



# Enough at the Table

*Creative Resources for Your Church's Hunger Emphasis*

*Sacred Seasons, a quarterly series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis, from Seeds of Hope Publishers:  
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# Sacred Seasons:

## *Creative Worship Tools for Your Church*

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# *Enough at the Table*

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## *a word about this packet*

The cover art for this packet is adapted from the Argekultur Salzeburg logo art. The Sacred Seasons logo is by Sharon Rollins.

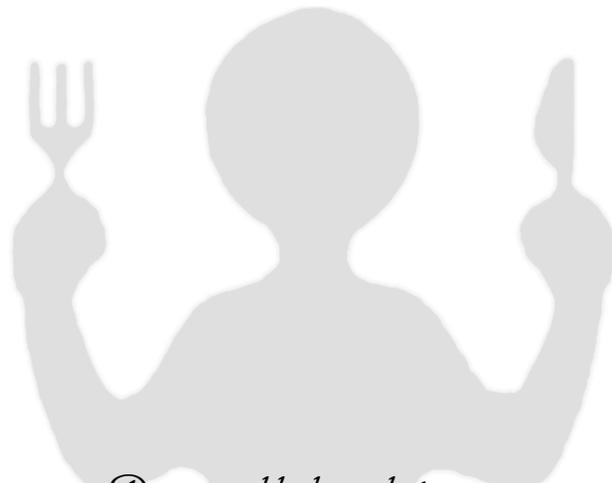
We have included sermons, poetry, and meditations from several folks you have heard from before. Lorraine DiDio, who works among the poor in New York, is a new contributor, as is Josh Burden, a minister in Maine. Stan Dotson, who teaches at Mars Hill College, allowed us to use his "Zacchaeus" lyrics, to go with Brett Younger's sermon on page 10. Your Hunger Emphasis place mat contains the liturgy to be used with Lanny Peter's sermon "Whose Table Is This?" Our new 40-day calendar has some of the old favorite "things to do," along with some new ones and some new resources. You will also find four pages of statistics.

As always, the material in this packet is your congregation's to use freely. We have tried to pull together creative and inspiring resources that you can use to raise awareness of issues surrounding economic justice and food security (especially from a biblical perspective) in your congregation. We endeavored to choose a variety of age groups, worship areas, events, and angles, so that you would have a potpourri of art and ideas from which to choose.

We make a conscious effort to maintain a balance between the apostolic and the contemplative—on the one hand, the dynamic challenge to stay true to God's mandate to feed the poor and struggle for justice, and on the other hand, our own compelling need for nurture and healing while we work toward those dreams. May it be so.

Gratefully,  
The Staff and Council of Stewards

# Bulletin art



*Dear and beloved stranger,  
Please eat this food with us  
that we may all be nourished.  
Please share this walk with us  
that we may all know nature's peace.  
Please rest in this warm house  
that we may come to know each other.  
Please sleep under these soft blankets  
that we may all know safety.  
Please pray this prayer  
that all our names of God  
may guide us on.  
—Christina Baldwin  
from Prayers of the World*

# Whose Table Is This?

## *a communion sermon*

*by Lanny Peters*

*Luke 14: 1-14*

I believe that parables are at the very heart of Jesus' teachings. I also have been reflecting on a question and observation made by New Testament scholar Bill Herzog:

*If Jesus was a teacher of heavenly truths dispensed through literary gems called parables, it is difficult to understand how he could have been executed as a political subversive and crucified between two social bandits. It appears that Jerusalem elites collaborating with their Roman overlords executed Jesus because he was a threat to their economic and political interests. Unless they perceived him to be a threat, they would not have publicly degraded and humiliated him before executing him in as humiliating (ignominious) a way as possible. How is it possible to bring together the teacher who spoke in parables and the subversive who threatened the ruling powers of his day?!*

As we look at Jesus' life, we can watch his vision of the realm of God come into increasing conflict with the religious and political leaders of his day. In fact, in the passage just before today's scripture, Jesus is warned that he may be going too far.

*Some Pharisees came and said to (Jesus), "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is*

*impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem."*

*(Luke 13: 31-33)*

Instead of running away and hiding, as he had been strongly advised, Jesus instead accepted yet another invitation, to eat in the home of a leader of the Pharisees. More than twenty years ago, I read a novel by Anne Tyler, called *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*. I still remember that novel. It is about a family who could never sit down to eat together without getting into a big argument and someone leaving the table in anger before the meal was finished.

Jesus' disciples could relate. The last time they had eaten in the home of a prominent religious leader, Jesus had created an uproar. They must have wondered if they would make it through such a meal without something else happening. After Jesus' strong words about King

Herod, Luke tells us that everyone was watching him closely as he arrived at the home of yet another religious leader for a sabbath meal.

*Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?" But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" And they*



could not reply to this.  
(Luke 14: 2-6)

Goodness gracious! Jesus had not even made it into the front door, and he had already broken one of the Ten Commandments, justified himself, and left them all speechless.

But just as they stood there, dumbfounded, Jesus went right on into the house and took a seat—in the back of the room. Then he observed the rest of guests coming in and how they chose the best seats, the places of honor. When everyone was in their place, Jesus said:

*“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then, in disgrace, you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher;’ then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. (Luke 14:7-11)*

During the first time I visited my wife Karen’s family, when we were dating, the table was laid out. It would be the first of many wonderful meals I would have in that home. “Okay, everybody, sit down; we’re ready to eat,” Karen’s mom announced. I took the seat closest by, and everyone was seated except Karen’s father.

Then Karen looked at me and said sweetly, “Honey, you’re in Daddy’s seat.” And I stood up meekly and found another place at the table. Fortunately, everybody was smiling that day at my little *faux pas*. This was probably not the case when Jesus publicly poked fun at the religious leaders and his guests for trying to grab the best seats.

After embarrassing the guests, Jesus turned to the host. He said also to the one who had invited him, *“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14: 12-14)*

Well now, how’s that for getting some dinner conversation started?

The text does not say so, but I can imagine Peter trying to break the tension at this point saying, “Wow, this appetizer sure looks good. I bet this is going to be one fine

meal. Thank you so much for inviting us.” We are told that one of the dinner guests tried to put things in a more, say, spiritual way, saying, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

And as was his way, Jesus responded to this with a parable:

*“Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready*

*Jesus gets invited to a big party at a prominent religious leader’s home, criticizes the guests and the host and tells a story that implies that this is not the kind of party he enjoys anyway. Miss Manners would not be pleased.*

*now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.” (Luke 14; 16a-23)*

Like most of Jesus’ parables, this one starts out with a very ordinary situation for those listening, and one we can easily relate to as well. Many of you have probably thrown a nice party—but when the time came, the invited guests were unable to come.

In Jesus’ parable, they all had their reasons for not coming. Some had decided that business comes before pleasure. One had just gotten married and had all the pleasure he needed, thank you. It’s a regrettable, but understandable situation.

But like most of Jesus’ parables, this one has a jolt. The host looks around at all the food and decorations and

gets angry and tells his servant to go find him some folks he can party with. But he does not want others from the same social circle as the original guests. He sends him out to find a bunch of folks who would not be welcome in any of the homes of those he had first invited.

As requested, the servant found some poor and disabled folks, but there was still plenty of room, so the host told him to go all over town and look in the side streets and back alleys, and find all the outcasts. Apparently, many of them were so used to being excluded and were so wary about being invited, the servant had to compel them to come.

So there you have it. Jesus gets invited to a big party at a prominent religious leader's home, criticizes the guests and the host and tells a story that implies that this is not the kind of party he enjoys anyway. Miss Manners would not be pleased.

Jesus' last words in this story are: "For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner." (Luke 14: 24) I am among those who think this last sentence may have been added to Jesus' original parable to reflect the situation in Luke's community.

In Matthew's version of this same parable, it has been made into more of an allegory that reflects the tension between Jewish Christians and their neighbors who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Taken out of its original context, texts like this would later be tools of anti-Semitism, one of the most evil misuses of scripture. In its original form, the parable likely ended with the image of a great supper where all those in that society who were shut out were welcomed in.

What came to mind for me, in studying this scripture, was a story from Melissa Fay Green's book, *The Temple Bombing*.<sup>2</sup> In October of 1964, the white power structure of Atlanta received some good news and some bad news. The good news was that someone from Atlanta had won the Nobel Peace Prize. The bad news was that it was Martin Luther King, Jr.

Green tells the story of how a small group of black and white leaders in Atlanta began to plan a banquet to honor King. It would have been boycotted by the white business community, if not for the courage of a few white people like Mayor Ivan Allen, Robert Woodruff—and the white religious leader who probably exhibited the most Christ-like behavior concerning racial reconciliation in those days, Rabbi Jacob Rothschild.

Rabbi Rothschild would later recall,

*"A handful of us met for weeks making plans and arrangements without any hope of fulfilling them. And after all the foot-dragging and outright opposition, exactly 1,463 people gathered to honor Dr. King in the*

*largest room then available. Another thousand were turned away. It was the largest gathering of whites and blacks...in the history of our city. We had to turn away for lack of space some of the most prominent of our citizens who leaped too late on the bandwagon.*<sup>3</sup>

If I had time, I would read Green's whole account of this incredible evening. She says, "...for the moment, stature—lineage—derived from an entirely new, unforeseen direction....It was unheard of. It was outlandish."<sup>4</sup>

Coretta Scott King would later write, "When we arrived at the ballroom that night we beheld a beautiful sight....

*If there are people who you wish were not at this table, that's a good sign that it's Jesus' table. If everybody at this table is like you, it probably ain't Jesus' table.*

The big ballroom was filled... [with] Negroes and whites from all levels. Judges and top-ranking industrialists were sitting at the same tables with cooks and porters, all mixed up deliberately.... even one year before, such a sight would have been unthinkable in a southern city."<sup>5</sup>

Now that was the kind of banquet Jesus was talking about in his parable!

Let's return to our story and see what happened next after Jesus got everybody all riled up at the Sabbath dinner in the religious leader's house.

Well...we don't know. We are not told how the story ends. And once again, it doesn't matter, for WE are the ending. The parables, as John Claypool used to say, are "not portraits of other people, but mirrors to help us see ourselves more honestly."

In a few minutes, we are going to gather around the table. This is Jesus' table. We don't make the guest list. Jesus does. And Jesus' guest list is always bigger than ours. In the decade after the banquet honoring Martin Luther King, Jr., some two-thirds of the members of this church, where we are now, would leave rather than eat at this table with black people.

They thought it was their table. This is Jesus' table! In the following years, people would leave rather than eat with gay people. They thought it was their table. This is Jesus' table! People outside this church would try to tell us who was welcome at this table. We had to remind them that

they don't make the guest list. Jesus does. If people are grumbling about who is eating at this table, that's a good sign that it is Jesus' table.

If there are people who *you* wish were not at this table, that's a good sign that it's Jesus' table. If everybody at this table is like you, it probably ain't Jesus' table. If you might be concerned that somebody here does not like you, do not worry about it. It is not their table. This is Jesus' table!

If you are in some kind of conflict with someone, even the pastor, don't worry about it. This ain't the pastor's table. This is Jesus' table, and we have been wrong before about who should be at the table!

Jesus' table is always bigger and more inclusive than our tables. Jesus always invited the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden, the helpless and vulnerable.

Jesus always invited people who didn't necessarily pull their own weight. This table does not belong just to those of us who faithfully pay the mortgage and the utilities. This ain't our table. This is Jesus' table!

There are a lot of people still on the outside that Jesus is inviting to this table. Fred Craddock says, "Jesus is not [only] calling on us to provide for the needs of the poor and disabled; he says to invite them to dinner....In the Christian community, no one is a 'project.'"

If any one of us were making up the guest list, we would be like the Pharisees, a bit more discriminating. Thank God; praise God, this ain't our table. Whose table is this? (And the congregation said: "Jesus' table!")

Amen.

—Lanny Peters is pastor of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia. This was the originally the fourth sermon in a Lenten series called "The Parables Jesus Told and Lived."

Editor's Note: The liturgy that goes with this sermon is on the Hunger Emphasis place mat, in this packet.

### *End Notes*

1. William R. Herzog. *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*. Louisville (Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1994), p. 9.
2. New York: Balantine Books, 1996.
3. *Ibid*, pp. 418-19.
4. *Ibid*, p 420.
5. *Ibid*, p 421.ß

## *The Mortal Amen*

by David Sparenberg

Matters of Heaven,  
concerns of  
Earth and above:  
the mortal amen  
of immortal love.

Grant us this day  
the bread of non-discrimination:  
for at the banquet  
of ever-impending  
redemption,  
those who are left out  
will need to be taken in.

Give to us then;  
now  
before the moment passes,  
here  
before we walk  
a step away;  
the sweet pure wine  
of lasting peace.

Heaven and Earth, heart  
and soul, come,  
let us sit  
in God's circle  
without wealth  
or poverty.

Breathe  
to let be, breathe  
to be free.  
God's hymn  
of love without ending.

*David Sparenberg—a playwright, poet, storyteller, and Shakespearean actor—lives and writes in Vancouver, British Columbia. He uses his craft to help people cope with life-threatening illness and loss.*

# A Collection of Table Blessings

Creating, Redeeming, and Sustaining God,  
In the sacrament of communion, we remember the  
body broken for us and the cup of blessing poured out  
for us.

In this meal, may we recognize and give thanks for  
the gifts of the land, the sacrifice of plant and animal  
life, and the work of the hands that brought the feast  
from the field to the table.

May it strengthen us to love and serve all of  
creation, in the name of Jesus, and in the spirit of  
Francis and Clare.

Amen.

—Nancy Menning, *Order of Ecumenical Franciscans*

Bless us, Oh Lord,  
and these thy gifts which  
we are about to receive from thy bounty,  
through Christ, Our Lord.  
Amen.

—traditional Christian mealtime blessing

For food that stays our hunger,  
For rest that brings us ease,  
For homes where memories linger,  
We give our thanks for these.

—traditional US mealtime blessing

For each new morning with its light,  
For rest and shelter of the night,  
For health and food,  
For love and friends,  
For everything Thy goodness sends.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

O Lord, we thank you for  
the gifts of your bounty  
which we enjoy at this table.  
As you have provided for us in the past,  
so may you sustain us  
throughout our lives.

While we enjoy your gifts, may we never  
forget the needy and those in want.

—Methodist table blessing

Come Lord Jesus,  
Be our guest,

And let thy gifts  
To us be blessed.  
—attributed to Martin Luther

Through your goodness, we have this bread to offer  
which earth has given and human hands have made. It  
will become for us the bread of life.  
—liturgical blessing from Nothing Sacred

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech  
ha-olam hamotzi lechem min ha-aretz.  
(Blessed art Thou, L-rd our G-d, Master of the universe  
who brings forth bread from the earth.)  
—Jewish blessing over bread

God, food of the poor;  
Christ, our bread,  
give us a taste of the tender bread  
from your creation's table;  
bread newly taken from your heart's oven,  
food that comforts and nourishes us.

A loaf of community that makes us human,  
joined hand in hand, working and sharing.

A warm loaf that makes us a family;  
sacrament of your body,  
your wounded people.

—Workers in community soup kitchens in Lima, Peru



# Quotes, Poems, & Pithy Sayings

Yes, I am my brother's [and sister's] keeper. I am under a moral obligation to [them] that is inspired, not by any maudlin sentimentality but by the higher duty I owe myself. What would you think me if I were capable of seating myself at a table and gorging myself with food and saw about me the children of my fellow beings starving to death?

—Eugene V. Debs, in a 1908 speech

When we meet around our conference table at Caritas, we look for new ways to enlarge our circle of caring. That circle is limited only by the size of our hearts. And, in a way, we gather around a larger table of fellowship to share the blessings of life and the bounty of labor with our neighbors, the ones the scriptures tell us to take care of...

—Eugene F. Jud, former director of Caritas of Waco

The way we overcome poverty is with humanity. We must stop seeing the poor as objects to be 'dealt with.'

—Fred Ball, Past Minister General, Order of Ecumenical Franciscans

Having seen [glimpses of God], people of varying cultures turn—for reasons unknown, and by a mechanism unimaginable—to aiding and serving the afflicted and poor.

—Annie Dillard, For the Time Being

## Different Worlds

by Nadine Doughty



Lunching with our son downtown,  
We picked a sleek and costly spot,  
“Rosebud” was the restaurant’s name.  
The outside world we soon forgot.

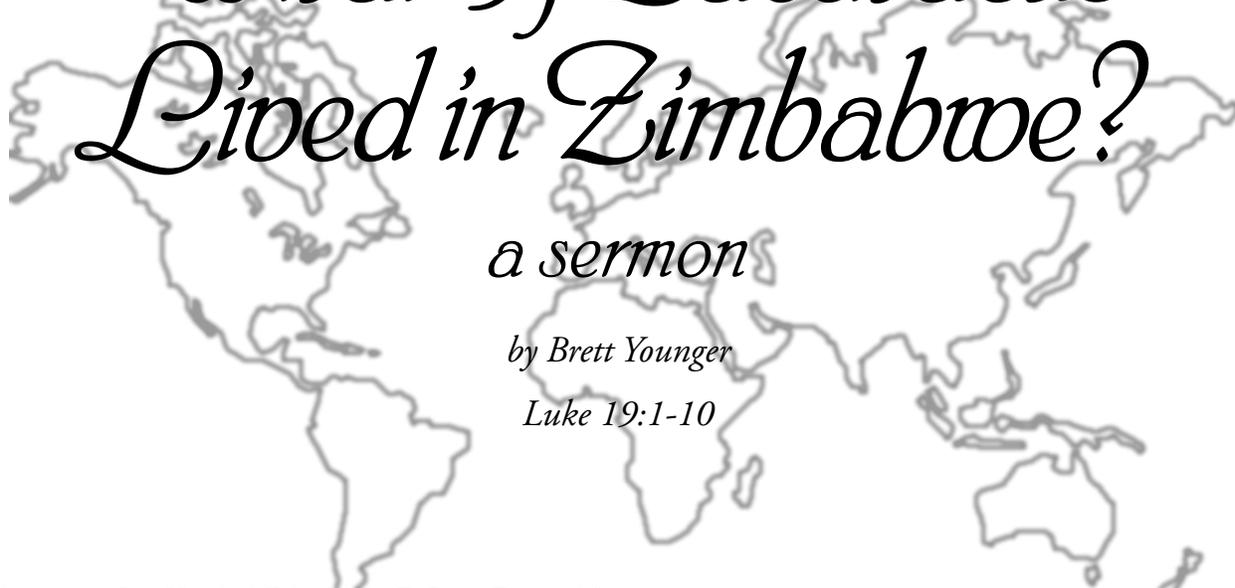
“And did you have a reservation?”  
Hostess asked with silken voice.  
“Here’s your table. Enjoy your meal.”  
We scanned the menu, made our choice.

“Reservation,” the word—it captured  
Thoughts of yet another place,  
A vast and sprawling reservation,  
With struggling missions, and as its base,  
A town called “Rosebud,” a central site  
For Native Americans to buck their plight.

West of us five hundred miles,  
Drinks don’t come in a frosted glass,  
But likely from a simple pipe,  
Available, but second class.

I could not find more different places  
That strangely share a common name.  
They’re worlds apart in every way,  
Yet both are “Rosebud” all the same.

—Dee Doughty, a longtime contributor to Seeds publications, has worked in soup kitchens and ministries for the poor in Evanston, Illinois for many years.



# What If Zacchaeus Lived in Zimbabwe?

*a sermon*

*by Brett Younger*

*Luke 19:1-10*

In his essay, *One Hundred False Starts*, F. Scott Fitzgerald writes,

*We have one or two great moving experiences in our lives—experiences so great and moving that it doesn't seem at the time that anyone else has been so caught up and pounded and dazzled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and rewarded and humbled in just this way ever before. Then we learn our trade, well or less well, and we tell our two or three stories—each time in disguise—maybe ten times, maybe a hundred, as long as people will listen.*

Fitzgerald could have added that, after a certain level of comfort is achieved, wealthy people like us usually try to avoid such transforming experiences. We understand that when affluent, successful people change, it has to change the way they see their affluence and success. Even the most wonderful transformations seem frightening when they threaten a comfortable way of life.

When Zacchaeus' alarm goes off, he hits the snooze three times before he convinces himself that he really does have to get up. Years ago, when he was an enterprising, energetic young financier, he couldn't wait to get to work.

Zacchaeus's chosen trade of tax collecting is not so much like working for the IRS (unpopular though that may be) as it is like working for a loan shark. He's closer to a Mafia boss than a bank president, a godfather extorting excessive taxes and bleeding the whole community.

Tax collectors are the most hated people in Palestine—deservedly so, for throwing in with the enemy and stealing from their own. These turncoats are the outcasts of the outcasts—the ones the lawyers tell jokes about, but the

money is so good that most days it seems like a fair price to pay. And those who work at the agency have a certain camaraderie. And, for a mob accountant, Zacchaeus can be a lot of fun.

Even so, on this particular day, eight hours at the office seems dismal. Then about ten o'clock the conversation at the water cooler picks up when someone says that Jesus, the one who's been getting all the press lately, is coming to Jericho. Zacchaeus thinks, "This could make an interesting

*Zacchaeus, more than anyone else in Jericho, knows just how poor they all are. In Palestine, there is no middle class. The rich are very rich and the poor are very poor.*

diversion." He tells himself he's only going out of curiosity. He comes into Luke's story the way people sometimes come to church, curious to see what goes on in here.

"Just looking," they say, kicking the tires.

"Would you like to go to lunch after worship?"

"Oh, no, we don't want to get involved. We're just looking."

Zacchaeus is just looking. If he has any other motivations, he buries them deep.

Finding the big event is easy. A crowd lines the road. Zacchaeus first plans to push his way to the front. Under normal circumstances, no one would get in the way of a

tax collector. But there's something in the air that makes the crowd less concerned about audits and more daring than usual. The most zealous patriots take advantage of this opportunity to give Jericho's chief tax collector an unfriendly elbow.

For a while, Zacchaeus keeps a mental list of every one who makes this unfortunate mistake. He plans to take revenge on each one, come April 15, but eventually the list gets too long. Zacchaeus sees a sycamore tree and decides it's an ideal place from which to watch the parade.

So this wee little man, as one of our "classic hymns" puts it, climbs up in a sycamore tree, a crime boss shinnying

*Zacchaeus needs to grab this moment for all it's worth. He needs to move from curiosity to commitment, from just looking to making a difference.*

up a telephone poll. Danny DeVito should play this part. He hasn't climbed a tree in years, so it takes a while, and he drops his black hat. When he finally settles into an almost tolerable spot, he congratulates himself for being as spry as a man, oh, two, three years younger than himself.

He looks down at the crowd and feels only contempt. How dare they despise him, dressed in their rags? Zacchaeus, more than anyone else in Jericho, knows just how poor they all are. In Palestine, there is no middle class. The rich are very rich and the poor are very poor. Zacchaeus is glad to be one of the *haves*, keeping his distance from the *have-nots*.

In our day, things haven't changed much. The rich are still very rich and the poor are still very poor. The world is made up mostly of people who have more than they need and others who starve. Twenty percent of the world's people consume 86 percent of the world's goods.

Of the 6.7 billion people in the world, more than a billion live on less than a dollar a day. Three billion, almost, half of the people in the world, live on less than two dollars a day. The statistics on hunger are overwhelming. More than 852 million people are chronically undernourished.

Every year, nearly 11 million children die before they reach their fifth birthday because of hunger and poverty. Development and aid agencies report that around 27,000 people die of hunger-related causes each day.

And yet, more overwhelming than the statistics are the cries of babies, the bloated stomachs of children, and the faces of mothers who starve themselves to death in the hope that the food they need will keep their children alive.

The front pages of our newspapers are given to the terrifying situation in the Middle East, but in terms of the loss of human lives, the most frightening places in the world are in Africa. Countries like Ethiopia, Malawi, and Zambia are facing food shortages because of ever more frequent droughts.

Countries like Congo and Angola are trying to rebuild after years of civil war. Clashes between government and rebel troops break out almost every day somewhere on the continent. An estimated 15 million children in southern Africa have been newly orphaned by the AIDS epidemic.

One of the worst places to be right now is Zimbabwe. Internal conflict, violence, loss of infrastructure, crop failures (especially maize), and one-thousand-percent inflation have left the country in shambles. The country is in so much turmoil that aid agencies can't even agree on the number of people affected by food shortage.

It's understandable that the problems are so overwhelming that we don't want to think about the hungry. When Zacchaeus sees a small article about the famine in Zimbabwe on page twelve of section D, he's able to reassure himself, "I work hard for what I have. I don't get a penny more than I deserve." Zacchaeus wants to believe that he's only getting what's rightfully his and that he has no responsibility to those who are poor.

In our country many want to think that we as a nation give more help than we do. According to one poll, most Americans believe that about fifteen percent of the federal budget is given to foreign aid. The actual amount is one percent. By percentage of gross national product, the US is the lowest of any industrialized nation in funding development programs.

And, on top of that, only half of what we call foreign aid goes toward economic development. The rest goes to militaries. Of the top ten recipient countries of USAID, none are among the twenty poorest countries in the world. The average Norwegian gives 17 times as much for development aid through taxes as the average American. As a nation we tend to keep what we think is ours.\*

Zacchaeus is afraid that he dropped his wallet climbing the tree or that someone stole it. His hand goes to his pocket to make sure it's there. It's only spare change to Zacchaeus, but it would seem a fortune to any of the peasants. The chief tax collector in Jericho makes a lot of money. Zacchaeus has more than he needs, though if someone asked him how much he needs he might answer, "Just a little more."

If asked how much we need, we might answer, "Just a little more." And yet, in our closets, there are clothes we don't wear. In our garage there is likely to be a car more expensive than we need. In our refrigerator, there's food that we'll waste.

Zacchaeus watches the mob move closer to his tree until the center of attention is directly beneath him. Jesus peers up through the leaves and calls his name, “Zacchaeus, hurry down.”

Jesus doesn’t need to tell Zacchaeus to hurry, because he almost falls out of the tree.

“Zacchaeus, I’m inviting myself to your house for dinner.”

The crowd gasps. There are religious leaders and business leaders who were assuming that Jesus would eat with them, but the crook and Christ go to lunch together.

Jesus welcomes himself into Zacchaeus’s house like he owns the place. And that’s Luke’s point. Because

*Most of us didn’t become Christians because we wanted to give our money away, but if we’re paying any attention, we’ve learned that there’s a lot more in the Bible about sharing with the poor than about getting saved.*

Zacchaeus’s story is also our story, we know something of what happens when Jesus makes himself welcome. C. S. Lewis likened it to the renovation of a house. Christ comes in to rebuild. At first it seems reasonable enough, as Christ goes about fixing the leaks and repairing all those things you already knew would need fixing. But then, Lewis says,

*He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and doesn’t seem to make sense. What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that he’s building quite a different house from the one you planned. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage, but Christ is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it himself. (Mere Christianity)*

That was the story of C. S. Lewis’ life and Zacchaeus’ life.

Something about being with Jesus feels peculiar. Zacchaeus doesn’t know what it is, but he recognizes that this moment crackles with possibility. Jesus has come either to bless or overwhelm Zacchaeus. It’s hard to tell the difference sometimes. This is one of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “great moving experiences.” He needs to grab this moment for all it’s worth. He needs to move from curiosity to commitment, from just looking to making a difference.

And Zacchaeus does. He sees the peasants, maybe for the first time, and understands what he must do to be on

Jesus’ side. Uncoerced, unadmonished, and unprompted, he announces with great joy and great fear, “Half of all I have I’ll give to the hungry. And the ones I’ve cheated,” – and there were more than a few– “I’ll pay back four times.” Nothing is clearer to Zacchaeus than that the friends of Jesus feed the hungry.

It’s still true. Jesus’ friends pray for the hungry, and in those prayers are called to share what they have. Most of us didn’t become Christians because we wanted to give our money away, but if we’re paying any attention, we’ve learned that there’s a lot more in the Bible about sharing with the poor than about getting saved.

When Jesus’ friends step into a voting booth, they think not of themselves, but of the hungry. They write letters to representatives and newspapers. They join groups like Bread for the World. The friends of Jesus are part of church efforts to care for the poor. They buy cases of canned food and bring them to the food pantry. Jesus’ friends give when a famine strikes our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world.

God’s people struggle with the lines between necessities and luxuries. And in that struggle the friends of Jesus find the joy of Jesus. Sharing what we have can be as joyous as hurrying down a tree to go home with a friend.

Lloyd C. Douglas, in *The Mirror*, a play based on Zacchaeus, imagines the story this way: after Zacchaeus announces that he will share his money, Jesus asks, “Zacchaeus, what did you see that made you desire this peace?”

Zacchaeus answers, “Good Master, I saw, mirrored in your eyes, the face of the Zacchaeus I was meant to be.”

Long after Jesus leaves Jericho, someone who hasn’t heard Zacchaeus’s story sees him giving his money to the hungry and asks, “Do you ever think about how rich you could be? Why don’t you give less?”

Zacchaeus smiles, “Why would I want to go back to the Zacchaeus I used to be?”

When Zacchaeus gave his money to the poor it looked like a great day for the hungry—and so it was. But Zacchaeus had also received a gift. The friends of Jesus have been caught up and pounded and dazzled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and rewarded and humbled by God. Then they find their joy in giving.

—Brett Younger, a frequent *Sacred Seasons* contributor, is pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

*\*Sources for hunger statistics: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), UNICEF, Zimbabwe Situation.org, Zim Times*

# Zacchaeus: The Rest of the Story

*new lyrics*

*by Stan Dotson*

*Editor's Note: Circle of Mercy, a faith community in Asheville, North Carolina, recently decided to invest in banks that participated in microcredit and community development programs. Ken Sehested, one of the pastors, wrote, "As we planned a special service around the inauguration of these modest investments, we challenged our creative music coordinator, Stan Dotson, to finish the story of Zacchaeus commemorated in the children's song." Stan came up with some extra lyrics, which—with his permission—we share with you below.*

Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he  
He climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see  
And as the Savior passed that way he looked up in the tree  
And he said, Zacchaeus, you come down  
For I'm going to your house today, I'm going to your house today  
And as Zacchaeus climbed back down the crowd began to groan  
They did not think the Savior should be seen in a such a home  
They did not know the wee little man was soon to be transformed  
(spoken) Til he said, Look, Lord, I'll give to the poor, and re-pay all  
my victims fourfold  
For today I've been re-born, today I've been re-born  
And when the wealth was freely shared and scamming was re-paid  
The Savior boldly told the crowd a miracle occurred that day  
The heart of the wee little man had grown four sizes from the call  
And he who once was short on love was suddenly walking tall  
He was suddenly walking tall

*—Stan Dotson is Dean of LifeWorks at Mars Hill College in Mars Hill, North Carolina. The LifeWorks program centers around justice issues. As part of the curriculum, he has taken students on a recreation of the 1960s Freedom Ride, visiting sites in the southern United States that were important to the Civil Rights movement.*

# Hunger Around the World

*compiled by the Seeds of Hope staff*

852 million people across the world are chronically undernourished, up from 842 million a year ago.

–*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2005.*

Every day, more than 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes—one child every five seconds.

–*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2005.*

According to UN scientists, one in six countries in the world faced food shortages this past year because of severe droughts that are connected to global climate change. The global food shortage monitors of the FAO and the US government agree that 34 countries are now experiencing droughts and food shortages, and others could join them. These groups say that up to 30 million people will need assistance because of droughts and other natural disasters.

–*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

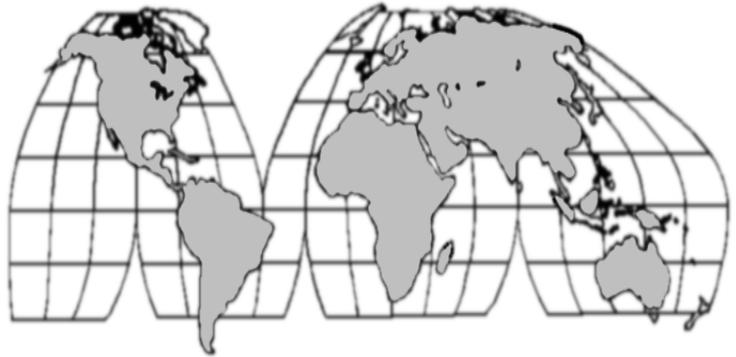
Countries in which a large portion of the population battles hunger daily are usually poor and often lack the social safety nets we enjoy, such as soup kitchens, food stamps, and job training programs. When a family that lives in a poor country cannot grow enough food or earn enough money to buy food, there is nowhere to turn for help.

–*Bread for the World Institute: Are We On Track To End Hunger? Hunger Report 2004*

Of the world's 6.7 billion people, approximately 5 billion people live in the developing world. This includes some 125 low- and middle-income countries in which people have a lower standard of living with access to fewer goods and services than people in high-income countries. The developed world, including the US and some 56 other countries, account for 0.9 billion people. The remaining 0.4 billion live in countries in transition, which include the Baltic states, eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

–*United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): Human Development Report 2005; Population Reference Bureau: 2005 World Population Data Sheet*

In the developing world, more than 1.2 billion people currently live below the international poverty line, earning less than \$1 per day. Many of these people have problems obtaining adequate, nutritious food for themselves and their families. As a result, 815 million people in the developing world consume less than the minimum amount of calories essential for sound health and growth.



–*The World Bank: World Development Indicators 2005; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2005*

Hunger is the most extreme form of poverty, where individuals or families cannot afford to meet their most basic need for food. Hunger manifests itself in many ways other than starvation and famine. Most poor people who battle hunger deal with chronic undernourishment and vitamin or mineral deficiencies, which result in stunted growth, weakness and heightened susceptibility to illness.

–*Bread for the World Institute: Are We On Track To End Hunger? Hunger Report 2004*

Poor nutrition and calorie deficiencies cause nearly one in three people to die prematurely or have disabilities, according to the World Health Organization. Pregnant women, new mothers who breastfeed infants, and children are among the most at risk of undernourishment.

–*World Health Organization (WHO)*

Water is one of the major concerns of development programs around the world. One of every six people lacks access to safe drinking water. Two million people—most of them children – die each year from waterborne disease.

–*Church World Service*

About 12 percent of the world's population uses 85 percent of its water.

–*Maude Barlow: "Water as Commodity—The Wrong Prescription," Institute for Food and Development Policy Backgrounder, Summer 2001*

There are 2.2 billion children in the world. One billion of them live in poverty (almost one in two), 640 million do not have adequate shelter (one in three), 400 million with no access to safe water (one in five), and 270 million with no access to health services (one in seven.)

–*UNICEF: State of the World's Children, 2005*

Every year, nearly 11 million children die before they reach their fifth birthday (10.6 million in 2003.). Almost all of these deaths occur in developing countries, three-fourths of them in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the two regions that also suffer from the highest rates of hunger and malnutrition. Most of these deaths are attributed, not to outright starvation, but to diseases that move in on vulnerable children whose bodies have been weakened by hunger

—*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2005; State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2002; UNICEF: State of the World's Children, 2005*

Every year, more than 20 million low-birth weight babies are born in developing countries. These babies risk dying in infancy, while those who survive often suffer lifelong physical and cognitive disabilities. The four most common childhood illnesses are diarrhea, acute respiratory illness, malaria and measles. Each of these illnesses is both preventable and treatable. Yet, again, poverty interferes in parents' ability to access immunizations and medicines. Chronic

undernourishment on top of insufficient treatment greatly increases a child's risk of death.

—*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2005; State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2002*

1.4 million children die each year from lack of access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. 2.2 million children die each year because they are not immunized.

—UNICEF: State of the World's Children, 2005

Since 1999, countries in the developing world have spent at least \$13 on debt repayment for every \$1 they have received in grants.

—*World Bank: Global Development Finance (released annually)*

*Editor's Note: For more information about global hunger statistics, see Bread for the World ([www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)), Church World Service ([www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org)), UN World Food Programme ([www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org)), Feeding Minds Fighting Hunger ([curriculum, www.feedingminds.org](http://www.feedingminds.org)), Hunger Notes ([www.worldhunger.org](http://www.worldhunger.org)), and the Hunger Web (<http://nutrition.tufts.edu/academic/hungerweb/about.html>)*

## World Hunger: Causes and Solutions

### There is enough food for everyone on earth.

The world produces enough food to feed everyone. World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70 percent population increase. This is enough to provide everyone in the world with at least 2,720 kilocalories (kcal) per person per day (Food and Agriculture Organization 2002, FAO 1998). The principal problem is that many people in the world do not have sufficient land to grow, or income to purchase, enough food. (Hunger Notes)

### But malnutrition and hunger still afflict one out of every seven people on earth. Why?

- Many poor people do not have the money to buy enough food.
- Some people live in such remote places that the food market is too far away or there is no road or means of getting there.

- Other poor people do not have the land, seeds or the proper tools to cultivate crops.
- For those who can grow food, insects, drought, floods and war often destroy crops.
- Many people don't understand the importance of a balanced diet of cereals, vegetables, meats, dairy products and other items. (World Food Programme)

### Just as there is no single cause of hunger, there is no single solution.

Aid organisations around the world try to prevent and alleviate hunger in a variety of ways, including:

- Protecting people from famine by giving food to them in emergencies;
- Reducing poverty through economic development. Helping poor people find and hold jobs or training them for jobs where they can make money;
- Providing information to people about the necessity of a well-balanced diet;
- Making farming more productive so that there will be more food for the world's growing population. (World Food Programme)

### We have made progress in reducing the number of hungry people.

The target set at the 1996 World Food Summit was to halve the number of undernourished people by 2015 from their number in 1990-92. (FAO uses three year averages in its calculation of undernourished people.) The (estimated) number of undernourished people was 824 million in 1990-92. In 2000-02, the number had declined only slightly to 815 million (State of Food Insecurity in the World 2005). So, overall, the world is not making progress toward the world food summit goal, although there has been progress in Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. (Hunger Notes)

# Hunger and Poverty in the United States

*compiled by the Seeds of Hope staff*

Note: Some of the statistics below are for 2004, the most recent statistics available in many cases.

The most recent USDA report shows the fifth consecutive annual increase—and by far the worst increase since 2000—in the number of food-insecure Americans. The total number of people living in food-insecure households in the US rose to 38.2 million in 2004. This number included 24.3 million adults (11.3 percent of all adults) and 13.9 million children (19 percent of all children). The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) also noted that this number grew by nearly two million in 2004, and has grown by seven million in five years.

—Food Research and Action Center, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

3.9 percent of US households experience actual hunger. Some people in these households frequently skip meals or eat too little, sometimes going without food for a whole day. 10.7 million people, including 3 million children, live in these homes. 8.0 percent of US households are at risk of hunger. Members of these households have lower quality diets or must resort to seeking emergency food because they cannot always afford the food they need. 27.5 million people, including 10.6 million children, live in these homes.

—Bread for the World, USDA: Household Food Security in the United States, 2004

Research shows that preschool and school-aged children who experience severe hunger have higher levels of chronic illness, anxiety and depression, and behavior problems than children with no hunger.

—Pediatrics, Vol. 110 No. 4, October 2002

The number of people in poverty in the US (37 million or 12.7 percent of the population) increased again in 2004, for the fifth straight year. (The previous year the number was 35.9 million.) This accounts for 7.9 million families, including 13 million children.

—US Census Bureau: Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States, 2004

In 2004, 3.9 million households (3.5% of all households) received emergency food assistance from food pantries one or more times during the year. 65.1% of food pantry users received food from at least one of the three largest federal food assistance programs which are the Food Stamp Program (FSP), The National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

—USDA: Household Food Security in the United States, 2004

Following years of decline, participation in the Food Stamp Program has been on the rise over the past two years. In August 2005, over 25.7 million people participated in the food stamp program.

—Bread for the World, Food and Nutrition Service Department of Agriculture, "Food Stamp Program Monthly Data," January 2006.

Churches and charities are straining to serve rising requests for food from their pantries and soup kitchens, especially from working people.

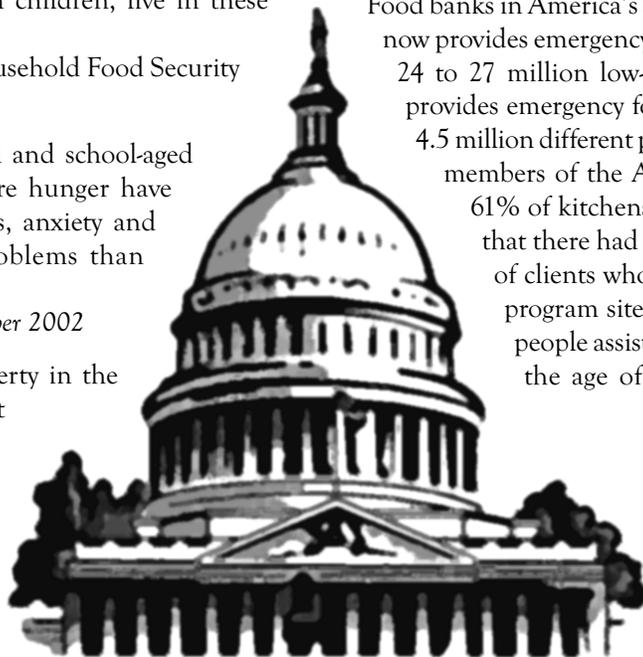
—Bread for the World

Food banks in America's Second Harvest Network (ASH) now provides emergency food assistance to an estimated 24 to 27 million low-income people annually. ASH provides emergency food assistance to approximately 4.5 million different people in any given week. Among members of the ASH network, 65% of pantries, 61% of kitchens, and 52% of shelters reported that there had been an increase in the number of clients who come to their emergency food program sites since 2001. Of the 25 million people assisted, nine million children under the age of 18. Two million of those are

young children under age five. Nearly three million are aged 65 or older.

—America's Second Harvest, Hunger Study 2006, Key Findings

Regardless of income level, food is the second largest



average expense for families in the US, accounting for 15% to 20% of child-rearing expenses.

–USDA: Expenditures on Children by Families, 2004

The US Conference of Mayors reports that in 2005 requests for emergency food assistance increased an average of 12 percent. The study also found that 54 percent of those requesting emergency food assistance were members of families with children and that 40 percent of adults requesting such assistance were employed. High housing costs, low-paying jobs, unemployment, and the economic downturn led the list of reasons contributing to the rise.

–US Conference of Mayors: Hunger and Homelessness Survey 2005 (December 2005)

The average unemployment rate in the United States in 2005 was 5.1%.

–US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Over half the cities surveyed in the 2005 US Mayors report (52 percent) said they are not able to provide an adequate quantity of food to those in need. And 83 percent of surveyed cities reported they had to decrease the quantity of food provided and/or the number of times people can come to get food assistance, up from 67 percent last year.

–US Conference of Mayors: Hunger and Homelessness Survey 2005 (December 2005)

In the past 30 years, the average American's annual salary has increased by ten percent. Over the same period, the average annual pay package of the top 100 CEOs increased from 39 times the average worker's salary to more than 1,000 times the average worker's salary.

–from *Interfaith Peacemakers of Edina* (Edina, MN)

According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), the federal minimum wage, in terms of buying power, is at its lowest point in 50 years. A CEPR report released in November 2005 found that 26.6 percent of the US workforce is in a job that pays poorly and offers neither health insurance nor a pension.

– Center for Economic and Policy Research

The US has the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world. In the US one of every six children live in poverty. One of three children in poverty is a child of color. In contrast to the US, one of 36 children in Sweden lives in poverty. In Germany it is one of 20, and in Britain one of 15.

–Stockholm International Peace Institute

# Pastoral Prayer

by Kate Hawk

God of many names—

In our deepest thirsts,  
be our underground spring.

In our hungry efforts to make sense  
of why things happen as they do—  
Call us home to a waiting supper on the table.

In our weary loneliness,  
be that summer wedding feast  
that feeds our tired spirits  
under a shady silk awning—  
with kisses, sweet cake, and mangos.

In our sighs too deep for words, enforce in us,  
a sense of life's irrepressible delight.  
Be that insistent furry muzzle that will not let us go  
without scratching under her ears.

When we feel helpless and abandoned—  
surprise us like a magician.  
Draw from our own moth-eaten hats—  
moments of quiet grace  
and the faint fragrance of field lilies.

When we've run out of hope, array us—  
like Solomon in all his glory—  
with tambourines,  
ruby slippers and parade floats that say,  
“welcome home,”  
to all who have wandered so long.

Be our remembrance, that within our dry bones,  
there is a marimba band  
warming up for a dance that will last until dawn.

And may we embody the life that is Christ.  
Through our own broken hearts—  
we pray with thanksgiving to the One  
who has become the bread of life, broken for us.  
Amen.

–Kate Hawk, a writer and a UCC minister for 27 years,  
has served—among other ways—as a hospice chaplain, a  
youth minister, and a facilitator of creative writing groups  
for people in recovery.

# A Blessing for Hungry People

by Lorraine DiDio

Lord, Most High Creator God of all that is good,  
Lord of Abundance and Magnificent Bounty,  
bless those who hunger today  
with nourishment,  
let even the smallest of crumbs  
fill their bellies with satisfaction  
and their souls, with knowing  
that they are indeed blessed  
with all the nourishment they need.

By your grace bless them  
to feel completely satisfied and content.

As they are blessed with food,  
allow their hunger pangs to become  
the hunger for You, dear Lord  
and may they always  
know contentment  
from this moment on.

Watch over them Lord,  
and provide them always  
with all they need.

May those who feed  
the hungry  
be abundantly blessed  
with all that is good  
and nourishing  
for their bodies,  
minds and spirits,  
may each blessing they  
bring to those  
who hunger  
be returned to them  
one-hundred-fold  
so that they, and  
all whom they love,  
are sustained always  
by the Grace  
and Light  
of your Goodness  
today and always.



—Lorraine DiDio, a novice in the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, lives and works as an advocate for the poor in Babylon, New York. Art courtesy of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

# Justice and Righteousness:

## *A Creative Re-Visioning of Amos 5:18-27*

*by Josh Burden*

**G**as prices are up. This is yet another sign that the end of days is close at hand, that the day of days is close at hand, that all our hopes will soon be consummated by the direct and glorious intervention of Immanuel, God with us.

I suffer, but with quivering anticipation. The weather, too, has been odd lately, with days too hot and too dry, scorching the earth, or else too wet and too windy, ripping out the bowels of our cities.

And there have been wars and rumors of wars, A-bombs and plane-bombs and train-bombs, unseen threats and unseen enemies, shadows enveloped in the dark, madmen who do not yet understand that the victory is ours, that freedom and equality cannot be vanquished, that the tide of history will not be turned back.

And from parts unseen I have heard of famines and plagues and genocides, of murder and rape and bones wrapped in skin, of creatures that might have been children.

All these portents are but the symptoms of the final convulsion, the birth pangs that will at last give way to our redemption, to the establishment of the blessed kingdom of God among us and for us. The air is crisp with the certainty of it; its image is stamped on the spirit of all things living, grasped by faith, which is the evidence of things not seen.

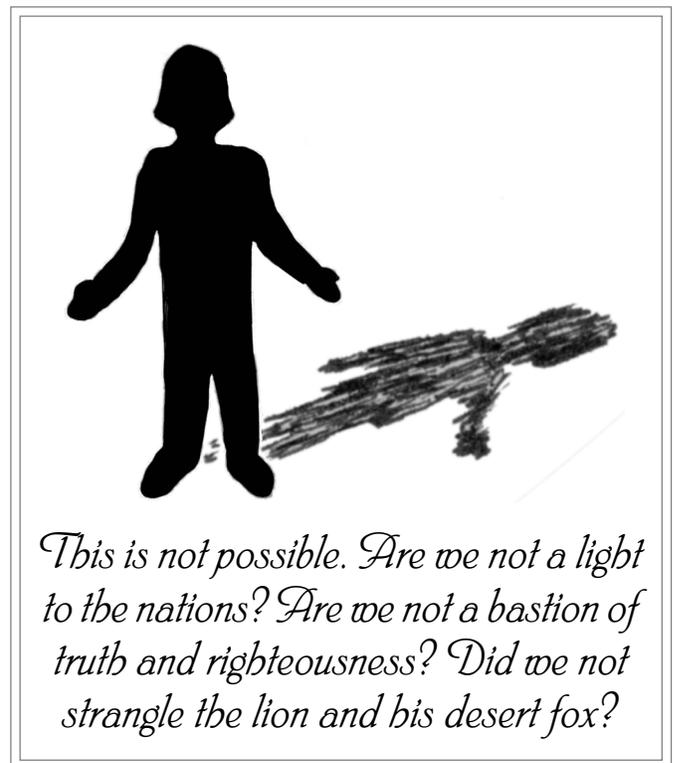
These are the words that Amos saw. These are the words that he saw. And the prophet says, "Behold, O Jacob."

**I** come slowly to consciousness and open my eyes, but I see nothing. Blackness greets me. I am lying on my back, and my shoulders are pressed up against walls. I attempt to move, but I am immobile.

Never one to be easily thwarted, I try to steady my breathing and focus my thoughts. But I am not breathing either. The realization is a cold one, but I cannot even panic. What's happening makes no sense.

I get the feeling that I am drifting upward, and, at the same time, the blackness blurs into an amorphous gray, out of which shapes slowly emerge. I am looking down now, down into a hole in the ground, in which lies a crude coffin, open to the sky. Within the coffin lies a corpse, and the face is haunting, ashen, eyes eerily wide and unblinking, unseeing. I both know and do not know the face, and at first I am not sure why.

Then, after moments of puzzlement laden with dread, recognition slips piercingly in, like a dagger between the ribs. The face is my own—older than the one to which I'm accustomed, but not old enough. And still, I cannot panic. I'm having a bad dream, I tell myself. I would be foolish to believe this.



My gaze broadens enough to see that my grave is not the only one. There are hundreds, thousands, stretched out as far as I can see under the dusky sky. Somewhere a dirge is being sung, low and mournful.

This is not possible. Are we not a light to the nations? Are we not a bastion of truth and righteousness? Did we not strangle the lion and his desert fox? Or was it the bear that slew the lion?

But we outlasted the bear. We outspent it. And we received the blessed reward of our many sacrifices to Mammon, which is the name of Yahweh's own self-giving love. We received ascendancy. And now we are making the world safe.

So what is this venom in our blood? What is this cancer? Why after we have outstripped the lion and the bear and come to rest in the paradise of our own homes have we had to lean against the wall as pain shot through our chest? Were we not promised immortality? Were we not promised eternal life?

*A being must be hovering there,  
some creative force, because now  
intense and almost unbearable  
rivers of light flood over my  
vision, dancing through the clear  
water, sparkling on the surface,  
eddying in the ripples.*

We have lit countless fires to offer up our thanks and our pleas to Mammon, who is the face of Yahweh's own self-giving love. We have paid our insurance. The plumes of our sacrifices have streamed out of factory smokestacks day and night. Their incense has gone out into all the world.

Why then do I see them now, my sight lifting higher, the night deepening, as smoldering embers in a primeval waste, as molten rock unformed by any civilizing influence? And why do they seem to be strung together by the pale strands of the highways of Hades, crawling at their hubs with the colonies of the damned?

This must be a deception, a distortion of vision. We have made our homes clean and white and bright. We have surrounded ourselves with colors and tastes and spectacles that exalt the grandeur of the human spirit, which was created in the image of God.

And we have made music. We dwell with music. We dwell in the hum of a well-oiled world, always in the midst

of voices, voices, a grand cacophony of voices. And we join together and lift our music and our voices up to God in the midst of our monuments to God's faithful provision.

Thus says Yahweh. And the prophet says, "Hear, O Israel."

My ears are pricked as I drift downward now toward the concrete something that I can no longer see at all. A sound is growing, a voice or a rumble like many waters. And perhaps it is water. The fires on the plain in front of me are dying out now one by one in sequence, moving toward me.

And then I am overtaken, but being bodiless, I am not carried away, though still I sense a cool and rhythmic throbbing as I surface. I can see nothing, but I suspect the presence of the some great and brooding spirit overhead.

A being must be hovering there, some creative force, because now intense and almost unbearable rivers of light flood over my vision, dancing through the clear water, sparkling on the surface, eddying in the ripples. Day has come, and I glimpse land masses rising amidst the flood, and on them people are helping one another up.

But these are people to whom I have not paid any heed in my strolls through Samaria. These are the filthy, the diseased, the blind and the lame—the useless. They are the poor.

But they are laughing and smiling and drinking the water together, gazing in wonderment at a smoke-free sky, tumbling through the rough glory of the vegetation near the shoreline.

And far away, where the waves were rolling on, I could see riding the crest the wreckage of all the awing vestments of Mammon, fragments of smokestacks and monuments, of the clean walls of clean homes, of the houses of God papered with hundred-dollar bills.

And then, abruptly, the scene stills and retracts. The waves pull back, the fires resurface. I return to my grave and close my eyes.

And then I wake.

And a voice says, "Choose."

*—Josh Burden is a minister in Maine. This re-visioning was done last year as an assignment for a Hebrew Readings class taught by Lai Ling Ngan at the George W. Truett Baptist Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas.*

# *I Needed Your Help, and You Came to Me*

## *a hunger awareness activity for youth*

*by Katie Cook*

*based on Matthew 25:31-40*

For this activity, you will need objects to represent the six ministries described in Matthew 25:31-40. For instance, you might bring a can of food or loaf of bread for “I was hungry and you fed me,” a glass or cup for “I was thirsty,” a flower for “I was sick,” and so on. You could also use six buzzers or bells of some sort. (Bright flags or bandannas will also work.)

Before you begin, read the passage together. Then divide the students into six groups. Give each group one of the objects, and ask them which ministry their object represents: “feeding the hungry,” “visiting the sick,” and so on.

Ask each team to sit together, with their symbol in front of them, and with one team member in charge of their buzzer, bell, or flag. Explain that you are going to tell several stories, and they are to hit their buzzers or wave their flag as soon as they think their team’s ministry fits the need of the person in the story. You could assign one person to watch the flags or listen for the buzzers.

- *Harry is homeless. He doesn’t remember how long he’s lived on the street. He’s about 50 years old, but he looks like he is 80. He is alcoholic; he says that’s what really caused him to be where he is. He sleeps in a cardboard box on a heating grate. He sits on the sidewalk in Manhattan every day and asks for change so that he can get food—and sometimes alcohol. He smells pretty bad, and sometimes he doesn’t make much sense.*

The “feeding” team will probably hit their buzzer. The “welcoming the stranger” group and the “visiting the sick” group may also respond. The students may expect that each story goes only with one type of ministry, but part of the learning is that these ministries often work together. Ask all of the teams to discuss the best things to do for Harry.

Encourage interaction between teams. For instance, the “visiting the sick” group may say Harry has to have

treatment for substance abuse before anyone else can help him very much. Allow them to be creative in their responses. There are no hard and fast rules here. The object is to come to a solution together.

Repeat the steps above for the following stories:

- *Martha is serving time in the county jail. She has been selling crack in her neighborhood. Her two children—LaTonya, age eight, and Jerome, age six—are with their grandmother. Martha hasn’t heard from the children’s father since Jerome was born. She couldn’t find a job, and she got hooked on crack when a friend gave her some. She began selling it to support her habit, and to also help her mother support the children. Now she has gone through rehabilitation; she’s clean, and she wants to go home and start over.*
- *Felicia is Colombian. She came to the United States to get away from the violence in her country, and she is here illegally. She lives in a run-down apartment house in Houston and lives in fear that the immigration authorities will find her and send her back to Colombia. She is certain that, if she goes back, she will be killed. She can’t work, because she doesn’t have a green card.*
- *Jack is HIV positive. His medicine held back the symptoms of the AIDS virus for a long time, but now his body is weakening. He lives in Los Angeles, and he is too sick now to hold a job. He is afraid that he will lose his apartment, and he doesn’t have enough strength to cook. He is also afraid that no one will want to be around him because of his disease.*

By this time, all teams should have had a chance to respond. Remind the students that Jesus said each of these people in the stories represents him. Ask them if thinking in this way makes them want to respond any differently.

—A version of this activity appeared in the Smyth & Helwys curriculum for Youth, Intersection, in a section called “Hunger in My World” by Katie Cook.

# *The Rice Bag Lesson*

## *a hunger awareness activity for children*

This is an activity that will help your children to realize that many people in the world don't have enough to eat. They will also be able to share this knowledge with the adults in your congregation.

You will need enough rice to make bags of two ounces each for every family in attendance on, say, a Wednesday evening or a Sunday morning. You will also need enough plastic recloseable "baggies" for each. (The "snack" size works best.) Bring several one-fourth-cup measuring cups and several large bowls.

You will also need cards or pieces of paper printed with something like the following:

*This two ounces of rice represents the daily diet of 852 million in the world. More than half of these are children. Imagine that you have this small bag of rice as your only food for the day, and that you probably have to walk a distance to get the water in which to cook it.*

You might want to add something about supporting a hunger project in your church or denomination, with contact information. (If that is not applicable, you might suggest that they support one of the development projects such as Church World Service or Oxfam, or get involved in the closest CROP Walk.)

You might also consider asking the children to write notes on the cards, encouraging folks to help these hungry people. Have the cards or pieces of paper ready when the activity begins.

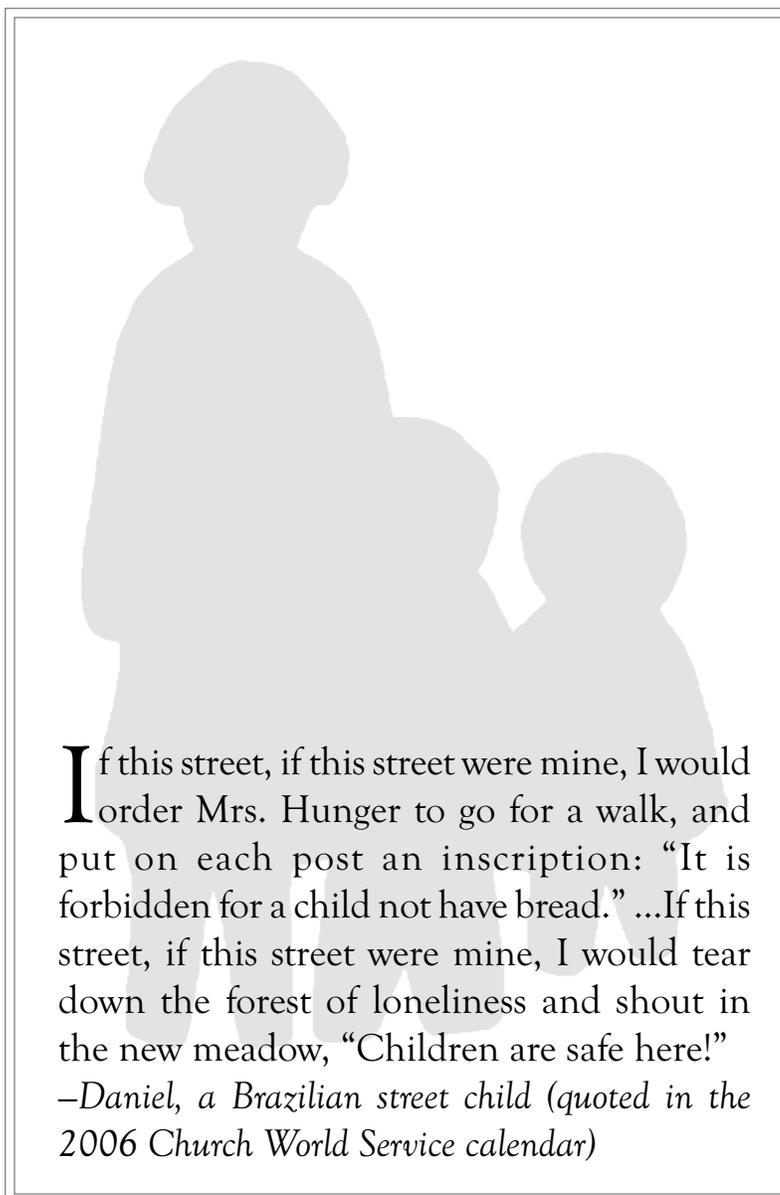
Empty the rice into the large bowls, separate the children into teams, and ask them to measure it into the snack bags. Ask them to put one-fourth cup (two ounces) in each bag. Once they've done that, ask them to insert a card in each bag, or attach a card to each.

While they are working (you could also do this before or after), discuss with the children about how Jesus talked a lot about giving food to hungry people. You could read the Matthew 25:31-40 passage to them, if you'd like. Explain that these bags are to remind all of us of the

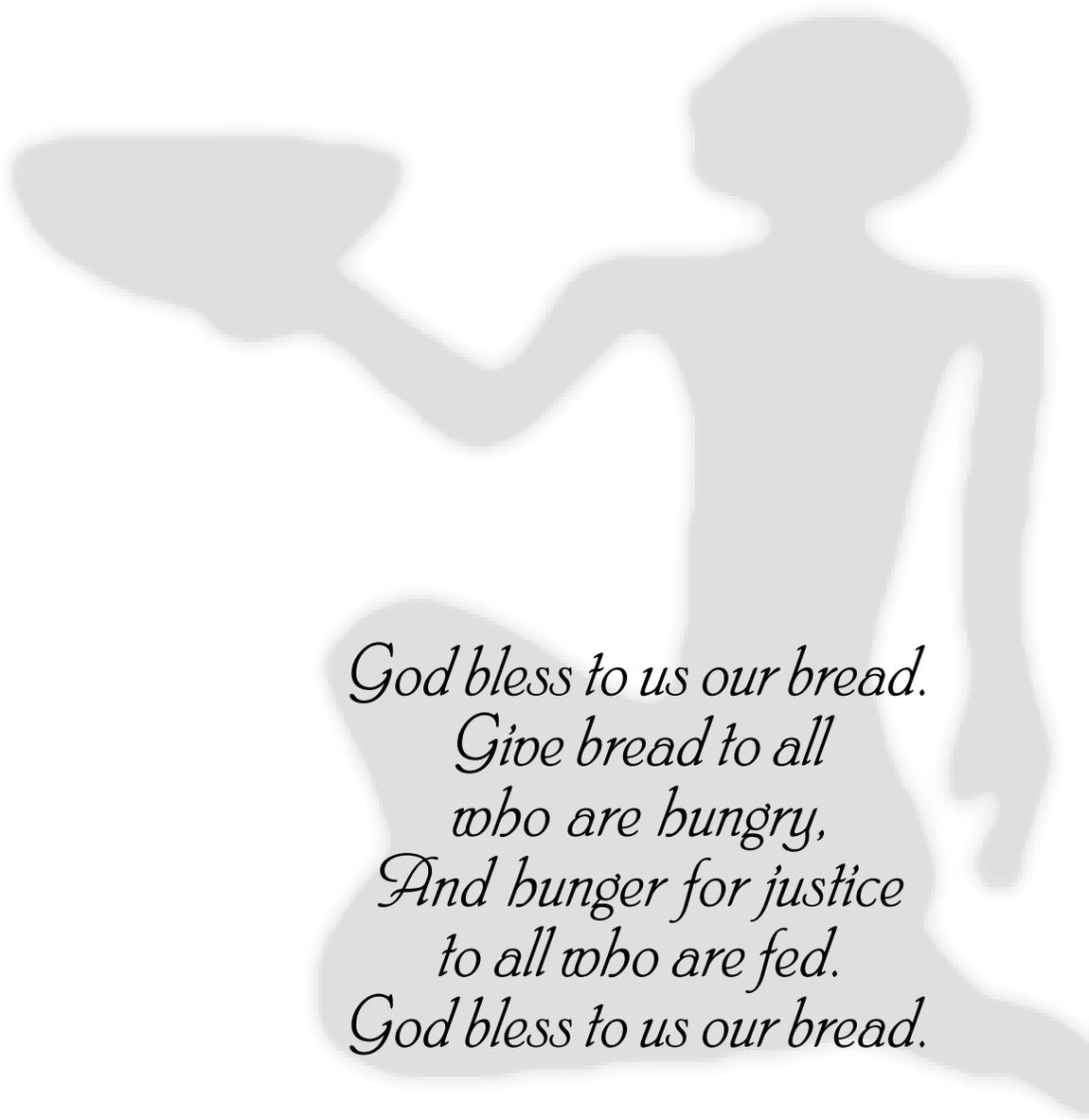
hungry people we have been asked to help, so that none of us forgets our responsibility as Christians.

When all the bags are ready, plan a time for the children to distribute these bags to the adults. You might consider asking one of the children to explain what the project is about. The impact should be significant.

*—This activity came from the CROP Walk materials produced by Church World Service ([www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org).)*



If this street, if this street were mine, I would order Mrs. Hunger to go for a walk, and put on each post an inscription: "It is forbidden for a child not have bread." ...If this street, if this street were mine, I would tear down the forest of loneliness and shout in the new meadow, "Children are safe here!"  
*—Daniel, a Brazilian street child (quoted in the 2006 Church World Service calendar)*



*God bless to us our bread.  
Give bread to all  
who are hungry,  
And hunger for justice  
to all who are fed.  
God bless to us our bread.*

*—a table blessing shared by five-year-old Kate Polaski  
of Charlotte, North Carolina*