

“There Was No One Needy Among Them”

some beginning thoughts

Editor's note: Those of us who create seasons of “hunger awareness” for our churches have become quite familiar with those scripture passages that we usually choose for those emphases. We go to Matthew 25; we rely on Amos; we bring out Isaiah 58 again. (Indeed, those scriptures are featured in the hunger emphasis calendar that is included in this packet.) But this time we looked for a passage that would be perhaps a little different, perhaps a little fresher for those of us who have done this many times before.

We enlisted the help of Matthew Schobert, a recent seminary graduate and a student in Baylor University's Master of Social Work program. With Matthew's help, we decided to concentrate mainly on three passages: For the Old Testament reading, Exodus 16:13-18, which tells of the provision of manna to the newly liberated Hebrew people in the wilderness; For the New Testament reading, Acts 4:32-35, which explains how the first Jerusalem church provided for its growing number of members; and for the Epistle reading, 1 Corinthians 8:1-15, which describes the sending of alms from Corinth to famine-stricken Christians in Jerusalem.

We asked Matthew to come up with some worship resources based on these three passages. (You will find several of his creations in the packet.) Below is his initial (and, it seems, most enduring) response:

Where is the Spirit of God Writing It Now?

by Fred Matthew Schobert

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed any possessions as their own, but everyone shared all they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time, those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Acts 4:31b-35 (based on NIV)

Acts 4:32-35...

There must be something important
in this passage.

There must be something special
in this text.

It seems so familiar;
And it seems so unfamiliar.

It is familiar
for Luke wrote it previously in Acts 2:42-47.

It is unfamiliar
for I am haunted by the question,
“Where is the Spirit of God writing it now?”



art by Rebecca Ward

“There Was No One Needy Among Them”

a call to extraordinary service

by Fred Matthew Schobert

Meditation

The anticipation of Christmastide is a distant memory.
The passion of Eastertide is a fleeting thought.
Ordinary time, the season of Kingdomtide,
is fast growing stale.
Our thoughts and meditations
are far from the coming of the Messiah.
Our thoughts and meditations
have forgotten the suffering of the Messiah.
Our thoughts and meditations now dwell on the Spirit,
on the presence of the Messiah, amidst God’s people.
Despite this,
we have lost the exuberance of Pentecost
and are awash in complacency.
Yet Ordinary time is Kingdomtide,
A time of community-building and growth.
A time of working for the commonwealth of God.
A time which should be anything but ordinary.

Theme Interpretation

CONGREGATION: For Scripture tells us:
“There was no one needy among them.”

FIRST READER: (*Read Exodus 16:13-18.*)

LEADER: It is now Kingdomtide,
Ordinary time,
Yet there is nothing ordinary
about God’s provision
of quail and manna.

CONGREGATION:
For Scripture tells us:
“There was no one needy
among them.”

SECOND READER:
(*Read Acts 4:32-37.*)

LEADER: It is now Kingdomtide,
Ordinary time,
Yet there is nothing ordinary
about believers
sharing possessions
with one another.

CONGREGATION: For Scripture tells us:
“There was no one needy among them.”

THIRD READER: (*Read II Corinthians 8:1-15.*)

LEADER: It is now Kingdomtide, Ordinary time,
Yet there is nothing ordinary about Christians
giving generously to those in need.

CONGREGATION: For Scripture tells us:
“There was no one needy among them.”

LEADER: Lord God, in this season of Ordinary time,
we beseech you to do
extraordinary works among your people.

CONGREGATION: Lord God, in this season
of Ordinary time,
we pray that we too do extraordinary works,
by the power of your Spirit, for others.

ALL: For Scripture tells us:
“There was no one needy among them.”



—Matthew Schobert, a native of DuQuoin, Illinois, is a recent graduate of the MDiv program at Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas, and is now a student in the Master of Social Work program at Baylor University.

—art by Lenora Mathis

Helping People to Feed Themselves

ideas for a children's story

by Katie Cook



This activity should work either in a children's time during worship, or during a church school session. Before the service or session, set up a table and two chairs in the area where you will tell the children's story. You will need a loaf of bread, some twine, and a pair of strong scissors. Before the story, place the loaf somewhere where the children can see it, but not on the table.

Also beforehand, choose two volunteers from an older group (perhaps the youth) and enlist them for the activity. You may need them to help guide the children in discussion. When the activity begins, ask them to sit at the table, and tie their hands and arms so that they cannot reach anything on the table. You might choose to get the children to help tie them.

Then say to the group, "Justin and Caitlin are hungry. We want to see that they get something to eat. Now, is there any food for them here?"

Hopefully, the children will see the loaf of bread and suggest that you give it to your volunteers. You may have to gently guide the discussion, or let "Justin" or "Caitlin" mention it. (Try to give the children plenty of opportunity to come up with the answers themselves.) When the children are aware of the loaf and agree that it should be given to the two, ask one of

the children to place the loaf on the table. Then say, "We have found something for you to eat, Justin and Caitlin. Now you may eat."

With any luck, someone will point out that they can't eat because their hands are tied. You might instruct your volunteers to wait

a moment and then say something to that effect, if the children don't suggest it. Then tear off a piece from the loaf and place some bread in the mouths of your volunteers. You might ask a

couple of the children to do the same. (Make sure it's someone you know will be gentle.) "Is that better?" you might ask. "Have we done everything we can do to help them eat?"

Again, hopefully, someone will suggest that they could feed themselves if you untied them. If no one thinks of this, get the scissors out and say, "What if we got them out of this twine? Then they would be able to feed themselves." Then cut them loose.

As Justin and Caitlin proceed to feed themselves, briefly explain to the children that these two are like many of the world's hungry people; they like to be able to feed themselves, and they know how. But many kinds of problems keep them from doing it. Maybe they don't have enough money to buy seeds. Maybe they don't have access to land to grow their own food, or to a market where they can sell it. Maybe they need a well to water their crops. Maybe they need a farm animal to help with plowing or to provide milk or eggs.

Explain to the children that, just like with Justin and Caitlin, the best way to help hungry people is to help in such a way that they can help themselves. You might want to mention some of the ways your congregation already does this. You might suggest that the children give their own money to help someone in this way.

Here's one idea for response: Recently a group of children at a children's church camp, after going through a curriculum about hunger, were given the opportunity to give money towards buying an animal for a poor family through the Heifer Project International.

The size of your group would affect what they could buy. For instance, a water buffalo would be \$250, but a share of the buffalo would be \$25. A llama would be \$150, with a share being \$20. Chicks would be \$20. These animals provide milk or eggs for the family, and sometimes they make plowing easier. The family, in turn, gives an offspring of their animal to another family in need.

When the children at this camp learned what each sum of money could buy for a family in another country, they became excited about the idea and gave three times what the sponsors expected. You can look up the prices for chickens, ducks, bees, heifers, and many other animals at www.heifer.org, or contact HPI at PO Box 808; Little Rock, AR 72203; 501/376-6836.

—The basic idea for this children's story came from a Thanksgiving resource published by the Sharing Way office of Canadian Baptist Ministries in Mississauga, Ontario. The idea for the response came from Jackie Saxon, a minister in Austin, Texas.



Bread, Rest, and Strength for the Journey

a youth-led communion service for a weary congregation

by Katie Cook and John Garland

Note: This service is designed to be led by youth, but it could actually be led by any group within the congregation. You will need baskets or trays (preferably of wicker or wood), different kinds of bread (for instance, baguettes, tortillas, pita, round sourdough loaves, or pumpernickel—but you need to make sure it is all easy to tear into pieces), and bunches of red grapes.

At one point in the service, your leaders will ask the congregants to form two lines facing each other (perhaps down the aisles of the sanctuary). If you have a large group, you may want to have two or more sets of these lines. Your worship leaders will send the trays down from both ends of these lines, so you will need two baskets or trays per set of lines. Get the youth to arrange an assortment of breads with grapes on each basket or tray.

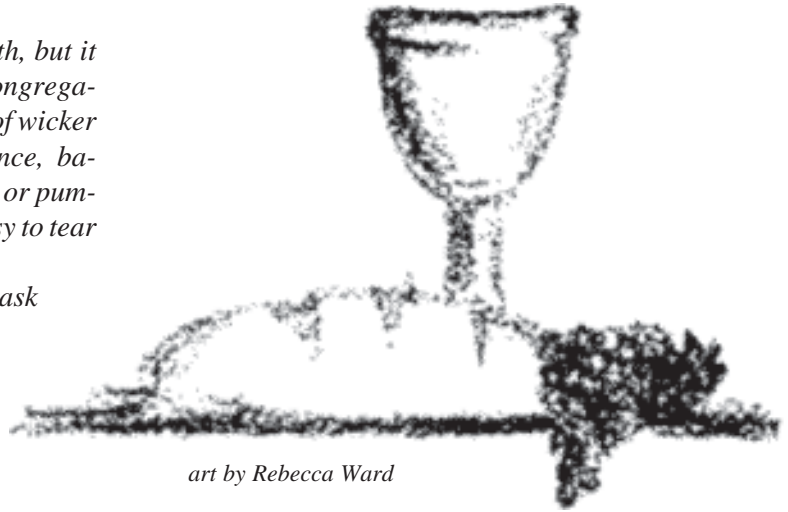
You will need six readers for readings, a reading chorus (with a leader), and a person for both the invocation and benediction. (The youth may prefer to voice their own prayers. Please encourage them to do so if this is the case.)

We have suggested hymns here, but please feel free to be creative and improvise according to your congregation's personality and needs. Your youth might be also interested in adding their own touches with homemade banners, interpretive dance, or their own choices for music. They might want to insert some kind of special music in the form of a solo or choral anthem. You also may prefer to use other translations of the scriptures. The scriptures below are based on the New Revised Standard Version.

Invocation

God, you are our Creator, who shaped the earth and all its creatures, who invented the wheat and the grape. You are the source of our life, the one who nurtures us as if we were small children. We are thirsty and hungry, without resources, and we are exhausted.

We call unto you today because, as usual, we have pushed ourselves to the limit. We have tried to accomplish things on our own. We need your nourishment. We need your comfort. We need to gain strength from being with you. Come to us, come into our midst. Feed us.



art by Rebecca Ward

Reading: I Kings 19:1-8

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

Hymn: "Help Us Accept Each Other"

—particularly the last verse:
Lord, for today's encounters
with all who are in need,
who hunger for acceptance,
for righteousness and bread,
we need new eyes for seeing,
new hands for holding on,

(continued)

renew us with your spirit, Lord,
free us, make us one!
(words: Fred Kaan, 1975; music: John Ness Beck, 1977,
hymn # 437, *The Worshiping Church*, Hope Publishing
Company)

Reading: Isaiah 55:1-3a

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you that have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without
price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

Note: At this point, instruct the worship leaders to help the congregation to form into facing lines. Don't tell them yet what is in store. (You might want to have someone playing guitar or organ while the lines are forming. Songs like "Let Us Break Bread Together" or "In Remembrance of Me" would be appropriate here.)

After the lines are formed, have one of the worship leaders explain that bread and grapes will be coming down the lines, and that each congregant is asked not to feed himself/herself, but to feed the person across the aisle. Each person should tear off a piece of bread and feed it to his/her partner, and then tear off a grape and do the same. As he/she does this, he/she should say, "Bread for the journey. May the Peace of Christ go with you."

As the congregants are doing this, the reading chorus should begin:

Choral Reading

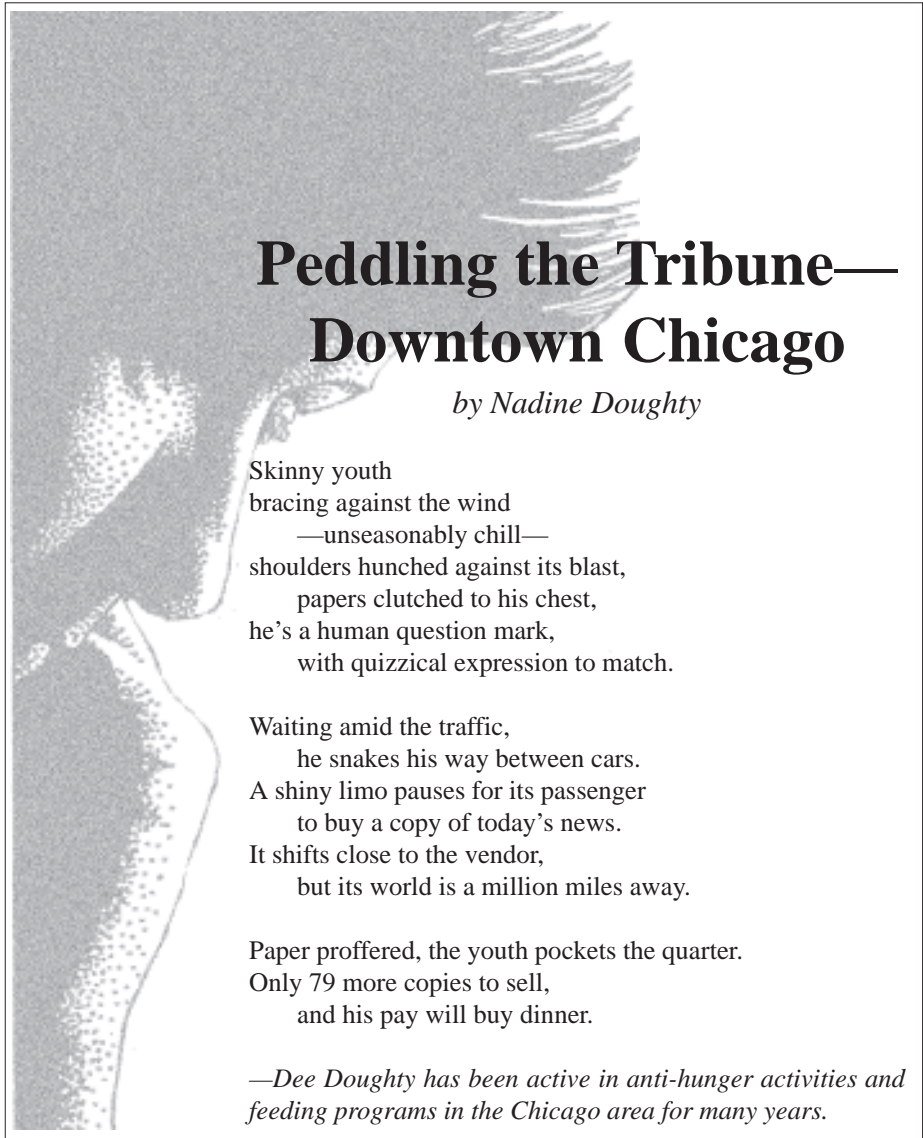
Chorus Leader: Come, every one of you who is thirsty
Chorus: Come to the waters.
Chorus Leader: And all of you who are hungry and have no money for food,
Chorus: Come on! You can buy

all the food you need!
Chorus Leader: The angel said to Elijah,
Chorus: "Get up and eat! Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you."
Chorus Leader: Jesus said,
Chorus: "Eat and remember who I am, so that you will remember who you are."

Note: The following readings are also for reading while the people partake of the food. We suggest that you assign them to the reading chorus, since they will already be in place.

First Reader: The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread.'" (Exodus 16:11-12a)

Second Reader: Seek the Lord while God may be found.
Call upon God while God is near; let the wicked forsake



Peddling the Tribune— Downtown Chicago

by Nadine Doughty

Skinny youth
bracing against the wind
—unseasonably chill—
shoulders hunched against its blast,
papers clutched to his chest,
he's a human question mark,
with quizzical expression to match.

Waiting amid the traffic,
he snakes his way between cars.
A shiny limo pauses for its passenger
to buy a copy of today's news.
It shifts close to the vendor,
but its world is a million miles away.

Paper proffered, the youth pockets the quarter.
Only 79 more copies to sell,
and his pay will buy dinner.

—Dee Doughty has been active in anti-hunger activities and feeding programs in the Chicago area for many years.