



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

March 21, 2010
Fifth Sunday of Lent
Ed and Lou Brandt

RCL: Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8
LM: Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6; Philippians 3:8-14;
John 8:1-11

As we travel to the culmination of our Lenten journey, this Sunday's lessons move us to remember God's mighty acts in former times and proclaim a remarkable new deliverance.

Isaiah 43 speaks of a "new thing" that God is about to do, a new act to quench the thirst of God's chosen so that they can declare God's praise.

Psalm 126 recalls the Lord's "restoring the fortunes of Zion" and the great rejoicing that accompanied it. The psalmist pleads for a new restoration, as abundant as the water that flows in the Negeb, to turn weeping into shouts of joy.

St. Paul, in the letter to the Philippians, contrasts his former days of being "righteous under the law" with this "new thing" that God has done—righteousness and a new deliverance through Jesus Christ.

In John 12, Mary recognizes this "new thing" in Jesus, giving praise as she anoints his feet with expensive oil. This display of devotion reminds us that genuine praise is at the heart of our servanthood.

Jesus, in John 8, welcomes an adulterous woman. Rather than condemn her, he offers deliverance and a fresh start with the encouraging words, "Go and sin no more."

Those who are poor in our world find it hard to gain society's acceptance because they do not "measure up" with a college degree, a prestigious job, or a position of importance on the city council or local school board. Yet St. Paul refers to these "confidences of the flesh," or social positions, as rubbish compared with the new deliverance through faith that Christ offers to all people. Christ breaks down distinctions of the flesh and gives all of us equal worth. How do we praise God and thankfully respond to this deliverance? Can we accept one another according to God's deliverance through Christ rather than measuring worth by the position each achieves within society—these "confidences of the flesh"?



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Does our praise response include working to relieve the pain of those who are poor? There are concrete ways to put praise into practice, such as accompanying low-wage workers who are unionizing for just wages and conditions. An article in the *Christian Century* highlights efforts of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice to pressure the U.S. Department of Labor to crack down on an abusive labor practice in the poultry industry.¹ Companies failed to compensate workers who were owed hundreds of millions of dollars for time they had worked but for which they had not been paid. “We’re trying to help get back some of the money they’ve stolen from the workers,” says committee staffer Leone Jose Bicchieri.

For over eighty years another religious coalition, National Farm Worker Ministry, has linked people of faith with farm workers’ struggle for justice through non-violent action, such as legislative advocacy, field accompaniments, vigils, pickets, and consumer boycotts. Rev. Steve Witte, executive director of Oregon Farm Worker Ministry, an affiliate, relates, “I believe that we are involved in a holy work . . . no one is free as long as others are oppressed. Upon seeing conditions of workers, I realized that this is an issue of civil rights . . . Workers’ rights are being ignored and abused. From a moral and ethical standpoint, I have to do something.”

Another way we can support justice for workers is through solidarity with our pocketbook. As people of faith, we are free to do business with companies that recognize workers’ right to union representation and negotiate in good faith with workers for decent pay, working and living conditions, and benefits. The simple act of looking for a union label on food, according to National Farm Worker Ministry, helps the shared goal of bringing justice and fairness to those who “set our tables.”

Children’s Time

Bring in three or four paper dolls (possibly multicultural), all dressed the same, and ask the children, “What can you tell me about each of these dolls?” Now dress them in different clothes indicating varying levels of affluence. Ask the children, “Now what can you tell me about each of these dolls just by looking at them?” God has sent Jesus to be our deliverer, to gather each of us in his arms because he loves us so much. We aren’t worth more to God because we can dress well or because we do well in school or in sports. God’s love is for every person, and every person is of great value to God because Jesus has died for each of us. Now we can praise and thank God by treating each other with great respect and caring. We can see each person as a gift from God.

1. William Bole, “Religion-labor group faults fowl factories,” *Christian Century* (September 11–24, 2002) 18–19.



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Musical Suggestions

Christ Is the Truth, the Way—*Banquet of Praise* 179

When the Poor Ones (Cuando el Pobre)— *Banquet of Praise* 154

Lord Jesus, If I Love and Serve My Neighbor— *Banquet of Praise* 95

New Days Are Coming— *Banquet of Praise* 142

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