



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

May 16, 2010
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Mary Newbern-Williams

RCL: Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21;
John 17:20-26

LM: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 97:1-2, 6-7, 9; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17,
20; John 17:20-26

Psalm 97 describes a just and loving God. In our relationship with others and with creation, we who worship and praise God must be just and loving. If we treat creation in a loving way, then we will be concerned with issues of justice and righteousness, for that is what God requires (Mic 6:8). We will seek a right relationship with God and with humanity.

By the Seventh Sunday of Easter we have celebrated the ascension of Jesus Christ and are preparing for Pentecost. The resurrection's power is still fresh in the congregation's minds and hearts. The Scriptures for this Sunday share strong messages of justice and caring, and many congregations respond with food drives, fundraising campaigns, and service programs.

A vital part of acting in a just and caring way is working for those who are poor and disenfranchised. Bread for the World uses the best of its gifts and resources to advocate for those who live in conditions of poverty and hunger. The work that Bread for the World does keeps the needs of our sisters and brothers before the world so that others can commit and policymaking institutions can become sensitized.

Justice and caring take many forms. Some churches and groups work through food pantries and food drives, volunteer their services in shelters, and teach youth and young adults the spirit of caring. Some support organizations committed to more long-term assistance with poor people, including rent and utility assistance, job training, financial management, and ongoing assistance with food. Still others, like churches and campuses associated with Bread for the World, advocate in additional long-term ways. The power of the resurrection and the new life in Christ challenge us to greater heights of love and caring for our fellow human beings.

Acts 16, in recounting Paul and Silas's journey and their time in prison, lifts up God's ability to change the heart even of a jailer. Just when it seems that Paul and Silas have

1. James M. Washington, *Conversations with God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994)
xxx.



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

no hope and no way out, God makes a way for God's servants. For anyone who has experienced the oppressiveness of a jail cell and the attitude of some who administer jails, this is an amazing story.

This jailer experiences the transforming power of Jesus Christ when he sees that Paul and Silas have not escaped. He becomes a believer in God, takes Paul and Silas to his home, cares for them, feeds them, and leads his entire family into a life of faith. He seeks a right relationship with God and with humanity, beginning with Paul and Silas. God in Christ can change even the hardest hearts or the least suspecting souls.

The Easter season deals with themes of life, death, hope, caring, justice, and mission. It shows us that from the empty tomb to the ascension to the day of Pentecost, Jesus Christ remains the center. He can be trusted to keep his promise, to meet people where they are, and to obey Almighty God. Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can cause the forces of nature to break the chains in a jail cell as well as the chains of unbelief, bringing unbelievers to faith and faithful servants to continued service and care for all.

The theme of caring continues in John's Gospel, where Jesus prays for the Church and its unity and for the indwelling of the Spirit of love. Jesus' prayer truly puts others' needs before his own, as he appeals to God on our behalf. In John 17, Jesus prays for the Church, and as we experience the Easter event, we pray for the world.

Prayer is a powerful tool. Dr. James M. Washington says that prayer is when we "count the stars of our souls."¹ The prayer Jesus models brings us in touch with a God who loves human beings in spite of ourselves and who redeems us from the bondage of sin, selfishness, and shame over and over again in the name of Jesus Christ. God's love breaks the chains of bondage and injustice, breaks the chains of sin and shame, and breaks the chains of unbelief.

Children's Time [LH]

Remind the children that when some people do very bad things, they may wind up in prison. Even though Paul and Silas didn't do anything bad, they were in prison (singing through the night!), but yet they didn't run away when they had a chance. In gratitude and amazement, the jailer becomes a believer. Without encountering Paul and Silas, that jailer might never have known Jesus. We learn from other people, even people very different from ourselves, what wonderful things God can do. We learn from Paul and Silas—and the jailer—how to give our lives to God.

Musical Suggestions [LH]

1. James M. Washington, *Conversations with God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994) xxx.



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

Help Us Accept Each Other—The Presbyterian Hymnal 358

O God of Earth and Altar—The New Century Hymnal 582

Come and Find the Quiet Center—The Faith We Sing 2128

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C

1. James M. Washington, *Conversations with God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994)
xxx.



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

© 2006 by the order of Saint Benedict, Inc.
Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.
Reprinted with permission.

1. James M. Washington, *Conversations with God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994)
xxx.