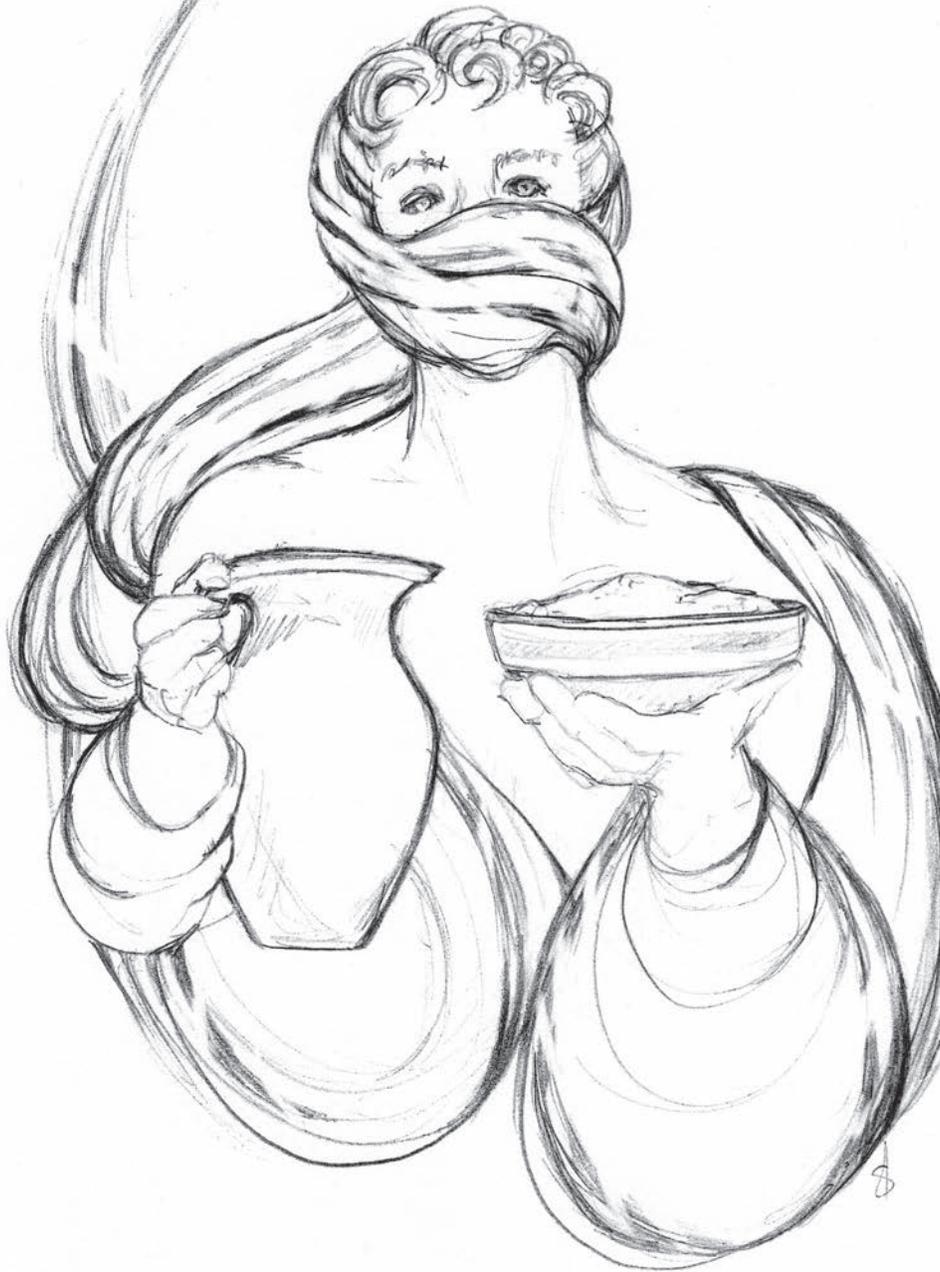


# Breath of Justice



*Worship Resources for the Creative Church - Hunger Emphasis 2021*

*Sacred Seasons, a series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis,  
from Seeds of Hope Publishers: 602 James Avenue; Waco, TX 76706 • 254/755-7745  
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# Sacred Seasons



## Worship Tools for the Creative Church

These unique resource packets are available for the liturgical year, three packets a year for \$100 (\$125 for non-US subscriptions), one packet for \$50 (\$65 outside of the US).

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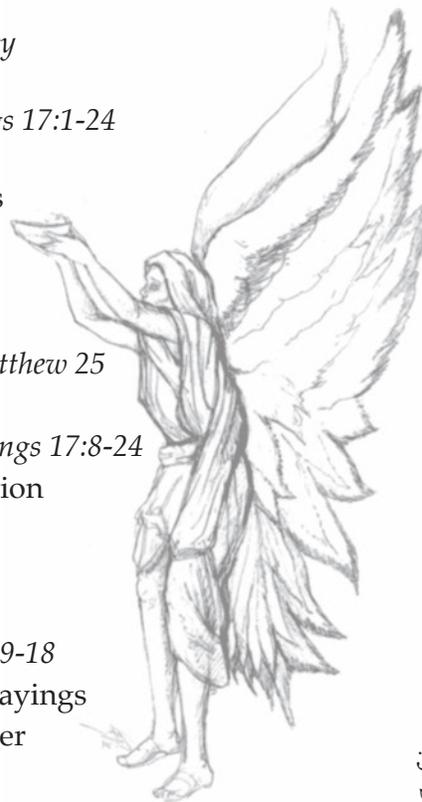
### Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding

# Breath of Justice

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The Seeds 2021 40-Day Hunger Calendar



art by Sally Lynn Askins

to a common burden for poor and hungry people of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. Since 1991, the group has sought out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable and empower a variety of responses to the problems of hunger and poverty.

### Editorial Address

The Seeds of Hope ministry is housed by the community of faith at Seventh & James Baptist Church. The mailing address is: 602 James; Waco, TX 76706; 254/755-7745; seedseitor1@gmail.com; www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2021.

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# A Word about This Packet

This packet's theme is the completion of a trilogy for this liturgical year centered around the concept of breath. (Read more about this on page 4.)

As always, we are indebted to a lot of people for their generous contributions to this packet. This includes our liturgical team—Guilherme Feitosa de Almeida, Erin Conaway, Milo Grant, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo—for the direction and theme, and for most of the elements of the liturgy.

Guilherme, a minister and a native of Brazil, teaches in the Baylor University Department of Theatre Arts. Erin is pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where the Seeds offices are housed. You will find a sermon by Erin on page 9. Alec is pastor of Richfield Christian Church in Waco and is very active in hunger-related and interfaith efforts in the community.

Milo, the minister to youth, children and families at Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, joined the team in 2020. So did Scott, a divinity student at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco. Scott wrote a children's sermon and a pastoral prayer, and you will find some of his art in this packet.

Sally Lynn Askins is a member of the Seeds Council of Stewards and our resident artist. With her cover art depicting God holding the oil jar and bowl of grain, and with three drawings inspired by the Elijah stories in our liturgy, she completes a series of drawings for this liturgical year.

She began with four angels for the 2020 Advent/Christmastide packet and continued with what we call "Sally's Tomb Angel" for the 2021 Lent/Eastertide packet. Almost all of them are masked, and all of them evoke the breath of God. We took the liberty of reprising one of the Advent angels on page 4, as well as her "Tomb Angel" on page 14.

We were pleased to be able to include in this packet a sermon about Elijah by Nancy Hastings Sehested and two readings by Ken Sehested. Ken is a former Seeds editor and a member of our Board of Advisors.

With the liturgy, the communion service, the sermons, the reflections and prayers, we are trying to learn together the

best ways to work for justice on a variety of fronts. The coronavirus pandemic has created new areas of poverty and exacerbated others. Minoritized people are feeling and speaking the oppression they have felt for a long, long time. Food security is bound up in all of these realities.

Although the 40-Day Hunger Calendar in this packet is the 23rd of its kind, we have added some very recent developments and ideas in its squares. We want to direct your attention to it, because we believe that authentic work towards healing hunger flows from an inner strength, which in turn comes from spiritual disciplines.

We also believe that a concerted effort, even by a small number of people, to observe a time of prayer together can make a huge difference in how we all face the problems of hunger and poverty. This calendar is designed to help you prepare spiritually for the work ahead of us. We know you can't do all of the things suggested for all of the days, but we challenge you to use the scriptures to make these 40 days a holy season.

The statistics beginning on page 21 include many recent numbers about how the pandemic has affected food security around the world and in the US. We hope all of these elements will come together to help you as you plan for your church's hunger emphasis, whatever form it takes, depending on COVID-19 protocols.

As always, we are deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work.

As always, we are counting on you to adapt these contents to your own needs, resources and inclinations.

We would love to hear about how you used them.

The contents of this packet are your congregation's to use freely and we want you to share them with others. We truly hope that the writings and art will contribute to many steps toward a world where everyone can breathe without restraint.

Gratefully,

Katie Cook, on behalf of the Seeds staff and Council of Stewards



art by Sally Lynn Askins

# Theme Interpretation

Our overall theme for this liturgical year has been about breathing. We became interested in this theme in March of 2020, when the world became focused on breathing because of the dangers of the COVID-19 era.

Two months later, we became even more focused on breathing when millions of people watched the video of George Floyd crying out, with a police officer's knee on his neck, "I can't breathe."

Those words became a rallying cry for people of color and their allies all over the world. Signs, t-shirts, masks and other merchandise saying "I can't breathe" proliferated. We were more aware than ever that many of our brothers and sisters couldn't breathe, and hadn't been able to for a very long time.

With all of this in mind, we began to take a deeper look into the effects of God breathing life into the world. Alec Ylitalo wrote,

*The breath of heaven, the breath of God, is a powerful force that is seen moving, creating, speaking and saving all throughout our scriptures, but there is especially an incredible focus on breath during the events that act as the pillars of our faith.*

So we tried to follow those thoughts in "Breath of God," the 2020 Advent/Christmastide packet, and "Breathe on Me, Breath of God," the 2021 Lent/Eastertide packet. We examined the notion of God breathing life into the world, into the first human.

For Advent and Christmastide, we celebrated God in Jesus breathing the same air as we do, joining in the now labored breath of humanity, as Alec wrote.

For Lent and Eastertide, we looked at God breathing new life into humanity through what that Christ child grew up to be. We followed the story from the first breath at Christmas to the last gasp of "It is finished" on Holy Friday.

Our theme for this packet, "Breath of Justice," was best interpreted by liturgical team member Milo Grant, who said:

*"I can't breathe" reveals more than the lack of air. It reveals the reality of a lack of justice, a*

*lack of hope and a lack of peace that Black people, Indigenous people and People of Color—and all oppressed people—experience. We are called to fill those lacks in any way we can.*

In our planning session, we discussed the fact that these are hard topics to preach about and to plan a worship service around. We know that. But we think they are important. God commands us to use our breath in voice and action to fight for justice of all kinds.

So, when you look through the packet, you will see references to hungry people, but you will also read about some of the harsh realities around them that make them hungry—that keep them from living full, healthy lives. Realities that keep them from taking a deep breath.

You will also see a subtheme woven through the packet. It has echoes of our 2018 Hunger Emphasis packet, "What Are These Among So Many?" Erin Conaway evokes this theme from the second chosen Gospel reading in the liturgy on page 5. The reading is in John 6, about the feeding of the multitude. Erin's sermon beginning on page 9 lays out this theme: what you have to give may be small, but what you have is what God wants from you, and it is enough.

Argye Hillis, who was instrumental in bringing the Seeds ministry to Texas 30 years ago, always said,

*The problem is huge, and there's no way you can solve it by yourself. Just pick up your end of the quilt and trust others to pick up their ends.*

You CAN be part of the global network that responds to hunger. You may not be on a helicopter, transporting tons of grain into war zones, but you can support and pray for those who are. You can do something to help that man on the street corner, holding the sign that says "Just trying to survive." You can volunteer somewhere. Our 2021 40-Day Hunger Calendar has all kinds of ideas. We know you can't do all of them in 40 days, but we hope one or two of them will inspire you.

As it says in the square for Day 40, "Do what you can, and ask God to bless your effort. To someone it may mean more than you dare to think."

*The art above was created by Sally Lynn Askins for the 2020 Advent/Christmastide packet, "Breath of God."*

# Breath of Justice

## *A Hunger Emphasis Liturgy*

by *Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook, Milo Grant,  
Scott Turner & Alec Ylitalo*

### *Call to Worship*

Come, let us worship and bow down before the Lord, our God, our Creator. Who made us to require food and drink in order to survive. Who gifted us with the ability to give food and drink to one another. Who calls us to use that ability to feed and quench the thirst of our hungry neighbors. Come let us not just worship and bow down, but let us feed and quench, let us love in truth and action.

### *Hymn*

“God of Justice Ever Flowing”

Text: Kathleen R. Moore

Music: *Columbian Harmony*, 1825

HOLY MANNA 8787D

Sing! A New Creation No. 101

(<https://hymnary.org/hymn/SNC/101>)

### *Meditation of Preparation*

Christians, reading this anywhere in the world, must work out in their own churches and families what it would mean to celebrate God’s kingdom so that the people at the bottom of the pile, at the end of the line, would find it to be good news.

–N. T. Wright, about the Parable of the Great Banquet, in *Luke for Everyone*

### *Hymn*

“O Breath of Life”

Text: Elizabeth Ann P. Head

Music: Mary J. Hammond

SPIRITUS VITAE 9898

*Worship and Rejoice* No. 328

(<https://hymnary.org/hymn/WAR2003/328>)

### *Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures*

1 Kings 17:1-24

*This reading can be done normally, that is, in one reading by one person. We have also prepared a reading that breaks down the passage and adds an interpretation. See page 7.*

### *Litany*

ONE: Lord, as the drought came, Elijah turned to your words and your directions, and you provided as he followed you and found water to drink and food to sustain.

MANY: *In our own drought of the soul, we turn to you too, O God, that you may lead the way once again to the plenty and fruitfulness that your creation can provide.*

ONE: But Lord, the drought continued, and the reality of starvation and even death set in for the widow of Zarephath. And again you provided, as she trusted that there would be enough: enough food, enough compassion, enough of you.

MANY: *In our own rumblings of hunger, even as we worry and wonder if there will be enough, we turn to you once again, O God, and your assurance that the jar*



art by Sally Lynn Askins

*will never empty and the oil will never fail, that there will not only be enough for us, but enough for a neighbor in need as well.*

ONE: And still, the drought continued, and the ills and pains of starvation brought the widow to her knees as she cried out for her son's life. And even though she seemed to turn away, you breathed new life into her hope through Elijah, his words, and his actions.

MANY: *Many witness the brutality of hunger on a daily basis in our world, and it's easy to turn away, O God, but your steady breath of life rises and falls, sustaining an inexplicable hope as we see your breath transform into other Elijahs when the world needs prophetic breath, when the world needs words of justice, when the world needs life-saving actions.*

### *Reading from the Psalms*

Psalm 1

### *Reading from the Epistles*

James 5:1-6

### *Hymn*

"Amazing Love"

Text and Music: Graham Kendrick

Worship and Rejoice No. 259

(<https://hymnary.org/hymn/WAR2003/259>)

### *First Gospel Reading*

Matthew 25:31-40

### *Second Gospel Reading*

John 6:1-14

### *Pastoral Prayer*

*If you use the sermon on page 9, see the pastoral prayer on page 12.*

### *Offertory*

### *Children's Sermon*

*See the children's sermon on page 15.*

### *First Epistle Reading*

James 5-16

### *Second Epistle Reading*

Philippians 4:10-14

### *Sermon*

*For a sermon that goes with the Gospel of John passage, see "It's the Little Things" on page 9. For a sermon about Elijah, see "Fire and Fury" on page 16. (Also, see the interpretation of the Elijah stories on page 7.)*

### *Meditation of Confession*

Obviously, while I love all, I must, like Christ, have a special love for the poor. At the last judgement, we shall all be judged by the treatment we have given to Christ, to Christ in the person of those who are hungry or thirsty, who are dirty, wounded, and oppressed.

—Dom Helder Camara

### *Communion*

*See "Communion Suggestions" on page 8.*

### *Meditation of Commitment*

Sometimes Christian churches forget that our mission is to do what Christ did. Care for the sick. Share with the poor. Listen to the lonely. Stand against greed.

—Brett Younger

### *Hymn of Commitment*

"When Love Is Found"

Text: Brian Wren

Music: Trad. English Melody

O WALY, WALY Long Meter

*Celebrating Grace* Hymnal No. 524

(<https://hymnary.org/hymn/CGH2010/524>)

### *Call to Action*

Friends, the breath of God has filled our souls and fed our hunger for righteousness today in worship. But we must realize that this is only the first gasp for air from a world and a humanity that is struggling to breathe. May this first breath signal the start of the tireless journey to help fill what is lacking in the community around us. May this breath sustain our voices not just in worshipful ways, but to be transformed into voices of advocacy for the voiceless in the pursuit of justice, into prophetic cries for equity. May this breath sustain our bodies into the actions that await us also. May it transform our actions into the work of feeding the hungry, into the fight for those who have been pushed aside for too long. In that way, may God breathe life into the hopes of all that we meet. Amen.

# Grain, Breath & Hope

## *An Interpretation of 1Kings 17:1-24 for Two or More Readers*

*Editor's note: This reading has been prepared to use in place of the Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures in the "Breath of Justice" liturgy on page 5. It calls for a narrator and a reader. You could vary the readings by asking three people to read the different sections of the passage.*

### *Elijah's Sojourn in the Wilderness*

NARRATOR: It is the 9th Century BCE. Ahab has disappointed God as a king. He has not been faithful. Elijah warns him of the coming drought. After this, he is told to go to the wilderness and wait. As Elijah's hunger is satisfied by the ravens and his thirst quenched by the nearby wadi, he is being prepared for a mission.



*art by Sally Lynn Askjns*

READER reads 1 Kings 17:1-6.

### *Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath*

NARRATOR: In the next verses, we will witness the reality of starvation that happens during a drought—not just in the 9th century, but also in our own day. The widow in the story you will now hear knew how it felt not to know where her next meal was coming from. In fact, she thought she was about to prepare her last meal. As you listen to these words, think of the 768 million people in the world today who are in exactly that circumstance.

READER reads 1 Kings 17:7-16

### *Elijah and the Breath of Life*

NARRATOR: Now you will hear an account of the effects of prolonged hunger, the real prospect of death, but also a breathing of life into the hopes of people who are trapped in these realities.

READER reads 1 Kings 17:17-24

---

### *Elijah's Showdown & Retreat*

*Editor's note: On page 16, you will find a sermon by Nancy Sehested about a later adventure of Elijah. If you plan to use this sermon, you might consider adding this passage to the reading.*

NARRATOR: As we confront the powers of our time, we often feel like we are the only ones who are true to God. We stand, as Nancy Sehested says, at the doorway of our deepest fears and illusions. As you hear Elijah's story of confrontation and retreat, listen for God's words of hope to Elijah and to us.

READER reads 1 Kings 18:30-39 and 1 Kings 19:4-13.

*This could be done by two readers.*

# Communion Suggestions

**E**ditor's note: Below are a few suggestions for your communion table and for the service of communion. We hope you will run with these concepts and come up with creative ideas of your own. If you do, we would love to hear about what you did.

## Preparation

We suggest that you prepare the following for your communion table:

- A cloth of unbleached linen, possibly with earth-tone stripes, resembling a textile of 9th-century Israel
- A simple clay jar such as would have been used in Elijah's time, filled with oil
- A small clay bowl containing a handful of barley or wheat grains

Arrange the cloth on the table. Place the clay containers prominently. Arrange your communion elements around these. You might consider finding a loaf of bread that is made of ancient grains. (Keep in mind, however, those of your congregation who may have gluten sensitivity.)

## Invitation to the Table

Our table today (*hold up the oil jar*) holds reminders of God's provision for Elijah and for the widow of Zarephath and her son. But (*hold up the small bowl*) it also holds an indictment and command for us, because hundreds of millions of people in our world only have this handful of food to eat each day. As we come to the table, let us confess that we often don't do anything to help people who find themselves in this plight. Let us confess that we sometimes live our lives as if they didn't exist. As we come to the table, let us ask for the wisdom to respond to them in ways that will make a real difference.

## The Bread

(*Raise the loaf of bread.*) Jesus said, "This is my body." Jesus told us that this bread is who he is. As we partake of it, we take his identity into ourselves. As we share this loaf, let us promise to share our bread with hungry people.

## The Cup

(*Raise the cup.*) Jesus took the cup and said, "This is my blood. When you drink this, you are sharing in my life." Each time we do this, we are renewing the new covenant between ourselves and with God. Let us promise to extend this covenant to all of God's people.

## Blessing

May this bread and this cup nourish our spirits and give us strength for the mission to which God is calling us.

*Note: The words for the bread and cup were inspired by William F. Cooper, retired professor of philosophy and former Dean of Arts and Sciences at Baylor University.*



art by Scott Turner

# It's the Little Things

*A Sermon by Erin Conaway*

*John 6:1-21*

The sign read: "Time Safari Inc., SAFARIS TO ANY YEAR IN THE PAST. YOU NAME THE ANIMAL. WE TAKE YOU THERE. YOU SHOOT IT."

Eckels stood looking at it, pondering his decision, and then handed the man a check for \$10,000.

"Does this safari guarantee I come back alive?"

"We guarantee nothing," said the official, "except the dinosaurs." He turned. "This is Mr. Travis, your Safari Guide in the Past. He'll tell you what and where to shoot. If he says no shooting, no shooting. If you disobey instructions, there's a stiff penalty of another ten thousand dollars, plus possible government action, on your return."

The men got in the time machine and started their journey backwards.

The Machine slowed; its scream fell to a murmur. The Machine stopped.

The sun stopped in the sky.

The fog that had enveloped the Machine blew away and they were in an old time, a very old time indeed, three hunters and two Safari Heads with their blue metal guns across their knees.

"Christ isn't born yet," said Travis. "Moses has not gone to the mountain to talk with God. The Pyramids are still in the earth, waiting to be cut out and put up. Remember that. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler—none of them exists."

The men nodded.

"That," Mr. Travis pointed, "is the jungle of sixty million two thousand and fifty-five years before President Keith."

He indicated a metal path that struck off into green wilderness, over streaming swamp, among giant ferns and palms.

"And that," he said, "is the Path, laid by Time Safari for your use. It floats six inches above the earth. Doesn't touch so much as one grass blade, flower, or tree. It's an anti-gravity metal. Its purpose is to keep you from touching this world of the Past in any way. Stay on the Path. Don't go off it. I repeat. Don't go off. For any reason! If you fall off, there's a penalty. And don't shoot any animal we don't okay."

"Why?" asked Eckels.

They sat in the ancient wilderness. Far birds' cries

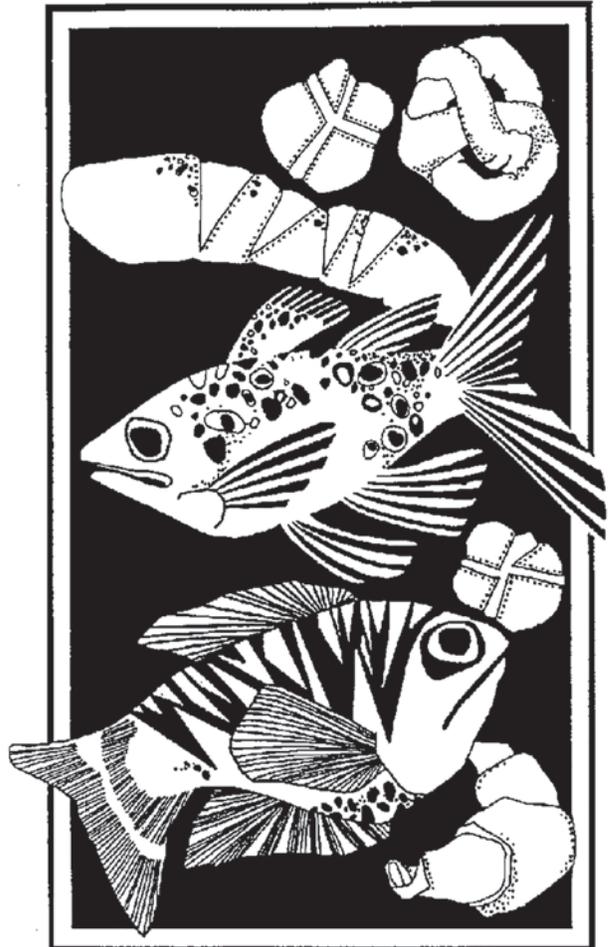
blew on a wind, and the smell of tar and an old salt sea, moist grasses, and flowers the color of blood.

"We don't want to change the Future. We don't belong here in the Past. The government doesn't like us here. We have to pay big graft to keep our franchise. A Time Machine is finicky business. Not knowing it, we might kill an important animal, a small bird, a roach, a flower even, thus destroying an important link in a growing species."

"That's not clear," said Eckels.

"All right," Travis continued, "say we accidentally kill one mouse here. That means all the future families of this one particular mouse are destroyed, right?"

"Right."



art by Melissa Storey

*“And all the families of the families of the families of that one mouse! With a stamp of your foot, you annihilate first one, then a dozen, then a thousand, a million, a billion possible mice!”*

*“So they’re dead,” said Eckels. “So what?”*

*“So what?” Travis snorted quietly. “Well, what about the foxes that’ll need those mice to survive? For want of ten mice, a fox dies. For want of ten foxes, a lion starves. For want of a lion, all manner of insects, vultures, infinite billions of life forms are thrown into chaos and destruction.*

*“Eventually it all boils down to this: Fifty-nine million years later, a cave man, one of a dozen in the entire world, goes hunting wild boar or saber-toothed tiger for food. But you, friend, have stepped on all the tigers in that region. By stepping on one single mouse. So the cave man starves. And the cave man, please note, is not just any expendable man, no! He is an entire future nation. From his loins would have sprung ten sons. From their loins one hundred sons, and thus onward to a civilization.*

*“Destroy this one man, and you destroy a race, a people, an entire history of life. It is comparable to slaying some of Adam’s grandchildren. The stomp of your foot, on one mouse, could start an earthquake, the effects of which could shake our earth and destinies down through Time, to their very foundations. With the death of that one cave man, a billion others yet unborn are throttled in the womb.*

*“Perhaps Rome never rises on its seven hills. Perhaps Europe is forever a dark forest, and only Asia waxes healthy and teeming. Step on a mouse and you crush the Pyramids. Step on a mouse and you leave your print, like a Grand Canyon, across Eternity. Queen Elizabeth might never be born, Washington might not cross the Delaware, there might never be a United States at all. So be careful. Stay on the Path. Never step off!”*

I won’t spoil the rest of the story for you. It’s a fun short story by Ray Bradbury titled “A Sound of Thunder.” I know one of the assumptions that lies beneath the story is a linear understanding of time that doesn’t take into consideration the brilliance of the multi-verse and more advanced understandings of the time-space continuum, but you get the point. One small action can lead to something big.

In our Gospel reading this morning, the weary disciples are faced with a giant crowd—about 5,000 in all, as best the writer could remember. And it’s getting late and everyone is hungry, and you know what happens when people start getting hungry. So before the crowd could turn on him, Jesus asks Peter, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?”

Peter is aghast and does quick math and responds, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” Then Andrew comes and says, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”

*In the economy of God, we can never tell on the front end how a small change, one gesture, one act of kindness, one risk of love will be magnified in the hands of Christ to change the world.*

“Have the people sit down,” Jesus says. Then he took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And everyone ate until they were satisfied and there were twelve baskets filled with leftovers.

Mr. Walker gave his life to teaching English to high school sophomores. He had the honors class and, by the time the students got to him, they were ready to take on *The Lord of the Flies* and other great works. He started the semester off with a short story and had the students analyze it. He asked them to discuss the symbolism in the story and talk about how it paralleled the character’s experience.

One student couldn’t see it. He wrote well, but he didn’t find anything symbolic in the story and said as much in his reflection paper. He also seemed to scoff at the idea that there was anything more than a plain, literal reading to anything written—at least anything serious. He was blind to so much that was going on in this short story.

Mr. Walker had a choice to make; he could tell the student the truth, that he was probably not ever going to make an “A” in his class, and that was important for college applications. So the student could transfer to the standard English class and he would surely make all “A’s” there. But he would miss out on some great literature and learning to see these wonderful things behind and beneath and above and throughout the stories he was reading. If he stayed, there was a good chance he would learn to see these things, but it would cost him in grades until he got to that point.

Mr. Walker imagined that conversation going on with this student and took a deep breath. He could

just give him a “C” and not say anything. I mean, the kid’s dad had been on the school board and he might complain about symbolism being a bunch of liberal nonsense.

And truthfully, what difference would it really make in the kid’s life? He’s a Bible Drill, literal-Bible-reading kind of kid who has “Jesus Saves” written on his folder. Why would he listen to me? It’s just one conversation. What difference can it make among so many this young man is going to have throughout his life?

Mr. Walker took the risk and told me I’d probably never make an “A” in his class, but, if I stayed and would be open to learning, I would see things I’d never seen before and entire new worlds would open up right before my eyes. But good grades are important. They matter a great deal for your future, so think about it and talk to your parents about it, and let me know.

Thirty years and a degree in literature later, I still remember that conversation in the hallway at Midland High School and the time I spent wondering what he could see that I could not. He was right; entire worlds existed that I couldn’t see before he opened my eyes to them.

What is so little among so many? That was what Ruth and Luis Campos thought the first time they opened up a week-long clinic in Colique, Peru. The people in that little place used old posters and advertisements to build roofs over their heads. They had old beer posters covering up gaps in their walls and many bathed themselves by splashing water from a bucket over their dust-covered bodies.

There was so much poverty, the mayor told the couple that he and his brother were going to stay up all night to try to catch someone who had stolen something from them the day before. Dr. Campos asked what they would do to him if they caught him. “We will kill him, of course.” They said it in such a matter-of-fact manner that it took him a minute to realize what he had just heard.

Just a week, a handful of doctors and a trunk filled with medicine. What could that do among so many needs?

Today theirs is a thriving ministry that has changed Colique. They are feeding children at school, which has increased attendance enormously. They are building huts made out of wood and tin, rather than old posters and trash bags.

The Campos are there with doctors and dentists at least three times a year and, through that care, have saved innumerable lives.

One mother came to the clinic early on, desperate to have the doctors help her daughter. She was born with a twist in her feet that made her unable to walk. The little girl was now too big to carry, so her mother had to drag her up and down the dirt roads of Colique to get her anywhere. She dragged her to the clinic, and the doctors quickly realized that a surgery could heal this little girl’s legs.

They started checking in Peru, but couldn’t find a doctor who had done this surgery before. But they

*Your acts of love and grace may very well change someone’s life. You may not get to see it come to fruition, but you are called to offer it just the same.*

had a friend in the US who said he would do it for free. They raised the money and flew the child and her mom to the US, where the little girl had the surgery. Within months she was walking. After a year she was running.

And Jesus said, “Talitha Cum,” which means, “Little girl, stand up.”

The name of the ministry is OSA, which stands for Operacion San Andres / Operation Saint Andrew. Its name comes from this very question in our gospel reading today: “What are they among so many?”

In the economy of God, we can never tell on the front end how a small change, one gesture, one act of kindness, one risk of love will be magnified in the hands of Christ to change the world. There were 5,000 hungry people, and all they had was five pita breads and two fish. But in the hands of Christ, it is enough.

Your acts of love and grace may very well change someone’s life. You may not get to see it come to fruition, but you are called to offer it just the same. We can never be so presumptuous to think we know better than God what is possible. We do the thing we are called to do and trust it in God’s hands. We make the phone call to that person who keeps showing up in our dreams or is constantly on our mind.

We write the card or send the email to the person who we know is hurting, even though we don’t know what to say. We show up, and we listen, and we feel the weight of the moment overwhelming the miniscule power of our fleeting words. But we have to trust that, through our presence, God’s presence will be made known.

We do the small things, the smile, the caring touch, listening and paying attention. We do the small things, and we trust God with the multiplication. Friends, that's all we can do. And it is enough.

*We do the small things,  
and we trust God with the  
multiplication. Friends, that's all  
we can do. And it is enough.*

When you get discouraged thinking, "I'm making 25 meals to feed to our Meals on Wheels partners today, but what is that among so many hungry people? I can only mentor one student, what good will that do in a school of so many children who need a mentor?" Offer the meal and see, mentor

the student and see. See what God will do with your version of five loaves and two fish.

Sometimes we get to see the feeding of the multitude, and sometimes we don't. Sometimes we don't know what happened to our five loaves and two fish, we only know we gave them faithfully and we pray it was enough. Do that. Give your gift to God in the way God is calling you to give it, and leave the multiplication up to God. For in God's hands what you have to give, as small as it may seem—it is enough. Amen.

### *Endnote*

1. All text in italics are direct quotes from "A Sound of Thunder" by Ray Bradbury. The short story was first printed in *Collier's* magazine in 1952 and was later included in the 1953 edition of *Golden Apples of the Sun*, a collection of Bradbury's works published by Doubleday & Company.

## Prayers of God's People

*by Scott Turner • Text: John 6:1-21*

God of All Provision, we thank you today for all that you have given us.

We know that we are blessed beyond belief and, even in the midst of our darkest days and most troubling hours, we seek to thank you for all your graces and mercies.

Lord, forgive us when we forget to thank you for your provisions.

We often take them for granted.  
Help us in our complacency.

Lord, forgive us when we don't believe that what we have is enough,  
for we have seen you feed 5,000.  
Help us to trust in you.

Lord, forgive us when we see our neighbors, our brothers and sisters, without enough, and do not seek to help them.

There is so much need and want around us.

Lord, help us to find ways to meet these needs,  
so we can bring your Kingdom to our community.

Lord, forgive us for living in fear when you have called us to live in faith.

Sometimes we toil in the storm and don't see your refuge.

Help us to find you among the waves.  
And we thank you for already being there.

For you are God of All Provision. Amen.

*—Scott Turner grew up in Georgetown, TX, graduated with a degree in youth ministry from Howard Payne University. At this writing, he is an MDiv student at Truett Theological Seminary and interim youth minister at Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed. He's passionate about congregational ministry and art (specifically illustration and printmaking) and loves to explore how they intersect. Loaves and fishes art by Sally Lynn Askins.*

# Elijah and the Widow

## *A Reading Inspired by 1 Kings 17:8-24*

*by Ken Sehested*

ONE: It is with careless ease that we say, "Bless God, for all life is good," when the sun shines during our outings, when no strain threatens our budget.

MANY: *It's easy, when life is blessed with children and our ancient ones live long and die in peace.*

ONE: It takes little faith to acknowledge God's goodness when terror remains at a distance.

MANY: *It's easy, when health is secure and the future holds promise.*

ONE: But life is not always and everywhere good. Storms and strains often surround us and those we love.

MANY: *Children suffer, loved ones die too young, health crumbles and threat draws near.*

ONE: Draw ever nearer, O God of Zarephath, divine place of Meeting in the midst of drought and destitution.

MANY: *Bring us into the presence of widows whose faith is stronger than famine.*

ONE: Send Elijah to accompany us to the place where hope outstrips horror.

MANY: *Provide us with provisions that neither faint nor fail.*

ONE: And teach us to say, along the risky journey of faith,

MANY: *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and bless God's holy Name."*

*—Ken Sehested was one of the founding editors of the Seeds ministry in Decatur, GA, and is*

*now a member of the Seeds Board of Advisors. He was the founding director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, whose offices were adjacent to those of Seeds. He is now the editor for the blog Prayer&Politics, where we found this litany.*



*art by Sally Lynn Askins*

# Sunday Morning Invocation

by *Blake Burlison*

O Nameless One whom we call God,

As we come into your presence now  
remind us that we belong to you  
remind us that when we were formed  
in our mother's womb,  
you were there with us, even then.  
And whether in our journey  
through this space-time world  
we have traveled far from you  
or whether we have always been near to you,  
we seek you again, now.  
Whether we believe or whether we doubt,  
we call on you now.  
Whether we have succeeded or failed  
in the week behind us,  
we call on you again, even now.  
Draw near to us in our longing.

This morning, may we know you more fully  
as we enter into this space with heart and mind.  
May we discern more clearly your will  
as we read from the Book.  
May we be challenged by a prophetic word  
from this pulpit.  
May we be healed by the gentle touch  
of brothers and sisters in Christ.  
May we be inspired to move beyond  
the confines of our small selves  
and into the mind of Christ.

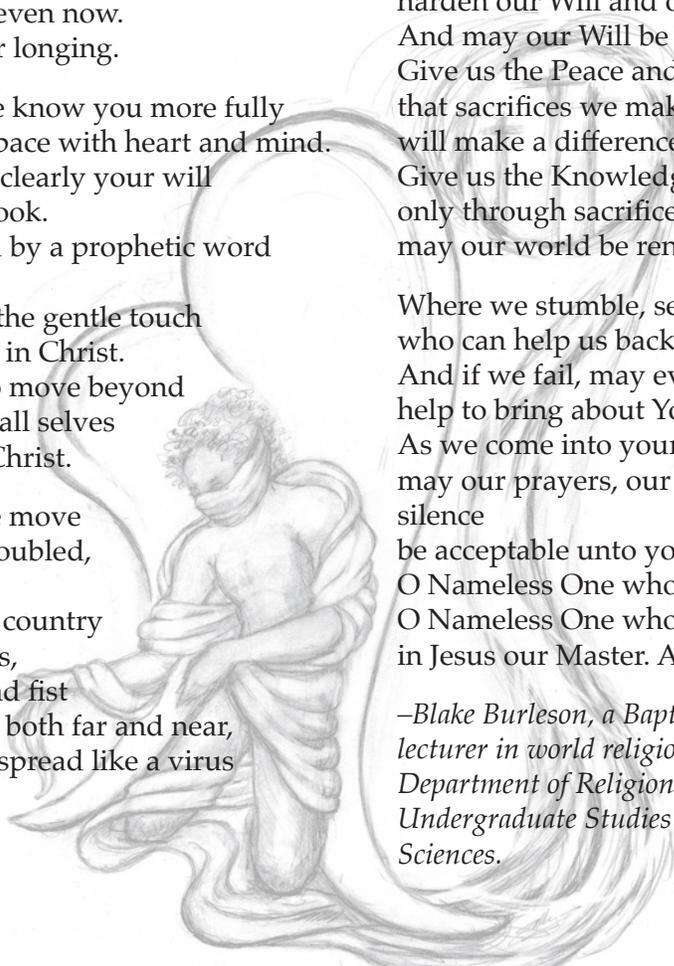
Give us courage as we move  
into a world deeply troubled,  
deeply divided.  
As our world and our country  
split apart into factions,  
as violence of word and fist  
destroy our neighbors both far and near,  
as hatred and bigotry spread like a virus  
across our land,  
give us courage.

Give us courage to face facts,  
Give us courage to seek truth,  
Give us courage to stand on the side  
of the poor, oppressed and maligned.

Give us the courage to remain faithful to You  
even in the face of obstacles that seem  
insurmountable and unyielding.  
Shield us from the fears born of reality  
and from the fears  
which are of our own making.  
Give us strength to bear  
the weight of the burden  
which you have assigned—  
heal our bodies and our minds  
when they are strained,  
harden our Will and our Determination  
And may our Will be Your Will.  
Give us the Peace and Assurance  
that sacrifices we make in your name  
will make a difference.  
Give us the Knowledge that  
only through sacrifice  
may our world be renewed.

Where we stumble, send one  
who can help us back up.  
And if we fail, may even our failings  
help to bring about Your Kingdom.  
As we come into your presence now  
may our prayers, our thoughts, our song, our  
silence  
be acceptable unto you  
O Nameless One whom we call God.  
O Nameless One whose face we have seen  
in Jesus our Master. Amen.

*—Blake Burlison, a Baptist minister, is a senior lecturer in world religions for the Baylor University Department of Religion and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences.*



*The art above was created by Sally Lynn Askins for the 2021 Lent/Eastertide packet, "Breathe on Me, Breath of God."*

# The Breath of Justice

*A Children's Sermon by Scott Turner*

*Text: Matthew 25:31-40*

I think balloons are one of the best things people have ever come up with. They make great decorations, they add color and excitement to rooms and events, and they are an absolute joy to play with. I'm sure all of you here have played with a balloon at least once in your lives, so you know they are endless fun. You can throw them up and bounce them while trying to keep them from hitting the ground, you can blow them up to see how big you can make them, you can fill them with water and throw them at your friends. Even popping balloons is fun.

But, for me, the most fun—and perhaps most embarrassing—way to have fun with a balloon is to fill it with air and then slowly let the air out while you listen to the noises the mouth of the balloon makes. You all know what I'm talking about: the rumbling, the spitting, the loud, boisterous and hilarious noise! What fun!

The Seeds Hunger Emphasis theme this year is a bit like a balloon. The breath of God, the breath of justice and Spirit, are flowing through this world, filling up the places that need God's breath the most. Can you think of where these places might be and what kind of things people are lacking?

Luckily, Jesus gives us a clue in Matthew chapter 25. Jesus tells us that those who are righteous, those he'll be pleased with, are those who have provided for what he calls "the least of these." So who are "the least of these"? We need to know so we can start providing for them, right?

Jesus tells us "the least of these" are hungry people, and the righteous are those who give them food. Jesus tells us "the least of these" are thirsty people, and the righteous are those who give them something to drink. Do you know anyone who is hungry, who might not have as much food as you or I do? Maybe you have friends who always forget their lunch or have to have the school pay for their lunch. Jesus wants us to help fill them, like the breath of God filling a balloon.

Do you see? We can breathe life, kindness and love into the lives of hungry people.

But Jesus' list of "the least of these" is longer than that. Jesus tells us they are naked people, and the righteous are those who put clothing on their backs.

Jesus tells us they are sick people, and the righteous are those who take care of them. Jesus tells us they are those who are imprisoned, and the righteous are those who went to visit them.

Unfortunately, our society has a way of allowing people to suffer in dire straits (or bad circumstances). We walk by and drive by people everyday who don't

*The breath of God, the breath of justice and Spirit, are flowing through this world, filling up the places that need God's breath the most. Can you think of where these places might be and what kind of things people are lacking?*

have enough clothes to wear and often don't have a place to live. Healthcare has gotten so expensive that there are people who refuse to go to the doctor, or they might wait to go until it's too late, in fear of losing all their money to the hospitals that are supposed to save them.

There are people who even have to ration (use sparingly) the medicine that is supposed to keep them from dying, and it really doesn't cost very much money to make, so everyday they have to gamble with their own lives. And then there are people all over who are suffering and struggling through difficult prison systems, often for minor offenses that were made very harsh because of where they were born or the color of their skin.

All of these people are lacking dignity and basic necessities that you and I take for granted. God wants us to love these people and care for them, so that we can be the breath of God, filling this world with the justice and hope it so desperately lacks.

*—Scott Turner grew up in Georgetown, TX, graduated with a degree in youth ministry from Howard Payne University. At this writing, he is an MDiv student at Truett Theological Seminary and interim youth minister at Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed. He's passionate about congregational ministry and art (specifically illustration and printmaking) and loves to explore how they intersect.*

# Fire and Fury

*A Sermon by Nancy Hastings Sehested*

*Text: 1 Kings 19:9-18*

**E**ditor's note: This sermon was originally preached at the Circle of Mercy Congregation in Asheville on August 13, 2017, the day after the infamous "Unite the Right" white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, VA. Sadly, its relevance has only become more profound in our lives today.

**F**riends, I still believe that when history beams its light on our treacherous times, that we will be known less by the battles we won and lost, and more by the stories we loved and lived.

The stories from long ago and the stories from headline breaking news are stories of fire and fury. The ancient story gives us the full array of human choices in the midst of struggles. Both the oppressed and the oppressors have found words to liberate or words to enslave within the biblical story.

Rev. Robert Jeffress from Dallas claims that "God has endowed our rulers full power to use whatever means necessary—including war—to stop evil." His words are in a long line of words from religious leaders who have used religious language to justify violence.

Our presence today is our choosing again the story that liberates with the love of God. We are still followers of Jesus, and his way of justice and love.

The prophet Elijah would have felt right at home in these times of fire and fury. You remember Elijah. He was a chosen one of God. He was

fierce, determined, and uncompromising. He was a man of miracles. He fed the hungry, raised the dead and blasted the evil empire of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. His message was to bring down the mighty and lift the lowly.

Like a superhero, he could suddenly appear in just the right place at just the right time, pouncing on injustice, exposing the hypocrisy and falsehood of the powerful. His most zealous actions were targeted on that relentless rascal of a king, Ahab.

The king was a bully. He had wealth, position, and power. Step in his way and he retaliated with ridicule and revenge. With the help of his conniving wife, he contaminated the nation with the poison of fear. Pagan temples were their joy. The palace became home to hundreds of false prophets. Political favors were handed out like candy at Halloween. The people didn't know who to trust.

Military might was the centerpiece for maintaining national power. On the backs of the poorest people, the nation slid into disaster.

People were suffering. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were a disgrace. It seemed like no one could stop them.

After several attempts at halting the horrors, including famine and humiliation techniques, Elijah got word from God that it was time to put the false prophets to death.

Now in this part of the story we could wish that God wasn't involved in that kind of showdown. And we could wish that Elijah had the benefit of reading



Walter Wink's book about the myth of redemptive violence. Hadn't enough blood been shed to know that? We could wish that Elijah had the example of Jesus meeting violence with his witness of peace and nonviolence.

But no. There was fire and fury.

Elijah gave a passionate word before the battle, asking God's people a decisive question: "How long will you go limping with two opinions? If God is God, follow God. But if Baal is God, then follow Baal."

*The ancient story gives us the full array of human choices in the midst of struggles. Both the oppressed and the oppressors have found words to liberate or words to enslave within the biblical story.*

Voices should've shouted out "God, not Baal," but not a word came out of the people. Nothing. They didn't answer.

Elijah, like all prophets, was a loner. But he liked applause. It was not forthcoming. Nothing worse than a preacher offering their best line, and the people don't utter a peep. No *amens*. No nods of the head. No, "Preach on, Prophet!" Nothing.

Elijah, being the sensitive type, took it maturely. "I, even I only, am left." Oh, there is no high like a self-righteous high. The fight was on, with the great prophet leading the way. The prophets of Baal did the same. The contest was this: the one who called down their god with fire was the winner. The one with the biggest fire power wins. It's such a tiresome game. Couldn't we just limit ourselves to kayak races?

The prophets of Baal danced around the altar all morning long, calling out, "O Baal, answer us." Nothing. By noon they were hoarse from shouting and worn out from walking around in circles. They started limping around the altar.

Elijah pulled out the mocking method of bringing down the enemy. "Keep it up, guys. Oh, I'm sure he is God. He's just taking a little break, meditating, no doubt." The prophets of Baal tried some more. Nothing.

Then it was Elijah's turn. "Step back everybody." Lightning flashed. Fire ignited the whole thing—the offering, the stones, the wood and even the water

in the trench. The whole kit and caboodle went up in smoke.

The people shouted, yelled, jumped up and down and applauded. "God is the true God! God is the true God." The false prophets were then slaughtered at the river. It ran blood red that day.

Queen Jezebel got wind of the slaughter of her best spiritual counselors. She was ready to have Elijah's head. He took off for the hills to try to save his life. Once he got far enough away, he took shade under a broom tree. He was worn out. He had won, but he had lost. His victory did not satisfy him. He was a man on the run. Where could he go to hide? He prayed, "God, just go ahead and take me now."

Elijah felt like a total and complete failure. He thought God should've at least shown some appreciation for all he'd done on God's behalf, put a little extra in the Prophet Pension Fund. But no. All he got was a pushy angel shoving him awake and demanding that he stop his whining and moaning. "Get up and eat! You'll need it for the journey." You ever noticed how neither God nor God's messengers have ever been good with empathetic listening skills?

Elijah walked 40 days and 40 nights until he arrived at the mountain of God. He crawled into a cave and collapsed. God showed up and asked, "What are you doing here, Elijah? Running? Trying to hide? Think you can escape from your life and your calling in here? Think you can have security in here?"

Elijah responded, "I've been working my tail off trying to get people on your side, God. I made lots of promises to persuade folks. I had a good mission plan. I took up for you. But now it's over. I have nothing to show for all my efforts except my picture on wanted posters. I'm the only one left. There are folks after me!"

There was no answer to Elijah's whine. The voice spoke: "Go, stand and wait at the mountain. God is coming your way." Elijah stayed at the mountain. A hurricane force wind ripped through the mountain. It was so strong that it split open boulders. God had been in wind before. Was this God? No. God was not in the wind.

The ground shook beneath his feet. An earthquake happened. God had been in earthquake before. Was this God? No. God was not in this earthquake. A fire flamed up. God had been in fire before. Was this God? No. God was not in this fire.

Then came the sound of sheer silence. Elijah knew the sound of this Presence. He wrapped his

face with his cloak, stepped to the front of the cave, and stood. God asked again, "Elijah, what are you doing here?"

Elijah answered with the same old story. "I gave my heart and soul to this battle, and I have nothing to show for it. I alone am left."

Elijah failed to interpret the sheer silence of God. What was this silence of God? It was not the silence of calm and peace. It was sheer cliff silence. It was an unbearable silence that verges on a scream. It was the inner scream of God. It was the kind of silence heard through the walls of skin of an exasperated person.

It was the silence when there are no words left to say. It was God's silence speaking as if to say, "Elijah, didn't I feed you? Wasn't the bread shared with those who needed it? Didn't I give you the strength to stand up to all the lies? Didn't I give you the courage to resist the royal tyrants and demand justice? Wasn't I with you always? Elijah, what are you doing here?"

So. What are we doing here? Perhaps it is time to listen with Elijah at the doorway of our deepest fears and disillusionments. Can we stand here long enough to see more clearly as a nation, as a people? The earthquake, winds and fires of rioting have been gathering power for a long time.

White supremacy and patriarchy are embedded in our national history. Sometimes it flames into fire and fury within public view. But let us not be fooled. Behind the vivid and horrific violence of white supremacist groups are systemic and structural powers that keep privilege in place. The structures and institutions that hold our lives have enormous power over all of us. Most of the major issues we face are decided without our vote and out of our sight—in boardrooms and corporate offices and legislative rooms where a code of ethics for the common good is not in place.

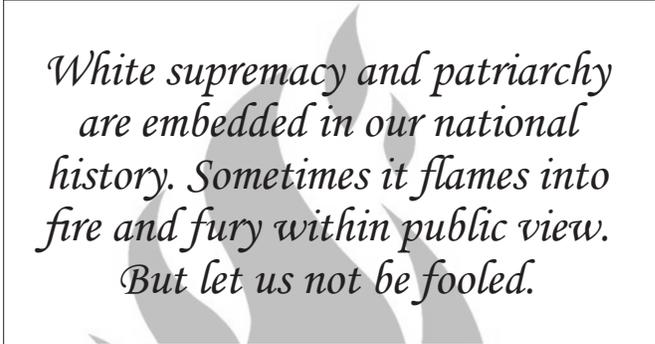
The ancients said such a sin-sick society was ensnared by the "powers and principalities." Hannah Arendt named it "the banality of evil."

Perhaps it is time to stop and listen, to stop our words long enough to experience the silent cries of God. Perhaps it is time, when hatred runs down the streets and laws allow terrorizing extremists to legally carry weapons....

Perhaps it is time, when mothers and dads are taken from their children and deported, and mosques are bombed in our cities, and black and brown-bodied people and LGBTQ people are vulnerable everywhere....

Perhaps it is time, when the major institutions that control our lives leave too many without adequate healthcare, wages and housing.... Perhaps it is time, when tyrants hold the world hostage with threats of using nuclear weapons.... Perhaps it is time for us to stand together, all of us—the wounded alongside the wounding—and listen.

Let us listen to our common fears, fears for ourselves and for our children. The world is much too complicated and confusing for any of us. Let us confess that the fire and fury can envelop us so that we cannot hear God's heartbeat of love for us.



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are embedded in our national  
history. Sometimes it flames into  
fire and fury within public view.  
But let us not be fooled.*

My Old Testament professor, Dr. Terrien, taught us about an Arab gesture made when speaking of a small sound. The thumb and the forefinger come together on both hands, creating a tiny opening. It is the image of a sound, hardly able to see or hear the voice. It was used as a symbol for little possibility.

But even little possibility is possibility for a way, an opening. It can open us to divine encounter, to the Holy Presence of hope.

Maybe in the silence we can hear Jesus once again, who did not conform to this world, but was transformed, and gave himself as an offering to God's way of love. We can find our lives again where Jesus did—on the edges where the fierce winds blow—alongside those who suffer. There we can discover again that there is no promise, save one: we are not alone.

Elijah thought he was running to safety. He was afraid. He had every reason to be afraid. So do we. This world is not safe. Earthquake, wind and fire still rage around us. Elijah's escape was no escape at all.

God asked Elijah the question: "What are you doing here? I need you. Come on out. Stop believing the lie that you are helpless and life is hopeless. Besides, it's not all about you. Go and anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Go and anoint Jehu as king over Israel. And go and anoint Elisha as the prophet who will take your place."

“Take my place as prophet? Really? And isn’t there already a king in place?” God didn’t explain.

“And one more thing, Elijah. You are not the only one who has stayed faithful to me. There are thousands of others who have not bent their knees and paid homage to Baal. Some of them have walked

*“And one more thing, Elijah. You are not the only one who has stayed faithful to me. There are thousands of others who have not bent their knees and paid homage to Baal.”*

bravely in marches for love and justice. Some of them have stood in the way of those who could be hurt. Some of them have responded in dozens of other ways. There are plenty of others in this struggle. Join them. Draw strength from them. Keep

on keeping on with them. I am with you.”

Friends, what are we doing here? Our God is a God who brings hope out of the dark night of despair. We have some anointing to do in God’s name. Anoint the rulers with new visions. Anoint the broken-hearted with comfort. Anoint the shamed with mercy. Anoint the damned of this earth with love—until God’s reign of justice has come, and the Bright Morning Star of Love rises in the hearts of all people.

Let us go and join the others.

—Nancy Sehested was one of the first women to become a senior pastor among Baptists in the US South. She has pastored churches in Atlanta, GA; Memphis, TN; and Asheville, NC (among others). She served for 13 years as a North Carolina state chaplain in high-security prisons for men. Some of her sermons and stories from prison can be found on the Prayer&Politiks website ([prayerandpolitiks.org](http://prayerandpolitiks.org)). More of her stories from prison are printed in *Marked for Life: A Prison Chaplain’s Story*, published by Orbis Books in 2019.

Through the centuries, as the Church became more institutionalized, the Spirit, though always with the Church, faded somewhat in human experience, with the crucified and risen Jesus, the Son of the Father, most central to the Christian faith, available through the Eucharist and depiction in the arts, and with people in their suffering. The Holy Spirit seemed less relevant and available in the busy, secular, expanding world. More recently, the Spirit has been “rediscovered” as many people felt the need for nourishing their souls in this increasingly materialized society with its goal of accumulating wealth. Many people, whether professing a religion or not, yearn to deepen their spirituality, satisfy their thirst for Divine Presence animated by the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who is Breath of God in us, energizing fire in the soul, urging us Christians, as on that first Pentecost, to go out into the world like a strong wind, or a gentle whisper, or a burning fire, bringing a message of love, truth and mercy, and serving as advocates for justice.

—Sr. Marie Lucey, OSF,  
from *Acting Franciscan*



art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

# Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Religion is outraged when outrage is done in its name.

—Mahatma Ghandi

Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.

—Vaclav Havel

Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.

—US Congressman John Lewis

There is inside of me an unknown quantity left unexplored—  
and waiting  
for the dawn.  
But will the day  
reveal the  
hidden  
treasure?  
Only if  
I overcome  
the deep suspicion  
that I'm overrated  
and have less to offer  
an impoverished world.

—Daniel G. Bagby

Christ is shown in mercy when his people break bread to them; he is shown in judgment when we do not. Never did Lazarus press closer to the rich man's door than does the

hungry world that presses its claim upon us in Jesus' name right now. God's people ought to break bread to them in sacrificial giving, in political action, and in economic sharing of our abundant resources. The challenge is to find the way rather than bemoan our helplessness.

—W. Clyde Tilley

Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business and, in fact, it is nobody's business. What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy.

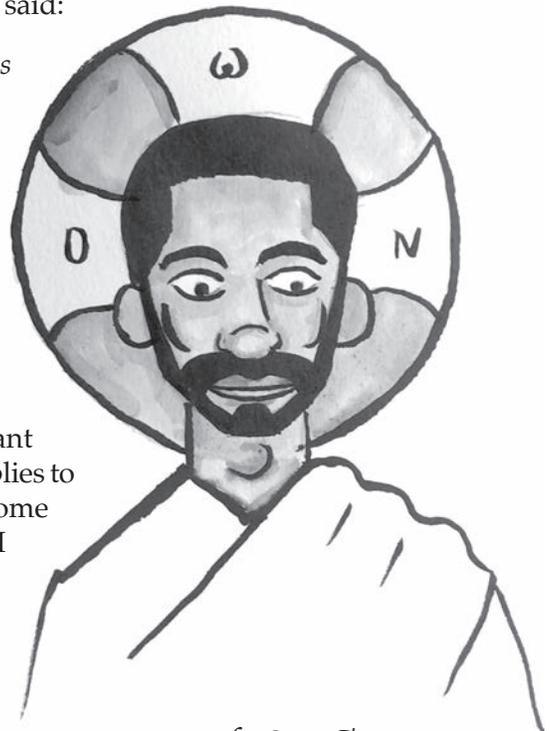
—Thomas Merton

We are faced with many issues, but the one that God is asking us to help people face right now, even though it has been going on for 400 years, is Racism. What takes us so long? In our preaching, bodily harm is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Harm that penetrates to the inner person, heart and soul, is what is lethal. I believe if we trust in God, we will be spared the threats against the heart and soul. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said:

*We all have to repent in this generation, not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people, but for the silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of all willing to be co-workers with God....*

Even though Dr. King meant this with regard to Racism, it applies to all the issues we want to overcome today. And it is a long list that I am sure you can put together yourself.

—Sr. Marge Wissman, OSF  
in *Acting Franciscan*



art by Scott Turner

# Facts about Global Hunger

compiled by Seeds staff

**E**ditor's note: Global hunger levels have been increasing since 2014. Last year the UN development agencies, along with many other humanitarian groups, predicted that the pandemic would increase the number of food insecure and outright hungry people by millions. They were right.

**T**he number of people living with food insecurity around the world—or those forced to compromise on food quantity or quality—increased by 318 million in 2020, to 2.38 billion. (See the definitions on this page.)

–UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Washington Post*, Devex Newswire

According to the 2021 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, the United Nations hunger report, **hunger** refers to periods when populations experience **severe food insecurity**. That means that people **go for entire days** without eating because of lack of money, or lack of access to food or other resources. Global hunger increased by 118 million people worldwide in 2020. That number is now 768 million. FAO says that this is the largest number of people in this category since 2006. –FAO, *Washington Post*, Action against Hunger

The number of people experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020 increased in every region of the world, according to the UN Hunger Report, which was released at press time. In Africa, 46 million more people experienced hunger than in 2019. That number was 57 million in

*Please see "Global Hunger" on page 22.*

## Hunger Terms

1. **HUNGER** is the distress associated with lack of food. The threshold for food deprivation, or undernourishment, is fewer than 1,800 calories per day. When we speak of people around the world who are hungry, we are referring to people who go for entire days without food.

–United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization

2. **FOOD INSECURITY** relates to food availability, access and utilization. When people don't always have adequate availability and access to enough safe and nutritious food to maintain an active and healthy life, they are considered food insecure.

–Action against Hunger

3. **MALNUTRITION** refers to deficiencies or excesses in nutrient intake, imbalance of essential nutrients or impaired nutrient utilization. This includes undernutrition, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases.

–World Health Organization

4. **UNDERNUTRITION** manifests in four broad forms: wasting, stunting, underweight, and micronutrient deficiencies.

- **WASTING** is defined as low weight-for-height. It often indicates recent and severe weight loss, although it can also persist for a long time. It usually occurs when a person has not had food of adequate quality and quantity and/or they have had frequent or prolonged illnesses. Wasting in children is associated with a higher risk of death if not treated properly.

- **STUNTING** is defined as low height-for-age. It is the result of chronic or recurrent undernutrition, usually associated with poverty, poor maternal health and nutrition, frequent illness and/or inappropriate feeding and care in early life. Stunting prevents children from reaching their physical and cognitive potential.

- **UNDERWEIGHT** is defined as low weight-for-age. A child who is underweight may be stunted, wasted or both.

- **MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES** are a lack of vitamins and minerals that are essential for body functions such as producing enzymes, hormones and other substances needed for growth and development.

–World Health Organization

*Note: A person who is food insecure is at risk for all of these conditions.*

## *Global Hunger,* *continued from page 21*

Asia, and in Latin America and the Caribbean, 14 million. Nearly 12 percent of the global population faced severe food insecurity last year.

–UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Devex Newswire

Small farmers, herders, and fishermen produce about 70 percent of the global food supply, yet they are especially vulnerable to food insecurity—poverty and hunger are most acute among rural populations.

–Action against Hunger

In 2015, the UN country members selected 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the first of which was to eliminate poverty, and the second of which was to eliminate hunger. These goals were to be reached by 2030. However, this year the UN predicts that 30 million more people will be hungry in 2030 than would have been had the coronavirus pandemic not occurred.

–FAO, Devex Newswire

According to the FAO, it would take an additional \$14 billion a year to prevent chronic undernourishment for 100 million people by 2030. It would take almost triple that amount to achieve the UN’s goal of zero hunger by 2030.

—FAO, Devex Newswire

The food security gender gap also increased in 2020: In 2019, women were 6 percent more likely than men to experience moderate to severe food insecurity; now that number is 10 percent.

–FA, Devex Newswire

In addition to job loss and lockdown-related measures impacting people’s access to food in 2020, other factors such as the closure of schools particularly affected children. Millions of children did not receive the breakfast or lunch they used to eat at school.

–FAO, Devex Newswire

In 2020, more than 149 million children under 5 were stunted, more than 45 million were suffering from wasting, and nearly 39 million overweight, according to report estimates. These are estimated figures; actual figures are expected to be even higher.

–FAO, Devex Newswire

An estimated 14 million children under the age of five worldwide suffer from severe acute malnutrition, also known as severe wasting, yet only 25 percent of acutely malnourished children have access to lifesaving treatment.

–Action against Hunger

There is more than enough food produced in the world to feed everyone on the planet.

–Action against Hunger

Armed conflict is a cause and consequence of hunger. In 2020, conflict was the primary driver of hunger for 99.1 million people in 23 countries.

–Action against Hunger

Undernutrition is responsible for 45 percent of child deaths worldwide.

–World Health Organization

Since the coronavirus pandemic began in 2020, more than two-thirds of the world’s countries have introduced national distance learning platforms, but among low-income countries the share is only 30 percent. Also, distance learning affects 368.5 million children across 143 countries who normally rely on school meals for a reliable food source.

–UNICEF

*Note: Much of the analysis in this list from the UN Hunger Report and the FAO comes from Teresa Welch, who writes for Devex Newswire, an independent news organization with some 100 staff members in Barcelona, London, Manila, and Washington, DC. Devex reporting shows particular attention to global relief and development agencies and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.*



*art by Sharon R. Rollins*

# Facts about US Hunger

*compiled by Seeds staff*

Feeding America, the largest food-bank network in the US, recently issued a detailed report, *The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 and 2021*. The report says that one of the results of the spread of COVID-19 since early 2020 was “an economic recession that ended years of declining rates of food insecurity.” The report defines food insecurity as “the lack of access to sufficient food because of limited financial resources.” It includes five key findings:

1. The report projects that 42 million people (one in eight), including 13 million children (one in six), are likely to experience food insecurity in 2021.
2. This is a slight improvement from updated 2020 projections (45 million people and 15 million children).
3. Many people who have been most impacted by the pandemic were food insecure or at risk of food insecurity before the pandemic and are facing greater hardship since it began.
4. Significant racial disparities in food insecurity that existed before the pandemic remain in its wake. The report projects that 21 percent of Black individuals (one in five) are likely to experience food insecurity in 2021, compared to 11 percent of white individuals (one in nine).
5. It will likely take a significant amount of time for food insecurity levels to recover.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of food insecurity in the United States had been declining during the longest economic expansion in the country’s history. The percentage of households that were food insecure for at least some portion of the year had dropped from 14.9 percent in 2011 to 10.5 percent in 2019. However, since the beginning of the pandemic,

the number of food insecure people has risen significantly.

–*Christian Science Monitor*, US Department of Agriculture

In the past two years, food insecurity has been at the highest level since annual records began in the mid-1990s, including after the Great Recession.

–*The Guardian*, US Census Bureau, Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research

Before the pandemic, more than 35 million Americans lived in households that struggled against hunger. One in ten (10.5 percent) of households in the US experienced food insecurity. One in eight households with children could not buy enough food for their families.

–Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)

Households in rural areas experience considerably deeper struggles with hunger compared to those in metro areas, with higher rates of food insecurity overall (12.1 percent compared to 10.3 percent).

–FRAC

The food insecurity rate for households with children (14.5 percent in 2021) is considerably higher than the rate for households without children (9.3 percent before the pandemic).

–FRAC

*Please see “US Hunger” on page 24.*



## US Hunger, continued from page 23

The food insecurity rate is highest in the South, followed by the Midwest, West, and Northeast.  
–FRAC

The prevalence of food insecurity varied considerably by state, ranging from 6.6 percent in New Hampshire to 15.7 percent in Mississippi (for the three-year period before the pandemic).  
–FRAC

New analysis from the US Census Bureau suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a racial inequity in US food security, leaving millions more children of color without enough to eat and threatens the long-term prospects of an entire generation.  
–*The Guardian*, US Census Bureau, Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research

Child hunger was a crisis long before the COVID-19 pandemic—and it has only worsened since. Widespread school and child-care closures have left millions of children without reliable access to affordable meals, while record job losses have made it even harder for families to keep food on the table at home.  
–Children’s Defense Fund

Child hunger is reaching dangerous new heights. As of February 2021, more than one in seven adults with

children (14.5 percent) reported that their children were not getting enough to eat—more than five times the pre-pandemic rate (3 percent).  
–Children’s Defense Fund

Due to historic and systemic racism, children of color are going hungry at even higher rates. As of February 2021, more than one in five Black and Hispanic adults with children (22.8 percent and 20.6 percent, respectively) said their households were not getting enough to eat, compared with one in 10 white adults with children (10.4 percent).  
–Children’s Defense Fund

If unemployment and poverty rates remain elevated, as many as one in four children—18 million in total—could be at risk of going hungry as a result of COVID-19. Without continued and expanded nutrition assistance during the pandemic and beyond, rising child hunger will devastate our children’s development and community success for years to come.  
–Children’s Defense Fund

Consumer food prices increased significantly last year, while some of the world’s biggest food companies saw profits rise.  
–*The Guardian*, US Bureau of Labor Statistics

In the week before Christmas 2020, about 81 million Americans experienced food insecurity, meaning that one in four people in the so-called richest country in the world did not have reliable access to sufficient nutritious food needed for a healthy active life. In that week, while the Trump administration

stalled the signing of the third COVID relief package, an estimated 45 million Americans reported not having enough to eat.  
–*The Guardian*, US Census Bureau, Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research

*Editor’s note: For an in-depth look at hunger in the US, see the Christian Science Monitor series, beginning with “Who’s hungry in America? The pandemic has changed the answer,” released in March.*

Who is my neighbor? This may be the most important question we can ask, a matter of life or death for us, and our planet. That great image of Gerard Manley Hopkins: “The Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings” only works for me when I consider it as including all the world—as in an astronaut’s view of it—and not just my small portion.



–Kathleen Norris,  
*Amazing Grace*

# Elijah's Pity Party

## *A Reading Inspired by 1 Kings 19: 1-15*

by Ken Sehested

FIRST READER: Sometimes knees grow weak and hearts grow faint.

SECOND READER: Sometimes vision grows dim and resolve wavers.

FIRST READER: Sometimes we simply want Jesus to leave us alone.

SECOND READER: The prophets, like the great Elijah, get frightened by the King Ahabs and the Queen Jezebels of this age.

FIRST READER: Prophets get weary.

SECOND READER: No one listens. No one pays attention.

FIRST READER: The devil has every appearance of being in charge.

SECOND READER: Every day brings more evidence that the market is rigged,

FIRST READER: that when the rich wage war it is the poor that die,

SECOND READER: that the cries of persistent widows no longer reach corrupt judges.

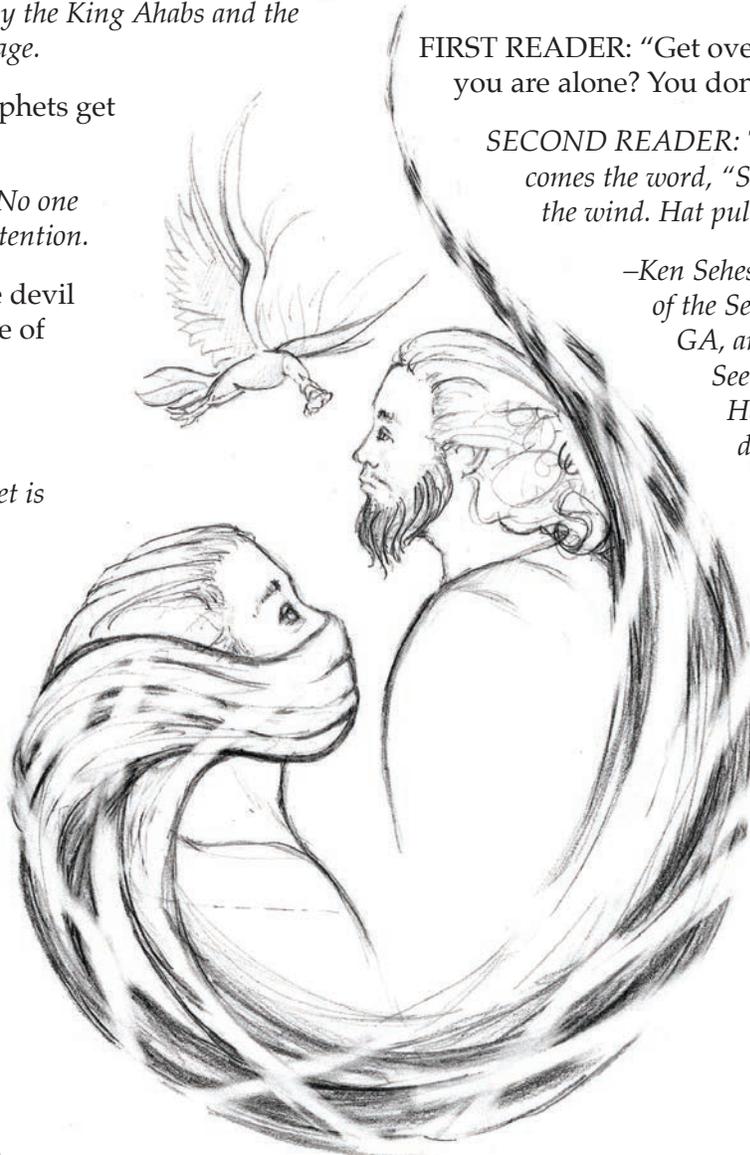
FIRST READER: In the middle of this pity party, surrounded by history's storms and quakes and wildfires, the sound of overpowering silence brings us to attention.

SECOND READER: And a voice of stone-cold stillness settles in and announces,

FIRST READER: "Get over yourself. Who said you are alone? You don't know the half of it!"

SECOND READER: Then, just as abruptly, comes the word, "Saddle up. Boots on. Face to the wind. Hat pulled low. Time to move."

—Ken Sehested was a founding editor of the Seeds ministry in Decatur, GA, and is now serves on the Seeds Board of Advisors. He was also the founding director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, whose first offices were adjacent to those of Seeds. He is now the editor for the blog Prayer&Politiks, where we found this litany.



art by Sally Lynn Askjns

# Benediction



art by Sharon R. Rollins

Friends, the breath of God has filled our souls  
and fed our hunger for righteousness.  
But we must realize that this is only  
the first gasp for air from a world  
and a humanity that is struggling to breathe.  
May this first breath signal the start  
of the tireless journey  
to help fill what is lacking  
in the community around us.  
May this breath sustain our voices  
not just in worshipful ways,  
but to be transformed  
into voices of advocacy for the voiceless  
in the pursuit of justice,  
into prophetic cries for equity.  
May this breath sustain our bodies  
into the actions that await us also.  
May it transform our actions  
into the work of feeding the hungry,  
into the fight for those  
who have been pushed aside for too long.  
In that way, may God breathe life  
into the hopes of all that we meet.  
Amen.

*–Alec Ylitalo is the senior minister at Richfield Christian Church in Waco, TX  
and is a member of the Seeds liturgical team.*