



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

## **December 4, 2011, Second Sunday of Advent**

*By Marvin A. McMickle*

Isaiah 40:1–11

Psalms 85:1–2, 8–13

2 Peter 3:8–15a

Mark 1:1–8

### **Introduction**

Advent is a time of waiting for the realm of God. But Advent waiting is not sitting silently with folded hands while God magically establishes the realm. Advent waiting is active: we not only join God in the movement toward the realm, but, as much as possible, we live as if the realm is already here. Today's readings call attention to different aspects of active waiting. Isaiah urges us to be patient, even if we suffer for our sins. The psalm reminds us that God will bless a nation that puts justice for all into action, and God will punish a nation that privileges a few at the expense of the many. The passage from 2 Peter encourages us toward holy living as our means of holy waiting. John the Baptist calls us to repent of our complicity with injustice as we wait for the coming realm. Taken together, these passages urge us to work as we wait for the realm of God.

### **Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13**

This psalm reinforces the message of Isaiah 40. The nation of Israel has suffered greatly because of sin. However, God has restored the fortunes of the people and forgiven their sins. They have seen God's fierce anger (v. 3), but now the cry is for God's "steadfast love" (v. 7). God gives a second chance to those who do "not turn back to folly" (v. 8). God's mercy and grace are available to "those who fear [God]" (v. 9). Has Israel learned anything as a result of having been exiled in Babylon for so long? Will they return to a life of faithfulness and obedience to God? Will they abandon the idolatry and injustice that earned God's displeasure? All of that is to be determined, but for the moment God is set once again to pour out blessings upon the land that has recently been punished: "The Lord will give what is good and our land will yield its increase" (v. 12).

What remains is for the people of God to understand that they had been chosen not for special treatment but for special service. God had chosen Israel not only to bless them but also to demonstrate what can happen when any nation keeps faith with God by showing justice, mercy, and love toward all, especially the most needy and vulnerable. God has shown love and faithfulness to Israel. If the people show those same traits to one another, "The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase." This psalm applies to the contemporary United States as much as it did to ancient Israel. We are at a crossroads. The greed of a few brought about the massive economic collapse that began in 2008 and has caused suffering for people of every income level, race, and ethnicity. The nation has a choice: We can repeat the mistakes of our past, or we can create a new economy that is based on managing the nation's wealth for the good of all.