



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

***April 2, 2010***  
***Good Friday***  
***Art Simon***

RCL: Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1–19:42

LM: Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1–19:42

Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant reveals the heart of the Gospel, depicting the one who has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," who was "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities," and who became "an offering for sin." Combined with today's Psalm 22 and the texts from the Letter to the Hebrews, and above all the crucifixion of Jesus, we see not only the Christ who took our sins upon himself but a God and Savior who deeply understands human suffering, painfully suffering with us as well as for us. The "us" includes all humankind. We cannot detach God's compassion for ourselves from God's compassion for others and Jesus' identification with the suffering of others, especially the oppressed poor and socially rejected, as his own ministry demonstrated. This calls us to reflect deeply on God's intentions for us regarding the suffering of others, especially in view of our comparative wealth and privilege. Surely the awesome justice and compassion that God extends to us through the cross cries out for us to extend such justice and compassion to others.

I read of two young African boys who froze to death on an airplane flying from West Africa to Brussels. Desperate to flee their impoverished homeland and get an education, they stowed away in the landing gear. They left behind a letter that said: "We suffer enormously in Africa. Help us. . . . We have war and illness, we lack food. . . . We want to study, and we ask you to help us to study so we can be like you, in Africa."<sup>1</sup>

What will we do to help, we who are so prosperous and who belong to the one who said, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor"? What does the sacrifice of God's own Son mean for us in relation to these two boys and their hundred million counterparts?

Hebrews 10 invokes Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant anchored in the forgiveness of sins and brought into being by Jesus' own life-giving sacrifice. The striking thing about this text is the way it immediately links that covenant and sacrifice to a faith

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1. Quoted by Jim Hoagland, "Help Us," *Washington Post*, August 22, 1999, B-7.



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confident in forgiveness and eager to do deeds of love. Encouraging one another in love and good deeds is, in fact, the reason put forward for “meeting together.”

In *Christian Ethics Today*, Jimmy Allen tells of a conversation with Alice Gahana, who survived two concentration camps during the Holocaust. Asked what she remembered most, she replied, “The empty windows.” German soldiers came to her little village when she was nine years old and told her family to come to the village square. “I walked that morning carrying my suitcase, down our cobble-stoned street—the street that I had walked all my life, by houses in which lived people I had known all my life. . . . I noticed the windows were empty. No one came to the windows. My friends and neighbors knew what was happening, they knew—but they were afraid. Nobody came to the windows to see what was happening to me.”<sup>2</sup>

Her story describes the failure of personal compassion; but that failure is tied immediately to a grave public injustice, because the injustice flourished in the failure of millions of nominal Christians to demonstrate compassion. The two are inseparable.

The account of Jesus’ passion raises the question, Why was Jesus crucified? God’s own redemptive plan arches over other reasons, of course, but God uses human instruments, often in ironic ways, to accomplish his purposes. As all four Gospels make clear, Jesus offers love that welcomes those who are poor, outcast, and religiously unobservant—yes, rotten sinners—into the kingdom. This love brushes aside binding regulations by healing and picking grain on the sabbath and eating with unwashed hands. This love heals those who are sick, feeds hungry people, and speaks good news to throngs of lowly peasants. This love promises to fulfill the jubilee justice of the Old Testament (Luke 4:16-21). All this challenges and ultimately threatens the religious and political leadership. What about the structures and powers today that oppress people, that permit millions to go hungry in the richest nation of the world? What about our role as citizens, speaking out to change policies?

John’s account of the passion includes Jesus’ affirmation to Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world. This is often misinterpreted to mean that God’s kingdom has nothing to do with the created, earthly world, but that leads to a privatized, detached “religion,” unconnected to the rest of life. Scripture is clear that Jesus is the Lord of the whole of life, not some isolated part of it. As Savior, he saves us not only from sin and for heaven, but for a life of self-giving service in the world.

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2. Jimmy Allen, “The Tears of God,” *Christian Ethics Today* (February 2002) 6–7.



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*Children's Time*

Ask the children, "Why did Jesus die for us?" The answers are apt to be: "To take our sins away." "So we could go to heaven." Good answers—affirm them. But point out that they tell only half the Good News, because Jesus also died to give our lives purpose: to serve Jesus and other people he loved. Talk to them about how they can do that, especially remembering, as Jesus did, people whom others reject, those who are poor, hungry, sick, or hurting.

*Musical Suggestions*

Were You There—*Lutheran Book of Worship* 92

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

Where Charity and Love Prevail— *Lutheran Book of Worship* 126

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C  
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