Rend Your Hearts

art by Rachel Farris

Worship Resources for the Creative Church - Hunger Emphasis 2024

Sacred Seasons, *a series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis,*
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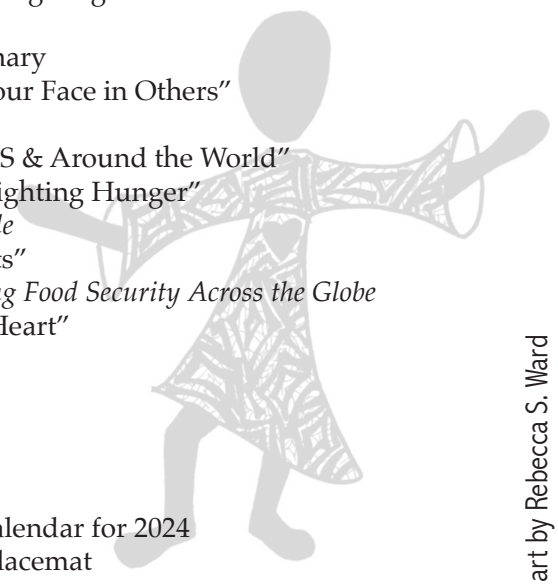
Sacred Seasons

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).

Rend Your Hearts

...in this worship packet:



art by Rebecca S. Ward

Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding 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. Contact information: 602 James; Waco, TX 76706; 254/498-4997; seedseditor1@gmail.com; www.seedspublishers.org.

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A Word about This Packet

This Hunger Emphasis resources concludes our trio of packets for this liturgical year. The theme for this year, beginning with Advent 2023, has been about tearing. For this packet, our theme (taken from the book of Joel) is about rending our hearts. (See page 4 for a theme interpretation.)

Last fall, we lost our resident artist, Sally Askins. Several of our other longtime artists have stepped up to help with art for the Lent/Eastertide packet, and now we are delighted to add a new artist to our team, Rachel Farris. Rachel, a professional graphic designer, took Alec Ylitalo's theme interpretation and came up with our cover image. We know that you will appreciate her work as much as we do.

You will see many offerings from our liturgical team, which includes Guilherme Feitosa de Almeida from the Baylor University Department of Theatre Arts; Erin Conaway, pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX (which is home to the Seeds office); Sharlande Sledge, former associate pastor at Lake Shore Baptist in Waco and now Lake Shore's resident writer; Ken Sehested, a founding Seeds editor and writer who lives in Asheville, NC; Scott Turner, youth minister at Seventh & James; and Alec Ylitalo, pastor at Richfield Christian Church in Waco. You will sometimes see their names, but their work is everywhere in this packet.

You will find, in this packet, a sermon by Matt Rosencrans, one of the Seventh & James associate pastors. We designed our liturgy around this sermon, which Matt preached on Communion Sunday 2023. You will find a Hunger Emphasis challenge by Brett Younger, pastor at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, NY, and a frequent contributor.

We also included a litany written by one of our founding Council members, Dan Bagby, a retired professor from Richmond Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA; and a children's sermon by Mark McClintock, pastor of Speedway Baptist Church in Indianapolis, IN, who has often served as our go-to person for children's resources.

We decided to include a lectionary of sorts, compiled years ago by youth from two different churches, assisted by Baylor University scholars. This may seem a little repetitive along with our 40-day calendar, with its daily passages about hunger-related issues, but we thought it could be a good tool to use alongside the calendar and the Revised Common Lectionary.

Our fabulous summer intern, Grace Sincleair, compiled several pages of hunger statistics, plus a cross-word puzzle. Grace also did most of the work in compiling a new version of the popular Seeds "Breakfast Poster," this time formatted as a placemat. It is printed on an 11 x 17 sheet, as is the Hunger Calendar.

We have included a number of quotes and prayers amidst the other material. As usual, Guilherme Almeida carefully chose the hymns for the liturgy. We hope these musical suggestions, this art and these writings will be inspiring as you create a meaningful Hunger Emphasis time with and for your community.

We know that churches have different ways of guiding members to remember people in need, so we have also tried to arrange the materials so that you can use them separately as well as for a concentrated emphasis.

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. 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. May you find resources that will help us guide our congregations into a new understanding of the needs around us and the work before us.

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

art by Susan Daily, IVBM

Rend Your Hearts

A Theme Interpretation

by Alec Ylitalo

I write this theme interpretation as I sit at the edge of one of Minnesota's 10,000 lakes while on sabbatical. It's a decently sized lake; I can barely make out anything on the opposite shore, but in the evening after the boats have all come in, the water stretches out in an incredibly calm manner. It's such a large expanse, it seems like there is nothing at all that I could do that would drastically change anything about it. It's like sitting on the edge of the ocean. I'm just tiny in comparison, but more on that later.

Our Hunger Emphasis theme this year is somewhat of a four-part to-do list guided by the words of Joel that we often hear around the Ash Wednesday liturgy every year. It turns us to an appropriate moment in the history of Judah, as locusts plagued the land and famine raged. People were hungry. It seemed like a problem too great for one person to solve on their own, but God prophesied through Joel for a simple solution:

> *...return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing…*

It's a call for the general population and a call upon each person's heart individually, and it's a seemingly simple step-by-step process as we have expanded a touch and put forth in this theme. **First, return to God with all your heart.** Simply put, where is your focus? During Sabbatical for me it was a reminder that I needed to find more time to center myself on God: my decisions, my intentions, my actions, my emotions, my life.

Returning to God is actively turning yourself around from wandering away towards your own fruition, your own ideals, your own selfish desires, and pursuing the heart of the Gospel—grace and forgiveness, compassion and help, selflessness and empathy. Returning to God is what we should take the opportunity to do each and every Sabbath at the very least. This is why it's a holy day, why it's life-giving, why it's important to keep.

Second, remember to whom you belong. In the midst of famine, Judah cried out in pain. But like during many catastrophes in Scripture, the people of God are taken care of in some way. God is with them even in the midst of their pain and suffering. Remembering to whom we belong is acknowledging the meaning of Immanuel, "God with us."

As children of a God who doesn't just lord over us from on high, but "walks with us and talks with us along life's narrow ways," we need to remember that even if you're the one lost sheep compared to the other 99, God cares enough to pursue you, no matter how far you've wandered or how deep your troubles are. In fact, in remembering this, we too remember that all others also belong to God. We

art by Rachel Farris

look out over Judah during their famine and every person who suffered had God walking alongside them in that moment.

Third, back to the words of the prophet, **rend your hearts.** This is something that we don't often do enough. The statistics overwhelm us. The texts are difficult to wrestle with. It's just easier for our eyes to glaze over when we see the hungry person

We look out at the same vast expanse where famine rages upon Judah, upon our own communities, upon our world—and we wonder how in the world we could ever affect change upon such a devastating landscape. And then God speaks: Return, Remember, Rend, and Respond.

at the stop light on our way to work, not to think about when their next meal will come.

This liturgy is about letting your heart wrench at the knowledge that 53.3 percent of students in the US qualify for free or reduced lunch at school (63.2 percent in Texas, where I live). It is about letting it rend at the call of God to feed the sheep, to take care of the poor, and to walk alongside those who hunger. It is about focusing on how your heart tears as you look into the weary eyes of those who are famished just searching for a morsel, and wondering how they'll be fed in a society that overlooks them.

Finally, and probably the most important step that we've put in the process, is **respond with action**.

Here's where I return to that lake in Minnesota, which seems so vast for me that I could never have an effect on it. What could I do to the great expanse that is laid out before me that would change anything? And then I just throw a small stone in, just off the edge of the bank, and watch as the ripples from that stone flow out farther and farther until I can't even see them anymore. Just a small impact on the surface, seemingly insignificant, yet every part of the lake is touched, altered for a while.

We look out at the same vast expanse where famine rages upon Judah, upon our own communities, upon our world—and we wonder how in the world we could ever effect change upon such a devastating landscape. And then God speaks: **Return, Remember, Rend, and Respond.** Find your center in God, remember you are surrounded by God's children who hunger, rend your hearts with the scriptures and calls of the Gospels, the numbers and the individual faces of those that dwell alongside us, and then respond…even if it seems as if you're throwing a pebble into a vast lake.

I assure you, that pebble, that crumb, that morsel makes a difference not just for one, but continues to ripple out and affect the entire gulf of hunger that is laid out before us. Not only that, can you imagine the effect if each one of us fulfilled that same call by God at the same time? The waters would change, the waves of compassion would build, until we couldn't even recognize what lies before us. As you read this packet and put it into action in yourself and in your community, may you find that sometimes one pebble makes all the difference.

–Alec Ylitalo, Senior Minister at Richfield Christian Church in Waco, TX, is a member of the Sacred Seasons *liturgical team. He is active in supporting local social assistance programs and in interfaith efforts.*

Endnote

1. National Center for Educational Studies (nces.ed.gov).

In Hebrew thinking, the heart is the deepest level of a human personality, representing the true picture of the person. The Latin word credo, from which we get the word "creed," comes from two words which together mean "I give my heart to."

—Ken Sehested

Rend Your Hearts

A Hunger Emphasis/World Communion Sunday Liturgy

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

ONE: We gather together with instructions to have the same mind in us that Christ Jesus had when he left heaven to be incarnate in the world. Those are hard words to follow. We don't like letting go of our privilege, even when it's something far less than the throne of heaven.

MANY: Holy Spirit, transform our hearts through the renewing of our minds.

ONE: The prophet Joel bids us to rend our hearts and not our clothes. To come back, even after we've strayed too many times to count. We are dizzy from the turning.

MANY: And from your love, O God, that is steadfast and quick to rejoice when let the parts of us that were lost be found again in your grace.

art by Rachel Farris

ONE: Return. Breathe deep. Do what you must to be present to the movement of God's Spirit in this moment of worship.

MANY: Lord, hear our prayer and open us so our vulnerable hearts can feel and know your peace.
–Erin Conaway

Hymn of Adoration

"Rejoice, You Pure in Heart"
The New Century Hymnal No 71
Text: Edward H. Plumptre
Music: Richard Wayne Dirksen
VINEYARD HAVEN, Short Meter with Refrain

Meditation of Preparation

From the moment you put a piece of bread in your mouth you are part of the world. Who grew the wheat? Who made the bread? Where did it come from? You are in relationship with all who brought it to the table. We are least separate and most in common when we eat and drink.
–Thomas Merton

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Joel 2:13

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 107:33-43

Epistle Reading

Philippians 2:1-13

Litany of Confession

ONE: Loving God, on this World Communion Sunday, we pray that we may extend your Table. When our hands reach across the table or to the people beside us, may they be a sign of peaceful prayer

for the world. Our prayer is an extravagant one: We pray that your Table may welcome each of your children as the Table extends around the world. But God, we realize our reticent role in peacemaking is slowing down the full expression of your dream of the Greatest Table. Until all of our brothers and sisters are at peace, we ask forgiveness from you, Loving God.

MANY: O God, we rend our hearts in confession and repentance.

ONE: We watch the news from home and see your children living through conflict, division and brokenness. We confess our sorrow that we, as your church, your living body in the world, have not fully devoted our lives to your peace.

MANY: O God, we rend our hearts in confession and repentance.

ONE: We confess to you our day-to-day failure to be human, for we exist as though we have within us the power to live without depending on you, our God of mercy and love. Our world is rife with injustice, and it is beyond our capacity to heal the world without your forgiveness and your Spirit's guidance.

MANY: O God, we rend our hearts in confession and repentance.

ONE: We turn our heads from those whose names given at birth have quickly been replaced with the word "migrants," so that their stories, too, are lost along the way in their journeys.

MANY: O God, we rend our hearts in confession and repentance.

ONE: We have let greed control us—greed for land, for waterways, for political sway, for dishonest promises, for passage of food and drink for our fellow human beings, for the assumption that our ideas can rule the future without ever having come to the table with others to discuss them.

MANY: O God, we rend our hearts in confession and repentance.

ONE: We cut ourselves off from each other, whether by language or custom, tradition or distance, and we erect barriers of division that seem to renew their strength through the years.

MANY: O God, we rend our hearts in confession and repentance.

ONE: We fail to risk ourselves in the name of your love, often because we don't understand what loving means—or perhaps we do understand what loving means—and, at risk of losing relationships, we deem your reconciling, renewing love too hard for us.

MANY: O God, we rend our hearts in confession and repentance.

ONE: Every night we bear witness as we watch the news that several more million people are hungry, even vulnerable to starvation, because their country's enemy or famine or war itself is prohibiting their access to food. The hungry, the thirsty, too, are our brothers and sisters.

MANY: O God, we rend our hearts in confession and repentance.

ONE: God, your words from Joel insist that "being sorry" isn't enough. You ask us to humble ourselves in confession and repentance, to rend our hearts, not only our clothes.

MANY: Loving and compassionate God, you do not punish us, but you continue to call us: "Return to the Lord your God, for God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

ONE: In your mercy we pray,

MANY: Amen.
–Sharlande Sledge, based on Joel 21:13

Hymn of Exaltation

"Precious Name"
The New Century Hymnal No 625
Text: Lydia Baxter
Music: William H. Doane
PRECIOUS NAME, 8.7.8.7. with Refrain

Gospel Reading

John 13:34-35

Children's Sermon

See "Feast Fit for a World" on page 15.

Hymn of Unity

"Un Mandamiento Nuevo/
Jesus a New Commandment Has Given Us"
The New Century Hymnal No 389
Text and Music: William Loperena,
tr. Carolyn Jennings
LOPERENA, 8.8. with Refrain

Sermon

See "Re-membering as We Remember" on page 9.

Invitation to the Table

As this new day dawned around the world, as God's people began to gather for worship amid the sounds of drums or pipes, strings or organs, we are mindful that we are brought together with our family of different nations, races and languages. And now we, too, join in this worldwide chorus of those who call upon the name of the Lord. On this World Communion Sunday, we remember especially that the scriptures are fulfilled as "People will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at the table." Our God reigns wherever this table is set! This is not our table. This is God's table, for all of us, and it's a table of grace. You are welcome. You are invited. You are called. Come, let us share this meal that God has prepared for us.
–Sharlande Sledge

Hymns for the Table

"Remembering with Love and Hope"
Sing! A New Creation hymnal No 249
Text: John Paarlberg
Music: American Folk Melody
LAND OF REST, Common Meter

"Broken for Me"
The Faith We Sing hymnal No 2263
Text and Music: Janet Lunt
BROKEN FOR ME, Irregular Meter with Refrain

"Live in Charity"
The Faith We Sing hymnal No 2179
Text: Ninth Century Latin
Music: Jacques Berthier
and the Community of Taizé
UBI CARITAS (TAIZÉ), Irregular Meter

Communion Blessing

Transform us, at this table, and for this table, and send us from this table as servants of your righteousness, by the power of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Meditation of Commitment

There is no such thing as "my" bread. All bread is ours and is given to me, to others through me, and to me through others. For not only bread, but all things necessary for sustenance in this life are given on loan to us with others, and because of others, and for others, and to others through us.
–Meister Eckhart

Hymn of Commitment

"Go to the World!"
Sing! A New Creation hymnal No 294
Text: Sylvia Dunstan
Music: Charles Villiers Stanford
ENGELBERG 10.10.10. with alleluia

Benediction

Friends, having turned our gaze toward the fullness of God's consistent and undaunted love, let us now go out into the world with confidence, to love with reckless abandon and serve as if we had nothing to lose.
–Erin Conaway

The Truth Will Make You Odd

The Reign of God is rightly said to be about human hearts, because it is in the human heart that choices are made about ultimate trust and security.

Jesus' concise statement in Matthew, on the relation between hearts and treasures, is stark: The heart's GPS is tracked relative to treasure—where we typically reverse such ordering! Flesh's positioning determines the heart's location: its loyalties, presumptions and fields of vision.

In other words, treasury decisions are not merely social or political choices. They are, at bottom, spiritual conclusions. Whether of a single household, a local congregation, or a nation-state, budgets are moral documents.

In biblical terms, therefore, giving one's "heart" to Jesus is in fact the most subversive, world-threatening thing that can happen to a person in a world configured in such a way that might makes right; that only the strong survive; that you make what you earn and keep what you can.

As has been said, you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you odd.
–Ken Sehested

Re-Membering as We Remember

A World Communion Day Sermon

by Matt Rosencrans

Text: Philippians 2:1-13

Today we observe World Communion Sunday, and I should begin this sermon by acknowledging that many, maybe all, of us are unaware of the origins and purpose of this Sunday. This is quite understandable. This Sunday does not seem to carry the same sort of weight of awareness, or even the decorations, that come with Christmas or Easter, or even Palm Sunday or Pentecost.

World Communion Sunday is not found in the Bible nor was it a practice of the early Christian church. It is a modern invention of the church—not our church, but first from *a* church as a gift to *the* church. And even though it is a modern invention, I think it is worthy of our time and consideration today.

It all started with a minister by the name of Hugh Thomson Kerr. Born in 1871 and raised in Canada, Kerr came to the United States to study at Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA. Following seminary, he pastored in Kansas and Illinois before returning to Pittsburgh to pastor Shadyside Presbyterian Church from 1913-1946, some 33 years.

A lifelong Presbyterian who served both the local church and denominal leadership, Kerr was also ecumenically minded. It was while he was serving as the moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1930 that he first had this idea for a worldwide communion Sunday. Three years later, he and his church held the first one with the attempt to bring churches together to celebrate their unity through Jesus Christ and to remind Christians how each congregation is interconnected one with another. And what better way, Kerr thought, than to do that around table fellowship, sharing a sacred meal, the Lord's Supper.

One of Kerr's sons, Donald Kerr, who would follow in his father's footsteps and become a pastor himself, tells the story how the tradition developed, saying,

> *The concept spread very slowly at the start. People did not give it a whole lot of thought. It was during the Second World War that the spirit caught hold, because we were trying to hold the world together. World Communion Sunday symbolized the effort to hold things together, in a spiritual sense. It emphasized that we are one in the Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

A Sunday set aside to remind Christians and churches that they are united through Christ and as a means to help hold things together. Unity in and through times of division.

Today's Epistle reading is a fitting text for World Communion Sunday. While Philippians is one of Paul's most gracious and loving letters,

art by Jesse Manning

he is writing, at least in part, to help hold things together for the church in Philippi. The first part of chapter 2 is a continuation of thought that Paul started in Chapter 1. A key verse to keep in mind from Chapter 1 is verse 27:

> *Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents.*

Paul writes from prison, where he had just received a visit from a member of the church at Philippi, who brought him a gift from the church.

> We remember, and make a point to say it each time we do communion, that Jesus gave thanks at the start of the Last Supper. He took the bread and gave thanks, and then gave it to his disciples. As we receive communion we, too, give thanks.

Paul sends him back with this letter with a word of thanksgiving for their continued support and an important word of encouragement. The encouragement was necessary because the church was facing some adversity from the outside and division on the inside.

Philippi was a Roman colony in ancient Macedonia. Many retired soldiers settled there, and it was a challenge when Paul first came and preached that there was indeed a king, but his name was Jesus, not Caesar. Now, sometime later, this established church continued to experience some resistance.

In addition to this resistance, there was some division and quarreling within the congregation. Well, at least by two members, who are named in Chapter 4. As a side note, can you imagine causing such a ruckus that the founding pastor has to write a letter to the whole congregation and calls you out by name? And not only that, this very letter will then be included within a sacred text that will be read by people around the world for millennia. In a way I'm kind of impressed with these two; they must have been some kind of dueling force.

In any event, some have wondered that what worries Paul about the quarreling of these two is a reflection of what worries Paul about the whole congregation. There is an opportunity for division to grow, which is why Paul sends a word of encouragement to remind them of who they are, to whom they belong, and how that can be reflected in how they live.

And what are Paul's words of encouragement to the congregation? As I read these I'm going to stop after each one and give us a moment to consider what it might have meant for the congregation at Philippi and what it might mean for us here today:

> *To be consoled by love, to share in God's Spirit,*
> *To show compassion and sympathy,*
> *to be of the same mind,*
> *To have the same love, to be in full accord,*
> *To be self-less in thought and action,*
> *to embody humility,*
> *To care for other's needs,*
> *To care about other's interests.*

This is the way to live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. This is what Christlikeness looks like for a Christian community.

This vision of Christlikeness and unity gets some people really excited. There is some kind of idealist utopia that is really appealing. But it also makes some people really nervous, because when some people hear *unity*, they fear uniformity. When some people hear *sameness*, they fear conformity to something they might despise. This can be less appealing and more appalling. But notice what Paul does not say:

> *You must be united around the same hymnal.*
> *You must worship with the same instrument.*
> *You must be united around the same*
> *architectural style.*
> *You must have all the same exact*
> *theological conclusions on all issues,*
> *large and small, throughout all of time*
> *and space.*

That is not what Paul says here. Paul is not worried about those thing; he is worried about the people and their relationships. It's a call from pride to humility, because if Jesus Christ the Son of God can humble himself to the point of death on a cross for the sins of the world, we, too, can humble ourselves enough to love and care for one another. This is a good word for that church, and a good word for the Church in the world today.

Communion. Communion in the Greek comes from a word that literally means "sharing." God shared Jesus with us and we share this meal together. Some call it by another name, *Eucharist*, which comes from the Greek, meaning "to give thanks." We see this word throughout the New Testament and Paul even uses it to begin his message to the Philippians, "I thank my God every time I remember you…"

The communion table is not the time or place to quarrel over the things that most often lead to division, that cause estrangement. This is why we often note that the communion table is not our table, but it is God's table.

We remember, and make a point to say it each time we do communion, that Jesus gave thanks at the start of the Last Supper. He took the bread and gave thanks, and then gave it to his disciples. As we receive communion we, too, give thanks. We give thanks to God for what God has done for us through Jesus Christ: the death and resurrection, forgiveness of sins, salvation and new life and the promise of eternal life with God.

The communion table is not the time or place to quarrel over the things that most often lead to division, that cause estrangement. This is why we often note that the communion table is not *our* table, but it is God's table. We do not get to say to the Christian who worships with a different hymnal, "No, you can't join us." We do not get to say to the Christian that worships with different instruments, "No, there is no space for you at this table." And we do not get to say to the Christian whose theology is different from our own, "You don't belong at this table." We do not get to deny access to this table. This is God's table for all of God's children.

World Communion Sunday becomes an invitation for all of us to remember our oneness in Christ. It is an invitation, for at least this one Sunday, to set aside our disagreements and quarreling with our siblings in the faith. Those are the things that dismember the body of Christ and separate churches from one another. Today we remember what brings us together, what unites us. This is the invitation that is before all of us. Come and join your siblings at the table. Amen.

–Matt Rosencrans is associate pastor at Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where the Seeds offices are housed. In addition to allowing us to print his writings, he also takes care of the many maintenance needs of the building where we work and is crucial in the planning of fundraisers. This sermon was preached at Seventh & James on World Communion Sunday 2023 and inspired the organization of this worship packet.

art by Scott Turner

Our God,
Make of our living
a habit of giving.
May the basic needs of others
Be a priority
in our culture of magnified personal wants.

And may we be uneasy
eating the Lord's supper
as long as there are those that hunger—
as long as there are the least of these
whose needs are not yet met—
as long as Jesus is not fully present.

All this we pray in the name of the one
whose voice disturbs us
from the very back of where we're comfortable.
Amen.
-John Ballenger

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

For Jesus, then, liberation is total liberation. And thereby he identifies the root of all injustice and exploitation: breach of friendship, breach of love. We are not presented with a liberation open to a "spiritualistic" interpretation, still so tightly clung to in certain Christian circles. Hunger and justice are not just economic and social questions. They are global human questions, and they challenge our way of living the faith in its very roots.
–Gustavo Gutiérrez

Whatever your life situation might be,
find some way to be in immediate contact
with the little ones,
the nobodies.
Get in touch with the people
who are of no account,
who haven't made it
into the great American midstream.
Maybe they don't talk 'right' and smell 'right.'
They may not seem to be part of the 'in' group.
…There is a reason we push
all these people
far away and far apart:
They represent everything we fear
and everything we deny
about ourselves.
Yet to be touched by these people
is to discover
the deepest recesses of our life.
–Richard Rohr

We walk towards God's
inbreaking justice
in the world, which is coming
whether we are flying, running,
or crawling. Our small acts of justice—
those single steps that we refuse
to stop doing, even though
we can't see how
they'll make a difference—
are met by a generous, just God
who is multiplying our small efforts
into making all things new.
–Laura Jean Truman

Micah Pascucci, when he graduated from college, decided to hike the Appalachian Trail before entering the "Real World." While there he had a powerful epiphany:

"Oatmeal for breakfast, a bagel, cheese and peanut butter for lunch. Noodles for dinner. *Nothing!!!* I'm an American, for Christ's sake! Where's the Beef?! I want to consume, eat till I need to unbutton my pants, until I'm sick. *I was starving.* At least what I thought was starving. Starving for an ignorant, middle-class, American white boy. That's when it hit me. Some people don't get this much. No, wait—MOST people don't get this much."

After this realization, Pascucci went, literally, straight from the Appalachian Trail to a hunger training farm in Texas he had heard about as a youth. He showed up on their doorstep and asked to be allowed to help out on the farm. A year later he went back for an official internship. He wrote in the newsletter, *Farm Notes*, "If the Real World calls, I'm not here."
–from the World Hunger Relief Training Farm, Elm Mott, TX

art by Sally Lynn Askins

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

What Did You Do about it?

A Hunger Emphasis Challenge

by Brett Younger

Some 730 million people wake up every morning with little hope of enough to eat. 195 million of them are, by the way, Christians. 258 million are dealing withmalnutrition. This is an increase from 193 million before COVID. The World Food Programme says that, in 2024, as many as 309 million people are facing chronic hunger in 71 countries.

> *If worship themes were in proportion to the attention given in Scripture, churches would have several world hunger months each year.*

Put all the hungry in single file, and they will circle the globe 25 times.

The United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) says that 25,000 people a day, 10,000 children, die of hunger-related causes. Malnutrition is responsible for nearly half the deaths of children under five. Three to four hundred starve to death in the time it takes to preach a sermon on hunger.

The numbers do not break our hearts like the pictures do. We see photos of children with bellies swollen, legs and arms like sticks, eyes vacant. A gaunt mother holds a tiny bundle of skin and bones to her chest. Children eat spilled flour off the ground at a makeshift feeding station.

An elderly man stands waiting for a handful of rice, but collapses before he gets to the front of the line.

Starvation is caused by conflict, COVID, climate change, government corruption, corporate corruption and income inequality. Conflict and climate change result in people being driven from their homes and jobs and becoming unable to find food.

The World Food Programme says that the war in Ukraine is still affecting global food production and supply chains. Measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus reduced the resources available to address hunger. Climate change causes droughts and floods, leading to fewer crops.

Whatever the reasons for food shortages, one thing is sure: the children who suffer are not to blame. Hunger affects their intellectual development, physical growth and the ability to fight off illness. Bread for the World reports that more than 40 percent of children in India have stunted growth caused by malnutrition.

Without proper nutrition, a child's heart literally shrinks. The liver, kidneys, and intestines begin breaking down.

In a world where thousands starve to death every day, we are surrounded by plenty. One restaurant in New York kept track of leftover food on people's plates. In one year, they threw away two and a half tons of meat. The United States wastes 20 percent of its food. An estimated $31 billion a year in food is thrown away or destroyed because of surplus. Americans waste enough food in a year to feed over 50 million people.

James Reston was a columnist for *The New York Times* for 30 years. In his final column, he wrote, "In America, we have learned something about how to deal with adversity, but not much about how to deal with prosperity. We are very rich, but we are not having a very good time. We are producing so

art by Susan Daily, IVBM

much food that we do not know what to do with the garbage, while half of the human race goes to bed hungry every night."

Americans make up 5 percent of the world's population, but consume 20-25 percent of the world's resources.

Americans have learned to make excuses:

"I work hard for what I have."

"The government should do more."

"I have too much to worry about without thinking about starving children."

"It's not my responsibility."

You might think progressive churches would latch on to the issue of hunger, but most do not. When we talk about racism, anti-Semitism, immigration, human trafficking, or LGBTQIA issues, liberals know we are not the bad guys, but when we talk about hunger, we are part of the problem.

You might think conservative churches that say they take the Bible literally would take the 3,000 verses on sharing with the poor literally. If worship themes were in proportion to the attention given in Scripture, churches would have several world hunger months each year.

One of the few things left and right-wing Christianity agrees on is that our churches are not going to worry too much about hungry children. Church leaders have figured out that feeding hungry children on the other side of the world will not increase attendance.

Our lack of concern is embarrassing. According to one study, most Americans who call themselves Christians give less than a dollar a year to feed the hungry. We lose sleep over problems at work, difficulties at school and troubles at home, but few of us lose sleep over children starving.

We tell ourselves there is nothing we can do about it, but that is not true.

One ethicist offers this parable:

> *Imagine you are on your way to work at a new job. For your first day, you have bought new clothes to make a good impression on your boss and co-workers. On the way to work, you come across a child drowning in a pond. If you stop to help, you will not only be late to work, but will ruin your new clothes. That said, there is no question about the right course of action. You have to stop and help.*

We have to ask, "If we're obligated to do the right thing when it comes to the children we see, what about those we don't see?"

Are we obligated to care for children in India? At some point in our lives, we come to grips with the haunting idea that we could have been born a poor child ourselves. We were not born in poverty, so what are our obligations to those who were?

We cannot solve the problem of hunger, but we can do more than we usually admit. We could start small. Peter Singer suggests giving 1 percent of our income to reduce the burdens of the hungry, increasing it over time. Not many do that, but it seems possible, doesn't it?

We make a difference when we refuse to be comfortable with the tragedy of hunger. We make a difference when we do not pretend nothing can be done.

We have the resources to end world hunger. The problem is distribution. We already produce enough grain to supply 3,600 calories a day to every person. If Americans just substituted chicken for one-third of our beef consumption and the cattle-producers responded appropriately, it could provide enough grain to feed 100 million people.

We understand that hunger is a political issue. Christians who vote, who make their voices heard, make a difference. We can push our politicians to use foreign aid to dig water wells, build fishponds, improve agriculture, teach nutrition, and make sure there is help when disasters hit.

We make a difference when we refuse to be comfortable with the tragedy of hunger. We make a difference when we do not pretend nothing can be done.

Heifer International is helping starving families in Odisha, India. The project increases each family's average flock from eight to 80 birds, which means farmers generate an annual income of $228 by the third year.

The struggle against hunger is not fought in one cataclysmic battle. Hunger is defeated by a health clinic here, a new piece of legislation there and chickens to a family in India. There is a lot of work to be done, and a lot of help we can give.

Imagine a tourist going to India, where he sees a hungry little girl outside a bakery window. She has

Please see "Challenge" on page 27.

A Feast Fit for the World

A Children's Sermon in the Form of a Dialogue

by Mark McClintock

Author's note: I use the following script as the basis of a dialogue between me and a puppet named Red, but it could be equally effective as a play performed by two human actors. For flexibility, I have simply used the appellations "ONE" and "TWO" to designate the two parts. The particular snack, of course, may also be substituted.

ONE: *(To the children)* I've been looking forward to this morning, because we get to share one of my favorite snacks—cheese crackers. I invited my friend, Red *(substitute TWO's name here)* to join us today, because he loves cheese crackers, too. Isn't that right, Red?

TWO: *(Nods head*

ONE: Are you glad to be here?

TWO: *(Nods head)*

ONE: Are you ready for a cracker feast?

TWO: *(Nods head)*

ONE: Do you want to greet the children first?

TWO: *(Shakes head, "no")*

ONE: Oh. A little bashful today, I guess. Well, anyway, we are talking this week about communion. What do you think of when you hear the word, "communion?" *(Allow children to express ideas, and affirm them for volunteering answers.)* In our church, we celebrate communion together to remember that we are one family—the family of Jesus Christ—and to remember how great Jesus' love for us is. Communion is a time for sharing. That's what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Can you say all that? *(Open your Bible and help the children repeat the scripture reference.)* How about you? *(Turn to TWO; feel free to insert a name)* Can you say all that as well as the children?

TWO: *(Shakes head "no")*

ONE: Oh. Well, that's okay. Not only do we have Communion with the members of our church, but with Christians all over the world. Sometimes we call Communion, "The Lord's Supper." The way Paul describes Communion in the Bible, it may have been like a real supper or a small feast, not just a little piece of bread or wafer. This morning, as we talk about sharing, we are going to share a small feast of cheese crackers. You did bring them, didn't you? *(Turn to TWO)*

TWO: *(Nods head)*

ONE: Great! Where are they?

TWO: *(Hands, uncovers, or points out a basket, which contains only two crackers)*

ONE: Um, *(name)*, there are only two crackers there.

TWO: *(Nods head)*

ONE: I just filled this basket this morning, and I know there were plenty of crackers to share with everyone here. Where in the world are they?

TWO: *(Talks with mouth full)* I don't know.

ONE: Red! You ate all our crackers?

TWO: Not all. I left some.

ONE: Two crackers, Red! How in the world are we going to share two crackers?

TWO: Oh, that's an easy one. One for me, one for you.

ONE: But we were supposed to share with all of these children. We're talking about communion, and that means everyone shares the feast.

TWO: Oh…well, you're a Christian—can't you break the crackers and multiply them?

ONE: Well, Jesus did do that, but I'm not so sure it would work here. You see, the way we multiply food is by sharing the abundance we have with people who have little. Why on earth did you eat all the crackers, Red?

TWO: Well, I was afraid if we shared them with all the children, there wouldn't be many left for me.

ONE: Oh, Red…that's the kind of attitude Paul was scolding the Corinthians for having. Some of the Christians there were coming to the Lord's Supper early and eating everything up before the poorer people got there. Paul says that we must not be greedy but be sure that everyone shares the communion, especially taking care to share with the people who have little money and would otherwise go hungry.

TWO: *I'm* hungry!

ONE: I understand, Red, but I mean *really* hungry. There are people all over the world who may go for days with no food or perhaps nothing but a little bit of rice.

TWO: Whoa! They must be starving!

ONE: That's right. And most people in the United States, although not all, have enough food. Some of us have more than enough.

TWO: Oh, I see. We're sort of like those people Paul was writing about…the Corruptions.

ONE: Corinthians, you mean.

TWO: Right. We got to the food first, and now we're hogging it for ourselves.

ONE: Yes, many of us are greedy, or we just try to ignore all the other people.

TWO: I'm really sorry, kids. I should have shared. I wonder if the Corrosions—

ONE: Corinthians.

TWO: Yeah, them. I wonder if they learned to share?

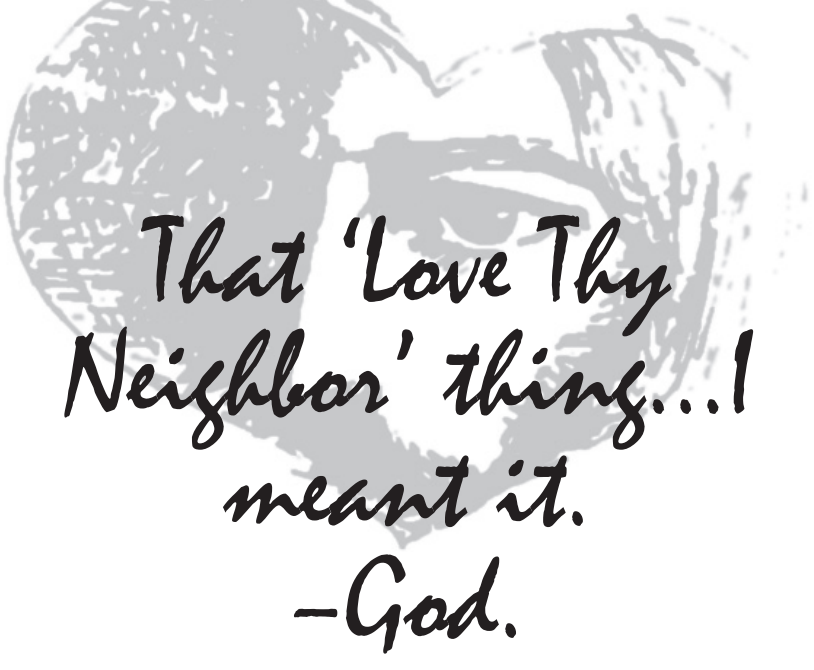
ONE: I don't know, Red, but I hope so. What's important is that *we* learn to share.

TWO: Good point. Can we bring crackers again some time? I want to share them with everyone!

ONE: Great plan, Red. We'll try again. Let's pray. God, help us to learn how to share.

–Mark McClintock is pastor of Speedway Baptist Church in Indianapolis, IN. He spent many years as a children's minister and director of PassPort Kids, a church camp for children. As an accomplished ventriloquist, he used dialogue with dummies as an effective way of storytelling.

Seen on a billboard in Dexter, Missouri:



The Reality of Budgeting:

A Hunger Emphasis Simulation

by Scott Turner

I'll be the first to admit that a poverty simulation can leave a bad taste in your mouth. Whether it be a little too exposed and performative or even just too much like a game, it's important that simulating real world experiences be taken seriously and tactfully.

Building empathy is the name of the game (for lack of a better phrase), but understanding the people in our communities who are impoverished and at risk takes a little more than a thought exercise. Nonetheless, it's a good place to start if we want to start thinking critically and empathetically about the conditions of our communities.

Understanding the people in our communities who are impoverished and at risk takes a little more than a thought exercise. Nonetheless, it's a good place to start if we want to start thinking critically and empathetically about the conditions of our communities.

I'm proposing a simple budget simulation for a youth group. Surely balancing a budget is the last thing that teens wants to do with their youth group, but I'm hoping that a small experience like this can start to develop practical and community-oriented skills for your kiddos. This activity might take a little research on the part of the administrator, but teenagers these days also have the internet at their fingertips, so if you feel omfortable doing so, enlist their help for the activity.

Balancing a budget is a simple concept: we take account of what money comes in through income and earnings and we compare it to what our estimated expenses will be, usually on a month-to-month basis. So for this activity, break up your students into groups (or not if the group is small) and start assigning family systems and incomes. While budgeting for their families, students will need to focus on housing, food, childcare, transportation, health care, taxes and other necessities.

Group A represents a family of four with a father who works in landscaping and a mother who works as a nursing assistant. The children are below age 4, so childcare is necessary and little Susie has to go to the doctor again this month for her third ear infection in a row. Can you afford a potentially expensive medical procedure to improve the quality of your daughter's life?

Group B represents a single-mother household with three children. Mom is a teacher, but her old car has been giving her trouble this week. Can she afford to take it to a mechanic and potentially not have transportation for the week, much less receive some bad news about the transmission?

It will be helpful to look at housing and income figures for your area. If you have an Amazon warehouse in your city, how much are those workers getting paid full time? What other large industries are in your area that barely pay people to survive? You might consider writing a situation card about someone getting laid off and needing a new job, but also having to budget for the month. Try to relate it to your community as much as possible.

It's not a competition among your students. Instead, help them parse out as best they can just how difficult and desperate it can be to pay all the bills while barely making ends meet. If you have a big enough group, you might consider throwing in a situation card for a trust fund college grad settling down in the area. It might be helpful to see the contrast between groups having to make really difficult decisions and a group that exists with ease and privilege.

–Scott Turner is an MDiv student at Truett Theological Seminary and minister to youth at Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed. As a member of the Seeds Liturgical Team, he contributes youth activities, prayers and art.

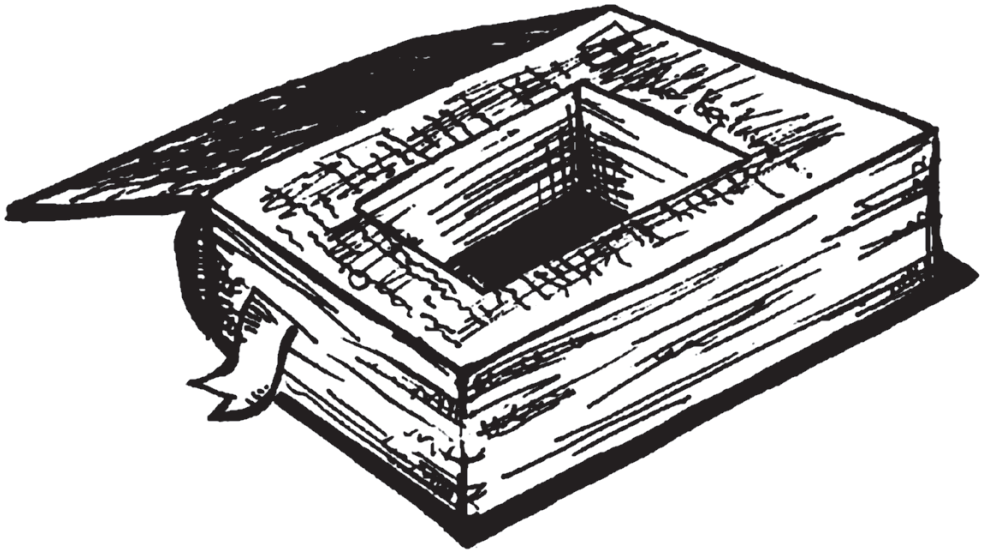
Editor's note: Jim Wallis, leader of the Sojourners community in Washington, DC, tells a compelling story from his seminary days. It seems that he and a fellow student decided one day to find all of the verses in the Bible that dealt with hunger and economic justice, and literally cut them out—with scissors.

When they were done, Wallis says, that Bible was in shreds. Later he held it up in the pulpit as a dramatic reminder of what happens to the Bible when the people don't care about the poor.

The following texts are from those sections that Jim and his friend would have snipped from the biblical material. They have been searched and selected by young people from Seventh and James Baptist Church in Waco, TX and St. Timothy Catholic Church in Mesa, AZ. They were assisted by Baylor University interdisciplinary scholars Erik Morken and Lynnette Ogle, along with the Rev. Eiko Kanamaru of Fukuoka, Japan.

These scriptures have been selected for use as a year-long immersion into hunger-related scripture. They begin with the beginning of the liturgical year. They are intended to be used as a supplement to the common lectionaries. They are for individual or congregational use. Please adapt them to the needs of yourself and/or your congregation.

We feel that, at this point, we should issue a warning. Some of these passages, as you may surmise, might seem rather harsh and have not been moderated or edited. However, the fervor of youth ("It's in the Bible; are we just going to ignore it?") is not easily stemmed—nor, we think, should it be. *(The story above is used with permission from Jim Wallis and is reprinted from* Sacred Seasons, *Advent 1998.)*



art by David Shoemaker

A Hunger Lectionary

Sundays in Advent and Christmas

First Sun.	Isaiah 3:13-15	Luke 1:46-55
Second Sun.	Isaiah 10:1-4	Matt. 19:16-21
Third Sun.	Jeremiah 7:1-11	1 John 3:16-18
Fourth Sun.	Deut. 14:28-15:11	Acts 11:27-30
Christmas	Nehemiah 8:10	Matt. 6:25-34

Sundays after Christmas

First Sun.	Isaiah 1:12-17	Matt. 5:42
Epiphany	Lam. 2:19	Matt. 25:31-46

Sundays after Epiphany

First Sun.	Isaiah 9:2-7	Acts 4:32-35
Second Sun.	Lev. 23:22	Matt. 15:32-39
Third Sun.	Psalm 9:18	Mark 10:23-27
Fourth Sun.	Psalm 107:33-38	Luke 19:1-10
Fifth Sun.	Proverbs 14:21	Acts 20:32-35
Sixth Sun.	Malachi 3:5	James 1:27
Seventh Sun.	1 Samuel 2:1-8	Matt. 22:34-40

(If there are eight or nine Sundays in this season, use the last one or two selections for the summer season.)

"God for everyman and everyman
for himself," said the elephant
as he danced among the chickens.
–Charles Dickens

Sundays in Lent & Easter

First Sun.	Amos 5:11-24	James 2:1-8
Second Sun.	Job 22:1-11	Galatians 2:10
Third Sun.	Psalm 41:1-3	Rom. 12:9-21
Fourth Sun.	Job 24:1-24	Matt. 6:19-21
Fifth Sun.	Exodus 22:21-27	Rev. 3:14-17
Sixth Sun.	Proverbs 19:17	2 Cor. 9:6-12
Easter	Psalm 82:1-4	John 6:1-15

Sundays after Easter & Pentecost

First Sun.	Psalm 140:12	1 Cor. 13:3
Second Sun.	Amos 2:6-8	Matt. 14:13-21
Third Sun.	Deut. 10:12-19	James 2:14-26
Fourth Sun.	Ezekiel 16:49	Luke 3:7-14
Pentecost	Jer. 8:19-21	Acts 2:43-47

Sundays after Pentecost - Summer

First Sun.	Lam. 1:11	Luke 9:10-17
Second Sun.	Psalm 72:1-14	Matt. 6:24
Third Sun.	Ezekiel 34:25-31	Luke 6:20-31
Fourth Sun.	Proverbs 14:31	Gal. 6:7-10
Fifth Sun.	Jer. 22:13-17	Luke 7:18-23
Sixth Sun.	Lev. 19:9-10	Rom. 12:9-21
Seventh Sun.	Exodus 16:9-18	James 5:1-6
Eighth Sun.	Isaiah 58:6-12	Rom. 15:25-29
Ninth Sun.	2 Kings 4:38-44	I Tim. 6:17-19
10th Sun.	Job 5:8-16	Mark 6:30-44
11th Sun.	Job 31:16-28	Rom. 12:9-21
12th Sun.	Proverbs 31:8-9	Luke 12:48
13th Sun.	Isaiah 32:1-8	Eph. 4:28
14th Sun.	Proverbs 25:21	Matt. 11:1-6

(If there are 15 or 16 Sundays in this season, use the last one or two selections for the season from Epiphany to Lent.)

Sundays after Pentecost - Fall

First Sun. (Labor Day)	Proverbs 29:7	Luke 14-15-24
Second Sun.	Isaiah 61:1-4	Luke 12:13-21
Third Sun.	2 Sam. 12:1-8	Mark 8:1-9
Fourth Sun.	Amos 4:1-3	1Cor. 11:20-22
Fifth Sun.	Lev. 25:8-17	Luke 18:18-25
Sixth Sun. (Communion)	Amos 8:4-8	Luke 21:1-4
Seventh Sun.	Jer. 9:23-24	Luke 18:1-8
Eighth Sun.	Ezekiel 18:5-9	James 2:1-8
Ninth Sun.	Job 30:24-25	Rev. 3:15-18
Tenth Sun.	Exodus 23:1-13	Luke 16:19-31
Eleventh Sun.	Jer. 5:25-28	2 Cor. 8:1-15
12th Sun.	Micah 6:6-8	Luke 10:25-37
Memorial Sun.	Zech. 7:8-10	Phil. 4:12

Wouldn't it be easier just to list the verses that don't have anything to do with the poor?

—overheard from a Seventh & James youth while working on the lectionary project

art on this page by Robert Darden

Remind Us of Your Face in Others

A Responsive Call to Awareness

by Daniel G. Bagby

ONE: Return our minds and hearts
to gratitude, O Lord!

MANY: We live comfortable lives,
enjoy many freedoms,
share abundant resources;
and struggle daily not to lead
self-centered and protected lives;

ONE: Teach us again the truth
about ourselves:
that we were born
for more than self-entertainment,
for active, and not passive, care;

MANY: Teach us, who so often
remain spectators in life,
to cast aside our carelessness
and fear of service;

ONE: Remind us of Your face in others,
when we see the eyes of hunger,
abandon, and hopelessness;
help us to recognize Your features
in the friendless stare
of a neighbor;

MANY: Open our hearts
to Your silent presence
in the want of those
who tread the city streets;

ONE: And teach us once again
that You were not crucified
in a clean cathedral
between two candles,

MANY: but on a garbage dump
between two abandoned thieves;

ALL: That we may share Your passion
for changing wretchedness
into treasured living.

art by Sally Lynn Askins

–Dan Bagby, a retired pastor and professor of pastoral care studies, is a founding member of the Seeds Council of Stewards and a present member of the Seeds Board of Advisors. Among his pastorates was that of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where the Seeds offices are housed.

Hunger in the US & Around the World

compiled by Grace Sincleair

Hunger and food insecurity continue to rage across the United States and the world. Two major causes of these issues currently are conflict and climate. While both of these causes have their own separate effects, they share an effect that also profoundly impacts food security: displacement. When people are forced to leave their homes, they do not always know where to turn for food. This adds to the troubles they are already experiencing.

The United States is not currently under conflict. However, this does not mean that we are without displaced people. Natural disasters are increasing more than ever as a result of climate change. This forces people to leave their homes and their livelihoods and will most likely place them in situations of food scarcity.

But there is hope. The United Nations and many other groups are working to alleviate hunger worldwide. The United States has many programs that help adults and children access food. What is needed is the ability to connect people with these programs and help them see hope through the hunger.

Global Hunger

• In 2023, the United Nations was only able to raise 35 percent of the money needed to fund its humanitarian aid plans. This was not due to a lack of giving, but rather an increase in need across the globe. (Devex Newswire)

• The World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) compiled a list of 18 hunger "hotspots." This was released in October 2023. This list highlights where hunger situations are expected to worsen and gives a forecast on hunger conditions for November 2023 to April 2024. (WFP) *(See "Hunger Hotspots" on page 24.)*

• Conflict is frequently the cause of food insecurity. "Conflict disrupts harvests, hampers the delivery of humanitarian aid and forces families to flee their homes." It is predicted that 85 percent of the world's poorest people will soon live in fragile areas affected by conflict. (Action Against Hunger)

• According to the International Food Policy Research Institute, over half of all people who face food insecurity live in countries that are impacted by conflict. (International Food Policy Research Institute).

• Conflict in Gaza contributes to the hunger of many Palestinians. It is predicted that half of the Palestinian population will face death and starva-

art by Sharon Rollins

tion by the middle of July 2024. (Food and Agriculture Organisation/FAO)

• Haiti, too, is suffering from violence. The domination of gangs in the country keeps humanitarian aid from reaching people in some areas. Some 38 percent of the population is facing a food crisis. (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere/CARE)

• Despite the war, both Ukraine and Russia were able to produce a large wheat harvest in the 2022-2023 year. However, Russia has pulled out of an agreement to let Ukraine trade on the Black Sea. This will force Ukraine to search for new ways to sell their grains, which will likely be more costly for the Ukrainians. (Christian Science Monitor)

• Bread for the World is a group of Christians who work alongside policy decision makers to advocate for the hungry and end food insecurity in the US and the world. Bread created a list of guiding principles that outline how it will work to prevent conflict and fragility, help those who are living in conflict areas and rebuild places that are coming out of conflict. (Bread for the World)

• Displacement is frequently caused by war and conflict, but it can also be caused by climate change. Experts believe that the total number of climate-related displaced people could reach 1.2 billion by 2050. (Bread for the World)

• Climate is predicted to cause more problems for food-insecure people. La Niña and the current hurricane season in the US will bring rain and flooding to areas, destroying crops and homes. (FAO)

• Smallholder farmers and their families frequently live from harvest to harvest, relying on the surplus from one harvest to get them to the next. The time period between when food begins to run out and the next harvest is called the "hunger season." The hunger season can last up to a few months. (Bread for the World)

Hunger in the US

• According to the USDA Economic Research Service, 4.2 million Americans lived in food insecure households in 2022. (Economic Research Service)

• 12 million children face food insecurity in the United States. This means one in five kids is at risk of hunger. The ratio is even greater for Black and Latino/a communities: one in three children in that group are at risk of hunger. (Bread for the World)

• In fiscal year 2023, 28.6 million children and youth participated in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). 66 percent of the participation was for free lunches, 4 percent for reduced price lunches, and 30 percent for full price lunches. The last 15 years have seen an increase in participation for free lunches, with a significant increase during the coronavirus pandemic (fiscal years 2020 and 2021). (Food and Nutrition Service/FNS)

• In the fall of 2023, the Biden Administration released a new summer food assistance program for children called the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (Summer EBT). However, 15 states chose not to participate for various reasons. This keeps 8 million children from accessing the benefits of this food program. (*New York Times*)

• The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program serves approximately 40 percent of the infants in the United States. These infants are considered at risk due to lack of nutrition. (FNS)

• Despite the many benefits of WIC, it is extremely underutilized. In 2021, only 51 percent of eligible mothers, infants and young children took advantage of the program. (United States Department of Agriculture/USDA)

• The number of authorized firms for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) increased by 1.2 per-

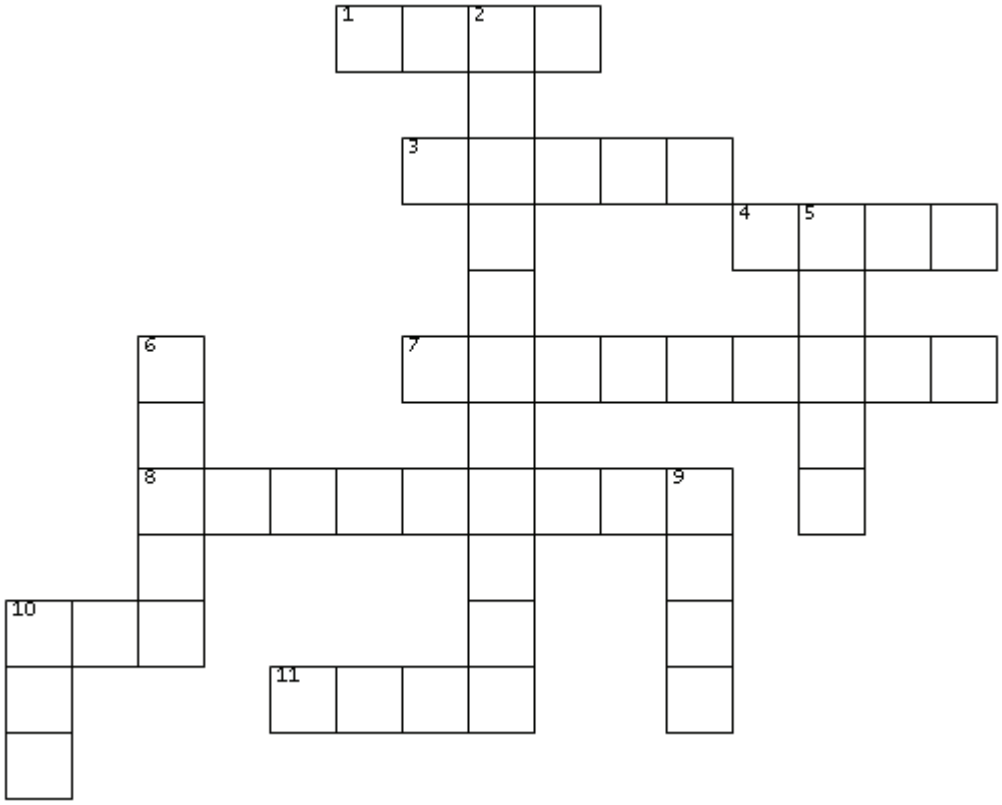
Please see "Hunger in the US" on page 25.

Organizations Fighting Hunger

a Crossword by Grace Sincleair

Test your knowledge of the groups and programs that are working to end hunger and food insecurity in the United States and the World!

See "Hunger in the United States & Across the Globe" starting on page 21 for hints.



ACROSS

1. Number of authorized firms for this program increased by 1.2 percent in fiscal year 2023.
3. A group of Christians who work alongside policy decision makers to advocate for the hungry and end food insecurity in the world; ___ for the World.
4. Abbreviation for the organization that contains the Food and Agriculture Association, the Economic Research Service, and the Food and Nutrition Service.
7. New Summer food assistance program for children that 15 states chose not to participate in.
8. USDA group that oversees SNAP, NSLP, and WIC; Food and ___ Service
10. Abbreviation for United Nations group that, along with the FAO, compiled a list of 18 hunger "hotspots."
11. Stands for Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere.

DOWN

2. Second word in the name of FAO.
5. The group that publishes what you're reading right now! ___ of Hope.
6. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for disaster survivors.
9. Abbreviation for the group that offers lunches to kids at full, reduced and no price.
10. Abbreviation for the program that helps mothers, infants, and young children live healthy lives.

–Grace Sincleair, a native of Salado, TX, and a Baylor University Professional Writing student, is the summer 2024 Seeds of Hope editorial intern. Compiled using Discovery Education Puzzlemaker.

Hunger Hotspots: A Look at Increasing Food Insecurity Across the Globe

compiled by Grace Sincleair

In June, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme released a document entitled "Hunger hotspots: Early warnings on acute food insecurity, June to October 2024 outlook." In it, they forecasted 17 countries/territories and one region that were likely to see a growing hunger crisis between June and October this year.

Myanmar: Conflict in Myanmar led to increased economic insecurity and displacement. In addition, its people will likely experience a below-average rainy monsoon season that will impact their 2024 harvests.

South Sudan: South Sudan has high inflation due to the rise in prices of their main cereal staples and a decrease in oil exports. Heavy rains and flooding will likely cause displacement, an increase in waterborne illnesses and other problems. Finally, subnational and intercommunal conflict will increase hunger.

Somalia: Somalia is projected to face heavy rainfall, which will damage buildings and crops. High food prices, conflict and political transitions are also likely to impact poverty and people's access to food.

Ethiopia: Armed conflict and weather extremes will impact Ethiopian's ability to access food. Food prices are also high; the inflation of food was 31.6 percent as of February 2024.

Haiti: Haiti's population is extremely food insecure. Non-state armed groups continue to use violence and pressure to expand their control. Inflation is also high; the annual food inflation rate was 28 percent in February 2024. Heavy rainfall and hurricanes will also increase hunger.

Palestine: The Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem are heavily impacted by the current conflict in Gaza. In March, an acceleration of starvation-related death and malnutrition was forecasted. Because of relentless military activity, people in this area also struggle to find access to humanitarian aid and essential items.

Sudan: Internal conflict in Sudan is predicted to cause an increase in displacement. Economic turmoil, a reduced cereal production and a series of attacks on ships in the Red Sea by Yemen's Houthi rebels are seriously decreasing people's access to food.

Lebanon: People living in Lebanon will be hurt by an impending decrease in humanitarian aid caused by armed conflict in the area. Additionally, a loan from the World Bank that supported bread subsidies is exhausted, and the subsidies are expected to end in September. Conflict at the southern border is also displacing people and decreasing agricultural production.

Syrian Arab Republic: The prices of essential goods rose here, and the country struggles to produce and import enough food for its population. Localized conflict and currency devaluation also limit people's access to food.

art by Audrey Cary Lange

Yemen: Humanitarian aid in Yemen decreased and is now more unpredictable. These operations are hindered by sanctions and conflict. Yemen is 90 percent dependent on imports for domestic food, and turmoil on the Red Sea, caused by Houthi rebels, hinders imports from reaching Yemen.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)—eastern provinces (North and South Kivu, Ituri): Conflict is the main driver of food insecurity, violence and displacement in the DRC. Additionally, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo withdrew from the eastern provinces, which leaves people in this area more exposed to violence.

Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe: This sub-Saharan region is experiencing an extreme drought, which harms both crops and farm animals. Food prices will likely continue to increase.

Burkina Faso: Conflict here impacts the food security and livelihood of its citizens. It disrupts markets and trade routes, limiting the availability of food and non-food items and increasing the price of food.

Central African Republic: Conflict between security forces and non-state armed groups causes displacement and hinders humanitarian aid delivery. Furthermore, extreme weather will affect the amount of food available.

Chad: Food prices in Chad are high. The arrival of Syrian refugees and Chadian returnees increase the need for humanitarian aid. A tense upcoming election is also decreasing security.

Mali: Mali recently announced its withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States. This will cause economic disruptions across the country. Furthermore, conflict and violence are already leading to displacement.

Nigeria: Nigeria is experiencing a decrease in security. Conflict in the north, high inflation and increased prices of staple cereals will increase hunger in the country.

Sierra Leone: High inflation and increase in basic food prices come as the result of a turbulent economic situation in Sierra Leone. High prices for fuel—one of Sierra Leone's major imports—also raise the cost of food.

–Compiled by Grace Sincleair. Source: "Hunger hotspots: Early warnings on acute food insecurity, June to October 2024 outlook," Food and Agriculture Organization and World Food Programme, June 5, 2024.

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Hunger in the US

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cent during fiscal year 2023. However, SNAP redemptions decreased from $138 billion to $124 billion. This is likely a result of the reduction in SNAP Emergency Allotment and Pandemic EBT (electronic) benefits (P-EBT). (FNS)

• The US Census Bureau estimates that 2.5 million Americans were displaced from their homes in 2023 due to weather-related disasters. One third of these people stated that they experienced some food shortage during the first month of displacement. (*New York Times*)

• Following weather-related disasters, victims can participate in a program called the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP). This program extends benefits for SNAP participants and grants SNAP benefits to those who were not eligible for them prior to the disaster. (Food Research and Action Center/FRAC)

• Following recent tornadoes and severe storms in the US, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service approved a plan to allow low-income residents of Oklahoma to receive D-SNAP benefits. If residents meet certain criteria, they can receive these benefits for a limited time to aid them in recovering from the storms. (FNS)

–Grace Sincleair, a native of Salado, TX, and a Baylor University Professional Writing student, is the summer 2024 Seeds of Hope editorial intern.

Religion of the Heart

by Ken Sehested

"Religion of the heart" has a decidedly evangelical Protestant ring to it, evoking the perorations of revivalism, with emotionally fraught, closing hymns of "invitation," the come-to-Jesus rite. (In commerce, the concluding bargaining includes emotional manipulation called "sealing the deal." I was once watching television with my then-four-year-old, and, after a used car commercial she innocently asked, "Daddy, was that a preacher?")

Faith is indeed a matter of the heart and a transformation "from within" is essential, a conversion which cannot be affected by creedal conformity, emotional intensity or even moral rectitude.

Though I was soaked in this religious environment from childhood through adolescence, I've jettisoned most vestiges of "evangelical" culture, which now has become almost synonymous with White supremacism and Christian nationalism.

But even when this cancerous growth has not appeared, evangelical piety has turned in on itself. The truth of that traditional spiritual holds: "I want Jesus to walk with me" is a powerful invocation. But often the comfort provided is little more than that of a favorite teddy bear to a small child. Hearts are severed from hands and feet. The circuitry of this piety has largely failed. There is no consideration of Jesus' response when he says, "Come walk with me."

As Clarence Jordan said in his inimitable way, "We'll worship the hind legs off Jesus and never do anything he says."

Besides enduring love for some of the old hymns of my rearing, there's this compelling disclosure of life lived in the Spirit: Faith is indeed a matter of the heart and a transformation "from within" is essential, a conversion which cannot be affected by creedal conformity, emotional intensity or even moral rectitude.

One of my favorite lines from contemporary music comes from Greg Brown: "Lord, I've made you a place in my heart, and I hope now you leave it alone." In most of what passes for spirituality in our time—whether it's the old-fashioned type of piety or the newer-age variety (and there are some stunning similarities)—there is a radical disconnect between religion of the heart and life in the flesh.

A lot of people, when they talk about "giving your heart to Jesus" (a phrase found nowhere in Scripture), what they mean is having a religious experience tinged with certain kinds of emotion and articulated with certain formulaic language.

As Robert McAfee Brown has written, attempts to separate personal faith from public policy "have been front and center ever since Pharaoh unsuccessfully tried to persuade Moses that religion had nothing to do with Egypt's domestic policy on the status of nonindentured servants."

In times past, the evangelical impulse in multiple Christian traditions was a reaction against stifling liturgical protocol, constrictive dogma and calcified creedalism, narrowly restrictive moralism or despotic church hierarchy.

Please see "Religion of the Heart" on page 27.

art by Rebecca S. Ward

art by Susan Daily, IBVM

Challenge

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fallen asleep with her face pressed against the window that separates her from the fresh bread inside. He takes a picture of the scene and posts it along with a lot of other photos on Facebook.

One person writes, "What did you do?"

The tourist is not sure what he means. "About what?"

"About the little girl asleep at the bakery window, what did you do about that?"

What will we do about hungry children?

What if someone surprised you by asking, "What was worship about this morning?"

You say, "It was about world hunger."

What if they then asked, "What did you do about it?"

–Brett Younger, a generous and frequent contributor to Sacred Seasons, *has pastored a number of churches in Indiana and Texas, and now serves as pastor of the historic Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, NY. The meditation above is an excerpt from "St. Paul's Sneaky Fundraising Letter," preached at Plymouth Church in October 2023 for Hunger Emphasis Sunday. Some statistics were updated for this packet.*

Religion of the Heart

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That impulse functioned, for a time (long since passed), in a way not unlike what New Testament scholar Walter Wink articulated nearly 50 years ago in "How I Have Been Snagged by the Seat of My Pants While Reading the Bible." That short essay was the opening salvo of his debate with the scholarly biblical guild's overconfidence in the historical-critical method of study because of the way it completely objectified the text.

His two major complaints were about "objectivism" and "the ideology of individualism, the flawed humanism of the Enlightenment, and an interpretation of Christianity which resolutely avoids addressing the principalities and powers." What he meant was the transpersonal forces that shape the way we see in the world in ways of which we are not conscious.

> As Robert McAfee Brown has written, attempts to separate personal faith from public policy "have been front and center ever since Pharaoh unsuccessfully tried to persuade Moses that religion had nothing to do with Egypt's domestic policy on the status of nonindentured servants."

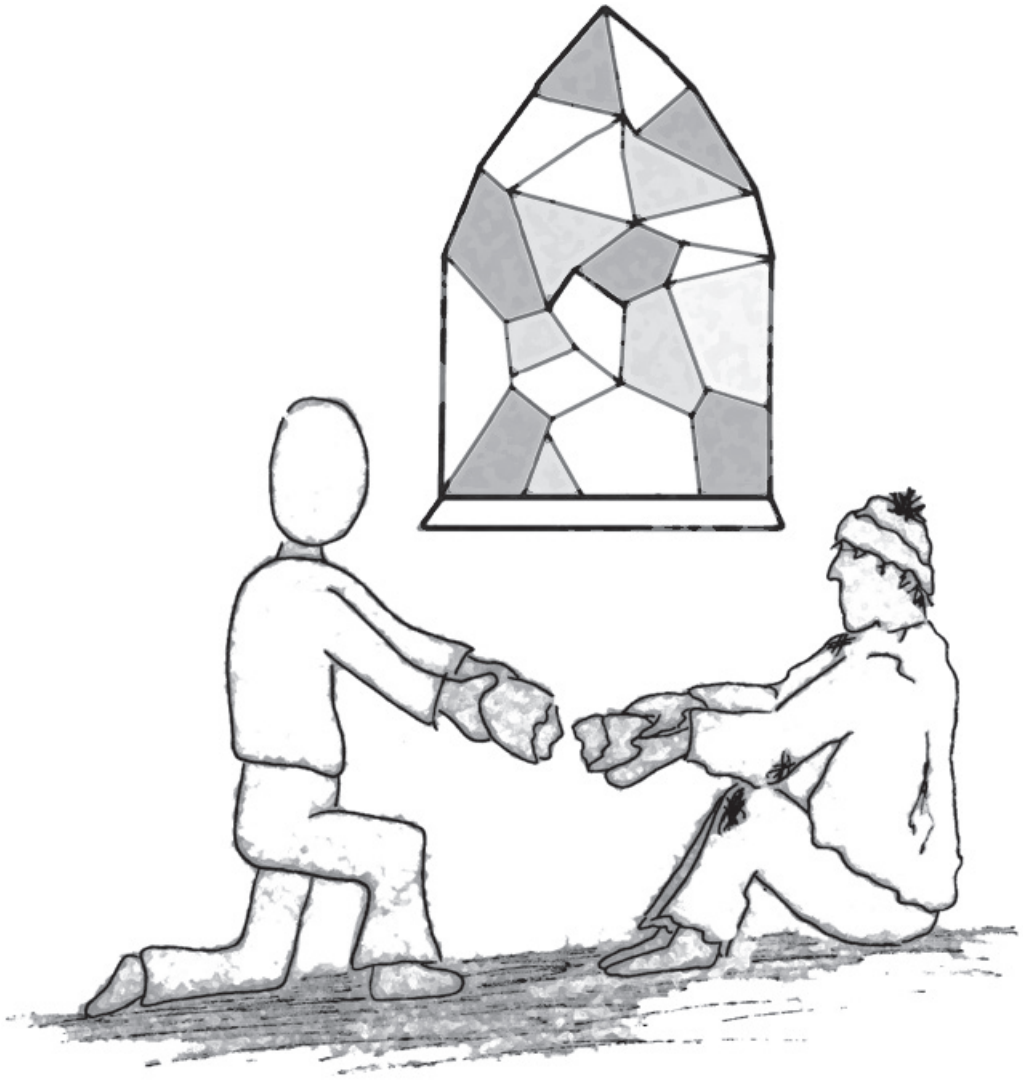
Interrogating the text is needed; but we also must allow ourselves to be interrogated by the text. The question of faith—or no faith—demands a concrete response from us. The choice of faith involves being "snagged by the seat of our pants."

One of the unfortunate aftershocks of the Enlightenment has been the assignment of the human heart as the metaphor of emotion, so that the heart is now the fickle organ, susceptible to mood changes: frivolous, irresolute, pliable. Sentimental faith is like cotton candy. Coming at you, it looks huge; but it's most air, and what substance there is will rot your teeth.

That older evangelical impulse was on to something important. The walk of faith entails a profound rearrangement of how the world (and our place in it) is perceived. It requires *metanoia,* a significant directional change—not just of emotions or cognitive assent to doctrinal formulation or pious posture, but a retooling of the desires and convictions that shape and drive patterns of behavior.

–Ken Sehested was one of the founding editors of the Seeds ministry in Decatur, GA. He is now a member of the Seeds Board of Advisors and the Sacred Seasons *liturgical team. He was the founding director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and is now the curator for the online journal Prayer&Politiks.*

Benediction



With eyes open to the world,

may you go out and look intently on our neighbors
and allow God to work through your hands
to perform miracles in our world
and then may you feel confident
to tell the story.
Beloved Child of God,
there are miracles in your hands,
not through your own power or piety,
but because God is at work in the world
and wants to use your hands,
to heal, to love and to save.
–Erin Conaway

art by Sharon Rollins & Katie Cook