of Mine Are the Hungry—*Banquet of Praise* 148

Faithful Family—*Gather Comprehensive* 413

One Is the Body— *Gather Comprehensive* 846

Here in This Place— *Gather Comprehensive* 839

We Are Your People—*The New Century Hymnal* 309

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