



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

May 31, 2009
Pentecost Sunday
George S. Johnson

RCL: Acts 2:1-21 or Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:22-27 or Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

LM: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13 or Galatians 5:16-25; John 20:19-23 or 15:26-27; 16:12-15

Signs of death, pain, and hopelessness are all around us. In spite of advances in science and technology, the world is still torn apart by poverty, hatred, and violence. The Christian religion, not to mention all the other religions, has had two thousand years to make a difference, to bring about change. But is the world better today? As one looks out on the human landscape, it reminds us of the valley of dry bones. And we ask, “Can these bones live?”

There is enough food in the world to feed everyone. Frances Moore Lappé was correct back in the 1970s when she wrote her best-selling book *Diet for a Small Planet*.¹ The myth of scarcity has been exposed for what it is—a myth. Yet chronic hunger haunts over 800 million people in our world. Why do 2.8 billion people live on less than two dollars a day while the rich become richer? It is easy to despair, become cynical, and give up hope. Yes, we can point to some progress through efforts of organizations like Bread for the World, but the cry of hungry people continues to ring in our ears.

If Pentecost means anything, it means don't give up hope. God has not given up on us; God is active in this world bringing life out of death. Jesus did not see the end of hunger and poverty in his lifetime and met a cruel death after only a few years of ministry. But Pentecost reminds us that God wants to bring life and hope to the dry bones of violence and despair.

The dry bones story comes alive by knowing the storyteller's setting, the context in Israel's history. The people are living in exile, away from home, and things look hopeless. Both Jerusalem and the Temple have been destroyed. For all the world it looks like God's promises have failed them. It is a valley of dry bones. In our day we can experience such despair reading the news or traveling to places of suffering in the Third World. Some 16,400

¹ Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine, 1975).

children die every day in the developing world from malnutrition and hunger-related causes, and there's no easy way to stop that tragedy. You may need to tell stories to make all this real to those of us who are privileged. So many things can keep us from listening to the cries of poor and hungry people. Ignorance must not allow us to live in denial.

But also tell positive stories. Frances Moore Lappé, in another book,² takes us into the Third World beneath the radar of the global media and shows how dry bones are coming to life in poor villages of Kenya, among landless peasants of Brazil, and for single mothers of Bangladesh. They are learning to survive by transforming fear into creative action. People have taken Ezekiel's story to heart. They have not given up hope, even though the market economy of globalization would say that it is a given that some should live in poverty.

"Mortal, can these bones live?" A testing, theological question. "Oh, Lord, you know." Is this a sufficient answer or an escape? When our friends or colleagues ask if we think there is any answer to the hunger problem, it is easy to despair—or answer in a way that puts the blame on God or on the victims. Some even use the Bible to justify passivity in the face of hunger's continued existence. People may give up hope unless we come with the confidence portrayed in this text. Continuing to write letters and work for a better life for the excluded ones means we believe that justice can live and be a reality.

Pentecost Sunday is about the hope-inducing presence of God in our real world. It is about the wind of God blowing new energy into our lives, into places where there appeared to be only death and decay. It is hard to describe, but you feel it and know it is real because it changes lives. Go to the newspaper or to literature from your Church's hunger program and pick out a story of hope or amazement. Or tell the story of someone like Zacchaeus in Luke 19 or the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. Tell about the work of Bread for the World or Amnesty International or Habitat for Humanity or Call to Action or Ministry of Money. Be open to the transforming wind (Spirit) of God and to the bones coming together with breath and power.

Children's Time

One of today's Bible passages tells a story about dry bones. It tells how God can make dry bones have flesh and come to life. God can bring life where there is death. God can make a difference. God wants all of us to make a difference—and we can.

Today we're going to do something that makes a difference. I'll bet many of you haven't done this before. We're going to write a letter together. Okay? Here I have some paper and a pen. We're going to write to the President of the United States and ask him to help hungry people. We know that letters to our nation's leaders can make a difference by reminding them that people like you care about those who are poor and hungry. So what shall we write to the President? I'll write down what you suggest. Why don't we begin by thanking him for something. (Write down their ideas.) Now, what shall we ask him to do to help hungry people? (Wait for some ideas.) Good! Shall we remind him what we've

² Frances Moore Lappé, *Hope's Edge* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

learned in our Bible about helping people who are hungry. Good! Now each of you can print your name at the bottom, and we'll put this in the offering plate this morning as part of our offering to help hungry people. Thank you for helping us write this letter.

Musical Suggestions [Larry Hollar]

Spirit—The Presbyterian Hymnal 319

Wind Who Makes All Winds That Blow—The Presbyterian Hymnal 131

Song over the Waters—Gather Comprehensive 585

Let It Breathe on Me—The New Century Hymnal 288

Dem Bones, Dem Bones (Anthem)

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year B

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