



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

February 7, 2010
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Robert Tiller and Derrick Boykin

RCL: Isaiah 6:1-8(9-13); Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

LM: Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8; Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or 15:3-8, 11; Luke 5:1-11

[*Editor's note:* In the following reflection, Bob and Derrick were invited to engage in a dialogue about the passages.]

Bob Tiller's Reflection

Most Christians are concerned about hunger and poverty, and they know that God is concerned about it, but few will take action to change things. Fewer still are willing to be advocates to our nation's decision makers about policies and budgets that affect poor and hungry people. Why?

One major reason is that many people believe that they are not right for the job, that they are not worthy, pure, or skilled enough. It is easy to think, "I don't have the faith or the strength to tackle the hunger issue for God."

Today's Scriptures provide God's response to that normal human feeling. In Luke's story the size of the catch of fish so awes Simon Peter that he feels unworthy and tells Jesus to go away, but Jesus replies, "Do not be afraid" (5:10). Simon and the others then leave everything and follow Jesus. In the passage from Isaiah the prophet likewise focuses on his unworthiness, but the angel blots out his sin and enables him to say with conviction, "Here am I; send me!" (6:8). In 1 Corinthians, Paul relates that while he is the "least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle" (15:9), God's grace nevertheless enables him to work harder than all the other apostles to fulfill God's intentions. The author of Psalm 138 affirms that "the Lord will fulfill his purpose for me," even "though I walk in the midst of trouble" (vv. 7-8).

A number of years ago a small group of Christians from Pennsylvania decided that they should actively press their congressman, a conservative Republican, to vote for the Civil Rights Restoration Act, a major bill coming up in the House of Representatives. The congressman had already made known his intention to vote against the bill, but two dozen faithful church members sent telegrams to him anyway, urging him to support the bill. Their effort caused him to rethink his views, and in the end he chose not to vote



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either way on it. The bill passed overwhelmingly, so his vote would not have made much difference. But that's not the end of the story. The president vetoed that civil rights bill, so it came back to Congress for a veto override vote. This time each vote was crucial, because two-thirds were needed for the override. The congressman voted in favor of the override, helping the bill become law. He said that a key factor in his change of position was the clear, strong expression of support for the bill from concerned people of faith in his district.

Those Pennsylvanians were, of course, part of a larger network of advocates who helped get that legislation passed, but they played a key role in getting it done. Perhaps they felt some twinges of fear or even unworthiness as they wrote their telegrams, but they knew God's promises, they lived in God's grace, and they responded to God's call to faithful action on behalf of oppressed people.

Derrick Boykin's Response

If we are not careful, our feelings of unworthiness, impurity, or even inexperience can prevent us from doing God's work. It is easy to become preoccupied with our inabilities and shortcomings, so much so that it leaves us in a state of inaction. It is difficult to believe that God, who is holy and pure, can use men, women, boys, and girls who have lived and acted in the profane. But God does.

Facing up to our feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, or sinfulness in the light of God's holiness and righteousness is a necessary step if God is to use us as instruments of God's justice. Simon Peter, the prophet Isaiah, the Apostle Paul, the Pennsylvanians above, and innumerable other men and women of God inside and outside Scripture share in this experience. In contrast to God's virtue, the men and women whom God commissions will always identify their own faults and failures. But in spite of that, they will also recognize God's readiness to forgive and empower, which frees them to work with supreme confidence on behalf of poor and hungry people in our nation and around the world.

Bob Tiller's Reply

One of the most amazing dimensions of our faith is that God is willing to forgive each of us and to empower us to work for justice. What a wonderful God we worship, who knows our failures yet says, "Your sin is blotted out. Don't be afraid. I am sending you to do my work in the world."



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Children's Time [Derrick Boykin]

Childhood is filled with frightening things. Some children are scared of the dark, while others are scared of being alone. Some children are scared of insects, older siblings, the boogiemán, starting a new school—and the list goes on. Most of these fears come from the unknown. In today's reading Simon Peter, one of Jesus' oldest disciples, also shows fear because of the unknown. Simon Peter is fearful because he recognizes that he is standing in the presence of God's Son, and he also knows that he has made many mistakes in the past. In response to Simon's fear, Jesus tells him to not be afraid, for God is going to use him to do great works. Children and adults struggle with fear, but God is able to help us overcome our fear so that we can do God's work.

Musical Suggestions [Larry Hollar]

Here I Am, Lord—*The Presbyterian Hymnal* 525

We Are Called—*Gather Comprehensive* 718

You Shall Cross the Barren Desert (Be Not Afraid)—*Banquet of Praise* 208

You Are Mine—*Faith We Sing* 2218

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C
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