



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

November 24, 2011, Thanksgiving Day
Barbara Lundblad

RCL: Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Psalm 65; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Luke 17:11-19

LM: Deuteronomy 8:7-18 or Sirach 50:22-24 or 1 Kings 8:55-61; Psalm 113:1-8 or
Psalm 138:1-5; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 or Colossians 3:12-17 or
1 Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19; Luke 17:11-19 or Mark 5:18-20 or Luke 12:15-21

Thanksgiving is the quintessential “American” holiday. (The word “American” here really means the United States, not Canada to the north or the Americas to the south.) The fourth Thursday in November is our own peculiar national celebration, recalling the legend of food shared with starving pilgrims by Native American people, though seldom acknowledging the lands we took from them as our end of the bargain. This day is marked by rituals that celebrate “American” values: Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade (shopping), football games (competition), and eating to excess (over-consumption of the world’s goods). How can we faithfully worship God on a day when the rituals of the marketplace worship something else?

The reading from Deuteronomy can be especially helpful. It may seem like our founding fathers borrowed these words about the promised land: a land with flowing streams, wheat, and barley, a land where we can eat bread without scarcity. This country has been portrayed as a city set on a hill, a beacon to the rest of the world, from the end their speeches saying, “God, bless America,” we have a sense that this is a prayer for us alone and no one else. But we can’t stop the reading with the glorious bounty of the promised land. The Deuteronomy text goes on: “Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments” (v. 11). When you have entered this good land, when you have built houses, when your herds and flocks have multiplied and you have mined silver and gold, “Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth’” (v. 17).

But we have said this. We have exalted ourselves and forgotten God. In her book *Chaos or Community*, Holly Sklar says, “The United States is the poorest rich country in the world,” lagging behind other industrialized democracies in assuring basic human needs such as health-care. Even more starkly, she writes, “If the U.S. government were a parent, it would be guilty of child abuse... Mortality rates for black babies in the U. S. are intolerable; our country ranks way down the list behind such nations as Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Poland, Cuba, and Kuwait.” Sklar summarizes the statistics saying, “We have a greed surplus and a justice deficit.”ⁱ



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We don't need to look far to see the human face of stark statistics. Lines at soup kitchens and food pantries have grown longer and longer since the welfare reform act was passed in 1996. According to America's Second Harvest, 39 percent of U.S. families receiving emergency food have at least one adult working. Of those seeking food assistance in 2000, more than eight million were children; no doubt that number is now even higher. Yet, during this same time, the number of millionaires in the U.S. doubled in just five years.ⁱⁱ Tax cuts for the wealthiest citizens will ensure that this number rises even in an economic downturn, while the lines swell outside the food pantry doors. Current political leaders have called on the religious community to pick up the slack, to provide the safety net. Is this reasonable? In the year 2000, Rev. Fred Kammer of Catholic Charities provided a reality check: "If the religious community alone were expected to make up for the proposed cuts in government social spending... the task of replacement would require an average annual increase of \$225,000 for charitable works from each of the nation's 258,000 churches, synagogues and mosques. As a point of comparison, the average total budget of a congregation is only \$100,000 per year."ⁱⁱⁱ

What promises are we keeping in this "promised land"? On this day dedicated to shopping, football, and extravagant eating, we're drawn back to the words of Deuteronomy, words about a bountiful land and about keeping promises to a bountiful God. This may be the day people serve Thanksgiving dinner at a shelter for homeless people, and the offering may include canned goods for the local food shelf. But we must also demand that our government do more to support the common good. Today is a very good time to receive an offering of letters:

"Dear Senator, please use my tax money to support the common good. Give your support to (Bill No. _____). We have enough millionaires."

On this most "American" holiday, we might also sing an additional verse of "America the Beautiful":

O beautiful, the world so wide,
Our wondrous global home!
God, shed your grace on ev'ry place,
And not on us alone.
America! America!
God, help us now to see
That ev'ry land is in your hand
From sea to shining sea!



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Children's Time

Written by Larry Hollar

Take time to reflect with the children on the words that conclude Barbara Lundblad's reflection, her own additional verse to "America the Beautiful." How is our nation at its best when it understands that God's blessings and care extend to other places and people as well? How is Thanksgiving, a holiday based on traditions very rooted in our Nation's history, also a symbol of what so many people in our world lack on a daily basis-adequate food. Pray that we all work for justice for hungry people on this day when food is so prominent in our midst.

Musical Suggestions

Prepared by Larry Hollar

Praise and Thanksgiving-GC 764

The Harvest of Justice-GC 711

Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace-BP 178

Take My Gifts-NCH 562

An Outcast among Outcasts-FWS 2104

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year A

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ⁱ Holly Sklar, *Chaos or Community: Seeking Solutions, Not Scapegoats, for Bad Economics* (Boston: South End Press, 1995) 11-13.

ⁱⁱ Leslie L. Norton, "The Wealth Revolution," *Barrons* (Sept. 18, 2000) 33.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cited in The Employment Project newsletter, *No More Jobs*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Feb. 2000).