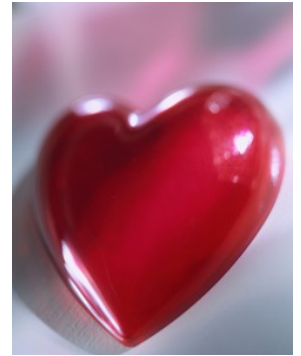


"Hunger: A Matter of the Heart"

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart..."

The problem of hunger in our country is growing. The lines at food pantries are getting longer. More children are being added to the "free or reduced lunches" programs at school. Some people, on limited funds, are making choices between needed food and needed medicine. For us who are "food secure", why do we care? The Lenten Series, "Hunger: A Matter of Heart," explores how God changes our hearts to beat with compassion for our neighbors. The series, written by members of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, is suitable for any five-week period, but works especially well for mid-week Lenten programs of the congregation. A variety of materials are available here: bible studies, sermons, children's sermons, worship resources, and take-home family devotions.



Overview and Ideas

"Hunger: A Matter of the Heart" was designed with flexibility in mind. The materials are divided into five units for use during the season of Lent. Use as many or as few of the resources as you like, however you see fit! Some possible scenarios and ideas:

- A congregation offers a lay-led Bible study on Sunday mornings in Lent. During worship, a lay member (or pastor) offers one of the provided children's sermons.
- A congregation offers a mid-week evening program on Wednesdays. The program begins with a simple meal, followed by a Bible study. A short Lenten Worship service concludes the evening.
- A congregation offers a mid-week noontime, brown-bag lunch Bible study and followed by a brief worship service.
- Two (or more) congregations collaborate to take turns hosting a mid-week or Sunday evening program. The hosting congregation provides a simple meal, while members of the other congregation provide the program.
- Five congregations could work together to offer the five programs of this series. One leadership team from each church travels to present the same program five times, once at each participating congregation's mid-week or Sunday evening gathering.

Meal Ideas: Many congregations gather for mid-week programs during Lent around food...a natural community-building event! A program focused on our calling to respond to the world's hunger can still begin with sharing food together. A pattern for a "table prayer cube", including six different meal-time prayers, is available on the website. Here are more meal ideas:

- Try keeping all of your meals as simple as possible...like bread and soup, or rice and beans. Resist the temptation for cooks to want to "out-do" each other with fancy food!
- If you normally enjoy a full meal at each program, consider having a "solidarity meal" one week, where all that is served are bowls of rice, and the money that would have been otherwise spent for dinner is designated for World Hunger. Discuss what it would be like to only have rice to eat all day, every day, and not enough to fill you up.
- Consider planning a "hunger meal" program, where the meal is apportioned to participants as food is distributed to members of different socio-economic classes around the world.
- Consider hosting a "stone soup" supper...inviting people to bring a vegetable or two to add to a large, boiling pot of water. (Plan ahead for this one!) For the "Stone Soup" story, go to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_soup.
- If you normally enjoy a full meal at each program, consider expanding the menu to include dishes from various countries around the world...simple, inexpensive meals are best. Try recipes from "More-With-Less Cookbook" or "Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook" (both available on Amazon).
- Consider building each meal around a different country that struggles with hunger issues. The ELCA World Hunger website provides great resources (prayers, recipes, placemats, and activities) for meals

specific to Bangladesh, West Bank, Columbia, Egypt, South Africa, and many more. Just click on the "Lent & Easter" tab on this webpage: <http://www.elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger>

- The ELCA World Hunger website also provides resources for offering a "100 Mile Meal", where all meal components come from a 100-mile radius. Another option is the "Food Stamp Meal", with recipes for meals that cost less than \$1 per serving (the average benefit for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program participants). Both programs look at hunger in the United States. Click on the "Lent & Easter" tab on this webpage: <http://www.elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger>
- Look to the same webpage (above) for downloadable placemats of various kinds, and use them to tell people about what ELCA World Hunger can do, with their help.

Hunger Fundraising Ideas: "Hunger: A Matter of the Heart" is not primarily about fundraising for World Hunger—it's about raising awareness, concern, and compassion for those who suffer from hunger. But raising funds for World Hunger an important way Christians may respond with compassion for the hungry. Here are some fundraising ideas to accompany a Lenten program on hunger:

- Order enough free coin boxes from ELCA World Hunger for your Sunday School, mid-week program participants, or whole congregation. Encourage people to save their spare change or contribute to their boxes at times when they're feeling thankful for how God's blessed them. Receive all these contributions at a special offering at your last gathering, or at worship on Palm Sunday. Order free coin boxes and other resources under the "General" tab here: <http://www.elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger>
- Invite people to take up a Lenten discipline..."giving up" something they'd normally indulge in, or committing to a positive addition to their spiritual life, like daily prayer or Bible reading. If they save money through their "giving up", invite them to contribute the savings to World Hunger. Or some may want to self-impose a "penalty" contribution any time they waver from their adopted discipline.
- Take orders for "fair trade" coffee, chocolate, tea, and other goods, benefiting small farmers and craftspeople before middlemen. Find details and resources at: <http://www.lwr.org/fairtrade/index.asp>
- Take up a "noisy" offering on the Sundays during Lent: pass around metal pans or bowls to collect loose change from people's pockets or purses. Invite people to bring coins from home.
- Instead of a monetary offering, invite mid-week program participants to bring canned goods for a local food pantry or needy families. Offer suggestions for items that may be especially needed, and a reminder not to bring outdated foods.
- Challenge people to donate \$.25 for every faucet in their house (remembering people who have little access to clean water), another \$.25 for every chair (remembering people who hunger), and another \$.25 for every bed (remembering people who have no safe place to lay their head at night).
- Hold a "World's Best X" contest...homemade bread, chili, cake or cookies, etc...and invite participants to "vote" for their favorite with a contribution to World Hunger. (Distribute samples of each food entry and place a cup or jar next to each to receive the "votes".) Tally the total for each entry, and award the winner a "fabulous prize". Donate all "vote" dollars to World Hunger.
- Challenge the congregation to raise a set figure for World Hunger by a particular date...aim high! "\$500 by May 1", "\$1,000 by Easter", "\$5,000 by Pentecost!" To "sweeten the pot", pledge something outrageous will happen if the goal is met...Pastor (or youth advisor, council president, congregational matriarch/patriarch) will shave his/her head, grow/shave his beard, dye her/his hair green, wear a kilt/toga/hated sports team merchandise, kiss a pig, etc. Use your imagination!

Related links:

- Explore the **ELCA World Hunger** resources website to learn more about the problem of hunger: <http://www.elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger> including resources you can order, serving learning activities, videos, stories, meal ideas, and more.
- Get the latest news on speaking out for people who are hungry in Pennsylvania at the LAMPa website (**Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania**): <http://www.lutheranadvocacy.org/>
- **Central Pennsylvania Food Bank**: <http://www.centralpafoodbank.org/>
- **The Coalition Against Hunger**, based in Philadelphia: <http://www.hungercoalition.org/>
- **Just Harvest**, based in Pittsburgh: <http://www.justharvest.org/>
- **Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center**: <http://pahunger.org/>
- **Bread for the World** is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. Learn more about them at: <http://www.bread.org/>
- **How rich are you?** Enter your annual income in the calculator on this website, and find out how you rate compared to the rest of the world's population: <http://www.globalrichlist.com/>

Bible Studies

(Rev. Erwin Roux, Contributor)

Week One: "Brethren, What Should We Do?"

Acts 2:37-47 (NRSV)

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." ⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Reflections

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit moves Peter to speak and the gathered crowds to listen. Jesus is risen from the dead and, seated at the right hand of the Father, he pours out this gift of the Spirit who flows through the people producing a faith that makes them urgently wonder "Brethren, what should we do?" The people have been cut to the heart, the seat of the emotions, and they have responded emotionally. Peter's response is directly from the heart of God who gave his Son out of love for the world. It is to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus, for forgiveness of sins and the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is calling them from the competing values of a corrupt generation and inviting them into the values of the Lord Jesus. This call is for all people in all places and at all times.

Question: *How have you been cut to the heart by the story of Jesus' death and resurrection?*

Many, some three thousand, respond to the call and begin the life-long work of integrating the values of Jesus into their community. The Holy Spirit leads them as they devote themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. The teaching helps them to understand who they have become and what should be the tasks of their communal life. The fellowship is the result of the passionate love of God that flows through them uniting people of every nation under heaven. The breaking of the bread is a sign that walls between people have come down creating a common identity in the sharing of food at their tables. The prayers, most likely a continuation of the pattern of Jewish daily prayer, turn their attention to God who has brought this new life to them. This is a life that has come to them through a God-given conversion, a life that needs the whole community to participate. This is a life that helps the people mature in faith.

Question: *How is the Holy Spirit drawing your community to renewed devotion to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers?*

The most profound evidence that the Holy Spirit has been at work among the new church is that "they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." This goes against the common human inclination to keep and hold, a behavior that comes from a fear of scarcity. The answer to the plea "Brethren, what then shall we do?" is taking shape. People who had been cut to the heart are now living with glad and generous hearts.

Questions: *How is your congregation living with glad and generous hearts? What has moved you to it?*

Week Two: "Each Tree is Known by Its Own Fruit"

Example: Disaster Relief Team

Luke 6:43-45

⁴³ "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks."

Reflections

As we have seen in the story of the early church as told in Acts, the people lived in ways that demonstrated how deep the power of God was in their conversion. Their communal life, especially the generous sharing of all their goods and possessions was remarkable. Many who have commented on this passage have claimed that this was an idealized description of these earliest believers. But can we have more faith to believe that God can truly bring such profound change upon people? Jesus, in this portion of the "Sermon on the Plain" speaks of the inevitability of producing such good fruits and good works.

Questions: *What are some of the good fruits being produced by your congregation and individuals within your congregation? What has come to bud or flower, and what may come to fruition in time?*

Jesus uses the example of a tree bearing fruit to illustrate what is happening in the lives of his disciples. The fruit one bears outwardly in this life is produced by what is going on inside of a person. When the goodness of God takes hold of the interior life of a person, they produce good fruits and good works, as Jesus states it, "The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good." Tying figs onto a thorn bush or a bunch of grapes onto a bramble bush will not fool anyone. The life of a disciple is not about trying to tie on a good work here or there, it is about the change that overcomes us when the Holy Spirit takes a liking to us and brings a genuine change of heart.

Question: *Congregations are often known for the fruit they bear. What is yours known for?*

This passage could cause one to wonder "Am I really the good tree that Jesus speaks about?" The encouragement that the passage offers is that we who have been made new in baptism do contain good treasure within our hearts. As Paul writes in Romans 5:5 of all of us who have been justified by grace through faith: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." Feeding the hungry is a good fruit and good work that God will produce through us.

Question: *What does the treasure of the heart look like, sound like, and feel like?*

Week Three: "And at His Gate Lay a Poor Man"

Example: Summer School Lunch Program

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' ²⁷ He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' ³⁰ He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Reflections

The rich man would most likely have been an ideal neighbor. No doubt his property was well tended, and he behaved in a civil way to other people. He probably paid the appropriate taxes to both nation and temple, his fair share in seeing that society was able to function. He most likely knew of the beggar who lay at his gate; he would have been hard to miss. One may even assume that he gave to Lazarus a minimum amount of alms.

Questions: *The rich man may have had the attitude that he had paid his share. What are common excuses we make for holding back? Is there such a thing as charity fatigue? What would it be like to give sacrificially?*

The sin of the rich man becomes apparent in the next scene of the parable when there is a reversal of fortunes. The rich man during his life put his trust in the things of the world, his property, food, and clothing. His heart trusted in wealth even while his lips prayed to God. With such misplaced trust, he was unable to see the great worth of Lazarus as a child of God. His mistake was that he did not invite Lazarus into his home and into his life. Had he done so, he may have recognized the great love that God had for this stranger at his gate. He may have come to value that which is truly valuable.

Questions: *What keeps us from relationship with those who are different from us? How may we value others in the way that God values them?*

The rich man's concern for his brothers making the same mistake that he made drives his request to send Lazarus to warn them. But the response he receives is that the scriptures everywhere attest to the responsibility of God's people to care for the poor and widow, and more than that, to welcome the stranger into their lives and communities. If they could not clearly understand that message, even someone rising from the dead would not persuade them. The truth the parable delivers to us is that we stand in the place of the brothers, and we do have both the scriptures and a risen Lord to speak to us. May we receive the heart of Jesus to love all whom he loves so much.

Question: *It has been said that giving to others without control, that is, without having to control the gift or how it is used, is a spiritual practice. Jesus gave that way when he emptied himself for the sake of the world. How may we receive such a heart?*

Week Four: "Whoever Is Faithful in a Very Little"

Example: Community Garden

Luke 16:1-13

16 Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ² So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.'³ Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.'⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'⁶ He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.'⁷ Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.'⁸ And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. ¹⁰ "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Reflections

The parable of the dishonest manager is one of Jesus' most puzzling parables. At first glance it appears that Jesus is commending dishonesty. The steward in question has mismanaged the master's business and is called to account for his management. Receiving the news that his employment has ended; he quickly calls in debtors and offers them discounts on the amounts they owe. The master commended the manager for his shrewdness.

Question: *The manager did not dwell on what was past but looked to what the future might hold, even in uncertain circumstances. How can we let go of the past when necessary and explore what the future may hold?*

The reason why Jesus offered this parable becomes clearer when we hear his commentary "for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light." The children of light are all people who see the new age dawning in Jesus. The dishonest manager was highly motivated to work his way out of his situation, and he was willing to use all the resources at hand to do it. The children of light, knowing the kingdom of God is at hand, are urged to follow the same passionate response as the steward and use every resource available to work for the good of all people. They are people who give their whole hearts to others.

Questions: *What are the riches and resources of your congregation? How are we motivated by Jesus' words that the kingdom of God is at hand? How are we children of light?*

Everyone must have a master whom we serve. We may have wealth, yet our loyalty is to God's kingdom and using our wealth for the sake of others. We are called to be faithful in little things as well as great. When we are faithful, by the guiding of the Holy Spirit, and we worship God rather than our wealth, we share in friendship with Jesus Christ, our friend in high places.

Questions: *What are the little things in which we are faithful? What are the great things? What helps us keep our hearts and minds on the kingdom of God first?*

Week Five: "Jesus Himself Came Near and Went with Them"

Luke 24:13-35

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." ²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So, he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflections

This passage may serve as a model of discernment for us. We are invited to walk along the road with our sadness, fear, and doubts. Jesus comes alongside and we may share our hearts with him in prayer. He touches us with his Word and our lives are changed. We recognize a new way forward.

Questions: *How have prayer and the message of scripture opened new roads for you? For your congregation? As we seek to help others, how can we make discernment the first thing that happens and the thing to which we continually return?*

Cleopas and his companion were sad and slow of heart when Jesus came alongside them on the road. They explained to this seemingly clueless stranger that they had been hoping for Jesus of Nazareth to bring the long-awaited redemption of Israel. Their concept of redemption was no doubt along the lines of a political solution to their problems. They wanted freedom from Roman rule, freedom from the oppression of empires which had been the long story of their life as a people. Yet this stranger opened their hearts to a new understanding of what redemption could mean for them, a redemption that had to do with death and resurrection, the transformation of people by joining them to the glory of a risen Messiah. This new understanding came upon them as the scriptures were opened to them, and sad and slow hearts then burned within them.

Question: *We have expectations of the caring projects that we take up on behalf of other people, but things may not turn out that way. The good news is that Jesus walks with us and redemption comes in a way that God provides. We have to be patient to see what God wants to bring. What examples do you have of God working in new and surprising ways?*

The travelers' hearts burn through hearing the Word, and Jesus is fully recognized when he brings, blesses, breaks, and shares the bread. It points to the importance of Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion in our congregational life. These places where Jesus promised to keep us grounded in God's presence, life, and salvation. They also open our eyes to the presence of Jesus in the communities in which we live. Jesus is present among those we meet, those for whom God calls us to care.

Questions: *How do your hearts burn within you for the people of your community? What concerns keep coming up for you as you walk with people? What would happen if you found others with the same heart for those concerns and came together? How might Jesus guide you to address those concerns?*

Worship Resources

Rev. Beth Ann L. Stone, Contributor

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

Merciful God,

You pardon all that truly repent and turn to you.

We humbly confess our sins and ask your mercy.

We have been hard-hearted and tight-fisted toward our neighbors in need.

We have not brought the homeless into our houses.

We have not fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited the captive.

We have not moved to change the structures that bind and oppress.

Have mercy on us, O God, in your loving-kindness.

Forgive us our sins and help us to live in your light.

May we turn our festivals into celebrations of your justice;

May we share our soup and bread with open hearts and hands;

May our light break forth and our healing spring up quickly;

All to your Glory, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

May the God of mercy, who forgives you all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. ¹

God of mercy,

forgive us when our hearts become calloused to the poor.

Forgive us for averting our eyes, closing our ears

and ignoring those who need our help.

Forgive us when we forget the stranger,

refuse to feed the hungry,

or neglect the poor child.

Put within us Your spirit of compassion

so we might meet the needs of the poor.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. ²

God of feasting,

the sign you give us of your resurrection life

is one of a banquet

where the wine does not run out.

And because we believe this tells us something about who you are,

we ask for your forgiveness.

When we eat exactly what we want,

when we want it,

because we can,

'because we're worth it',

or because we've had a bad day.

When we throw almost half our food away,

bored of eating the same thing two days in a row,

forgetting those for whom eating anything for two days in a row is a luxury.

When we forget that all humanity is made in your image,

¹ Reprinted from *Souper Bowl of Caring: Printed Materials – Prayers*

² Reprinted from the Society of St. Andrew website: <http://www.endhunger.org>

and we repay you by creating a God in our own image,
which suits us when we're powerful and affluent.

When we break bread together,
talk earnestly of being part of the body of Christ,
and fail to share bread even with those in our own backyard.

God of feasting,
who turns water into wine
and promises a world where none will go hungry,
please use our penitence
to work another miracle now.³

CALLS TO WORSHIP

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God.
When the Israelites hungered in the desert, God gave them bread from heaven,
and for their thirst God brought water out of the rock.
Arise and cry out! Pour out your hearts like water to the Lord.
We lift our hands to God in prayer for the lives of all in need.
We gather together in worship this day as a people longing to be fed,
so that we may go out to feed the hungry, work for justice
and be good stewards of the gifts we have received.⁴

God has created us in God's image, calling us good.
And so we give thanks.
While remaining fully divine, God became fully human
and knows what it means to means to hunger.
And so we raise our voices.
God has gathered us on this day to advocate for a world without hunger.
And so we cry for justice.
We gather in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.⁵

From the farthest reaches of our world we hear the call to come and worship.
We come from the global south, from the lands of the North;
we come from East and West to sit in community with each other.
We come as strangers, pilgrims on our way to God's holy mountain.
We come as those who are hungry, as those who are fed.
We come as those who are wanting and as those who are filled in abundance.
We come as friends, co-laborers in the fields of justice,
working for the common good of God's people.
We know we are friends because we give of ourselves to each other,
as we seek the common good in the one another and
seek to meet the needs of all we meet along the way.⁶

³ Reprinted from *IF Campaign Worship Resources*

⁴ Reprinted from *Bread for the World Sunday Tool Kit, 2008*

⁵ Reprinted from *Bread for the World Sunday Reflection Resource, 2007*

⁶ Reprinted from Service of World Hunger, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), available for download at:
http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/hunger/pdf/world_hunger_service.pdf

PRAYERS

Let us pray for those who hunger in this land:
whose only kitchen is a soup kitchen,
whose only food is what others don't want,
whose diet depends on luck, not planning. (*Silence*)
Lord, feed your people,
using our skills and conscience,
and eradicate from our politics and private lives
the apathy to hunger that comes from overeating.

Let us pray for the hungry and the fed.
Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray for the hungry in other lands,
where economies burdened by debt
cannot respond to human need,
or where fields are farmed, for our benefit,
by low-waged workers courted by starvation. (*Silence*)
Lord, feed your people,
even if rulers must cancel debt
and shareholders lose profit,
or diners restrict their choice
in order that all may be nourished.

Let us pray for the hungry and the fed.
Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray for the hungry for justice,
who document inequalities,
who demonstrate against tyranny,
distinguish between need and greed,
and are sometimes misrepresented or persecuted in the process. (*Silence*)
May their labour not be in vain
and may we be counted in their number.

Let us pray for the hungry and the fed.
Lord, have mercy.⁷

Lord Jesus,
You came that all might have life in abundance.
When you fed hungry people, everyone ate and had enough.

We know that there is enough food for everyone:
If we don't look the other way.
If we give the poorest people the power to feed themselves.
If we use land for food not fuel.
If we stop poor farmers losing their land.
If taxes are paid where they are due.

So, Lord Jesus,
Direct our attention to see beyond our own needs.
Strengthen the hungry poor and their rights.
Preserve and protect the land that brings forth food.
And contend with us for justice.⁸

⁷ © WGRG, used by permission

⁸ Reprinted from *IF Campaign Worship Resources*

Faithful God, who has given us favor and grace to accomplish your will,

We thank you and we praise you!

Lord, you see the millions of people who go hungry every day.

Use us to secure a lasting means of adequate and sustainable food supply for all people.

You delight in justice and you provide for all creation.

Let your wisdom guide our nation's leaders and your truth uphold them.

Faithful God, hear our prayer.

Fill their hearts and ours with compassion for hungry people.

We and our leaders will bring justice to those entangled in poverty.

Empower our actions on their behalf, so that our voices are magnified.

Faithful God, hear our prayer.

We will trust your goodness. We will rely on your faithfulness.

A strong rock is our God. We will not be discouraged. Amen.⁹

Open our eyes, Lord, that we might see the needs of others.

Open our hands, Lord, that we might share your abundance with our hungry brothers and sisters.

Open our hearts, Lord, that we might truly love as you have loved us.

Teach us, Lord, to bless others as you have so richly blessed us.

In your son's precious name, we pray,

Amen.¹⁰

In peace, let us pray to the Lord,

Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray for those who are hungry.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray for those who are full.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray for those whose voices are strong.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray for those whose voices have been silenced.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray for all those who gather on this day, in this place, and across the globe,
hungry and full, speaking and silent.

That, together, we may raise our voices against hunger and injustice.

Amen.¹¹

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Week One: *Isaiah 26:1-19; Psalm 9:1-9; Acts 2:37-47*

Week Two: *Isaiah 27:2-9; Psalm 14; Luke 6:43-45*

Week Three: *Isaiah 27:10-13; Psalm 105:1-11; Luke 16:19-31*

Week Four: *Isaiah 28:14-17; Psalm 117; Luke 16:1-13*

Week Five: *Isaiah 41:17-20; Psalm 125; Luke 24:13-35*

⁹ Reprinted from *Bread for the World Sunday Reflection Resource*, 2009

¹⁰ Reprinted from *Liturgy for the United Methodist Church Hunger Ministry Weekend to Change the World*

¹¹ Reprinted from *Bread for the World Sunday Reflection Resource*, 2007

RESPONSIVE READINGS

We rejoice in the abundance of your creation,
the lavish generosity of the water flowing in dry places,
the green plants that spring up out of the ground for food.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

We rejoice in the gift of your son, Jesus, whom you anointed to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, and sight to the blind.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

We rejoice in the coming of your Holy Spirit, who guides us, inspires us,
and will not let us see rest while there is hunger in your world.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

We have hope today because of your promises that hunger and thirst will be no more,
and that your banquet table has room for all.

We look to the day when all will be fed.

We have hope today because Jesus taught us a new way to love and serve one another.

We look to the day when all will be fed.

We have hope today because of those whose faithful persistence has delivered change.

We look to the day when all will be fed.

Gracious God, who called the prophets to act in your name,
and equipped them to deliver your message of justice,

may we be your hands and feet on earth.

Gracious God, whose spirit inspires your people in every generation
to live out the Gospel in our own time,

may we be your hands and feet on earth.

Today we rejoice. We hope. We act.

And we dedicate ourselves and everything we do to you, God of all.

Amen.¹²

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, [says our God,]

and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness,

and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you;

and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

I will put my spirit within you.¹³

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

and put a new and right spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence,

and do not take your holy spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,

and sustain in me a willing spirit.¹⁴

Is not this the fast that I choose, [says the LORD]:

to loose the bonds of injustice,

to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover them,

and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,

and your healing shall spring up quickly;

¹² Reprinted from *Bread for the World Sunday Reflection Resource*, 2009

¹³ Ezekiel 36:25-27a, NRSV

¹⁴ Psalm 51:10-12, NRSV

your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
**Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.**

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
**then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.**

The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
**and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.**¹⁵

I was hungry and you gave me food.
Let us act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God.
I was thirsty and you gave me drink.
Let us act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God.
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.
Let us act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God.
I was naked and you clothed me.
Let us act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God.
I was ill and you comforted me.
Let us act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God.

God, true light and source of all Light,
may we recognize you in
oppressed people,
poor people,
homeless people,
hungry people.
May we be open to your Spirit
that we may be a means of healing, strength, and
peace for all your children.
We ask this through Jesus, your son and our brother! Amen.¹⁶

God, show kindness and bless us,
And make your face to smile on us!
For then the earth will acknowledge your ways,
And all nations know your power to save.
Let the nations praise you, O God,
Let all the nations praise you.
Let the nations shout and sing for joy,
Since you bring true justice to the world.
The soil has given its harvest,
God, our God, has blessed us.
May God bless us, and let God be feared,
To the very ends of the earth! Amen.¹⁷

¹⁵ Isaiah 58:6-11, NRSV

¹⁶ Reprinted from Bread for the World's *Worship Aid: Your Light Shall Break Forth*

¹⁷ Reprinted from Bread for the World's *Banquet of Praise*

BLESSINGS

May the blessing of God, Creator of heaven and Earth,
rest upon you and upon all that God has made;
May the Risen Christ Jesus
transform your life and your vision,
so that you may live in reconciliation with all things; and
May the power of God's Holy Spirit
move over this whole Earth,
like the breath of Spring,
to renew the Earth and all its people,
so that all creation may join together
in praise to God's holy name!
Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you now and forever.
Amen.¹⁸

A Hebrew Blessing

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Eternal King,
Who feeds the whole world with your goodness,
With grace, with loving kindness, and with tender mercy.
You give food to all flesh,
For your loving kindness endures forever.
Through your great goodness, food has never failed us.
O may it not fail us forever, for your name's sake,
Since you nourish and sustain all living things,
And do good to all,
And provide food for all your creatures
Whom you have created.
Blessed are You, O Lord, who gives food to all.¹⁹

May the God of love, who loves us freely,
strengthen us in our love for others;
May Jesus Christ, who is the true bread from heaven,
grant us grace to speak out for those who have no voice;
May the Spirit, who dwells in us,
empower us to go out into the world to work for change,
bringing God's justice and hope to all.²⁰

Open my eyes that they may see
The deepest needs of people;
Move my hands that they may feed the hungry;
Touch my heart that it may bring warmth to the despairing;
Teach me the generosity that welcomes strangers;
Let me share my possessions to clothe the naked;
Give me the care that strengthens the sick;
Make me share in the quest to set the prisoner free.
In sharing our anxieties and our love,
Our poverty and our prosperity,
We partake of your divine presence.²¹
Go forth thirsting to drink from God's cup.
Hear the cries of our brothers and sisters.

¹⁸ From *Living Earth: Creation Waits with Eager Longing* by Kim Winchell

¹⁹ Reprinted from *Bread for the Preacher*, October 2010

²⁰ Reprinted from *Bread for the World Sunday Reflection Resource*, 2008

²¹ By Canaan Banana, Zimbabwe; *With All God's People*, World Council of Churches (1989); *Bread for the Preacher*, September 2010

See the invisible members of our communities.
 Feel deeply, the Spirit of God moving powerfully
 in every part of life, and in every human being.
 Walk with those who struggle and falter,
 knowing that God is walking with each of us as well.
 Audaciously proclaim that God's good news is for all people.
 Advocate with conviction for change that will make a difference
 in the lives of vulnerable people.
 Be transformed by God's abundant love
 as it is reflected in vulnerable people.
 Thanks be to God. Amen.²²

SUGGESTED HYMNS

ELW 185-188 (WOV 732)	"Create in Me a Clean Heart"
ELW 712 (LBW 423)	"Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service"
ELW 469	"By Your Hand You Feed Your People"
ELW 512 (WOV 713)	"Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil"
ELW 523	"Let Us Go Now to the Banquet"
ELW 648	"Beloved, God's Chosen"
ELW 676 (LBW 403)	"Lord, Speak to Us, That We May Speak"
ELW 679 (WOV 760, LBW 563)	"For the Fruit of All Creation"
ELW 689 (LBW 409)	"Praise and Thanksgiving"
ELW 704	"When Pain of the World Surrounds Us"
ELW 707 (LBW 424)	"Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us"
ELW 710	"Let Streams of Living Justice"
ELW 712 (LBW 423)	"Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service"
ELW 714 (LBW 425)	"O God of Mercy, God of Light"
ELW 715	"Christ, Be Our Light"
ELW 716 (LBW 419)	"Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace"
ELW 720	"We Are Called"
ELW 725	"When the Poor Ones"
ELW 729 (LBW 433)	"The Church of Christ, in Every Age"
ELW 793 (WOV 776)	"Be Thou My Vision"
ELW 801	"Change My Heart, O God"

SUGGESTED HYMNS FOR WORSHIP WITH COMMUNION

ELW 479 (WOV 766)	"We Come to the Hungry Feast"
ELW 484 (WOV 711)	"You Satisfy the Hungry Heart"
ELW 535 (WOV 722)	"Hallelujah! We Sing Your Praises"

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- A complete "**Service of World Hunger**", including a "**Suggested Liturgy for Celebration of the Lord's Supper**", created by seminary students in conjunction with Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary's "Leadership in the Connectional Church" course at the national headquarters of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Louisville, KY, is available for free download here: http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/hunger/pdf/world_hunger_service.pdf
- For another kind of worship service, see **Holden Prayer Around the Cross**, especially the liturgies entitled "A Heart of Flesh" and "Hunger for God". The book, in addition to providing a number of liturgical orders, describes in detail how to prepare and lead a meditative service of worship with silence, song, and a time of personal prayer around a large cross placed in the center of the worship space. An accompanying resource, *Singing Our Prayer*, provides songs for meditative singing. Both are available from Augsburg Fortress. To order, go to: <http://store.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/8470/Holden-Prayer-Around-the-Cross-Handbook-to-the-Liturgy?c=285662>

²² From *Justice Ministries*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, July 2011.

Sermons

*Rev. Viking Dietrich, Rev. Robert Driesen, Rev. Carla Volland, Rev. Gary Roth, and
Rev. Karl Runser, Contributors*

Week One: Acts 2:37-47

"Opening Our Eyes to Suffering"

Optional additional readings: Psalm 9:1-9, Isaiah 26:1-19

"Man's inhumanity to man" is a well-known phrase, but did you know that the phrase was first documented in a poem by Robert Burns? In his 1784 poem, "Man was made to mourn: A Dirge," Burns uses the phrase to describe the suffering of those falling into poverty during the industrial age. He writes:

"See yonder poor, o'erlabour'd wight,
So abject, mean, and vile,
Who begs a brother of the earth
To give him leave to toil;"²³

As a Romantic poet in the age of industrialism, Burns identifies growing class differences as the essential and negative effect of a society in rapid economic changes. He writes,

"Where hundreds labour to support
A haughty lordling's pride."

Even swifter are the changes occurring in the world today during the age of technology, and just as dramatic are the increasing global inequities. Many developing countries in Africa celebrated their 50th year of independence during the last three years. The changes in those countries over those fifty years are exponentially greater than the changes in Europe or America wrought by the industrial age. By the end of the twentieth century, in an age when a few hundred people have billions and billions of dollars, one sixth of the world population lived on less than \$1.25 cents a day. Today, one out of eight people worldwide (870 million) are undernourished.²⁴

It was a German philosopher, Samuel von Pufendorf, who claimed, in the late 1600's, that human suffering is caused more by humans than by nature.²⁵ Robert Burns' echoes this sentiment in "Man was made to mourn," writing,

Many and sharp the num'rous ills
Inwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves
Regret, remorse, and shame!

Though it is clear that natural causes—droughts, or floods, or plagues of insects—influence food supply and world hunger, we must acknowledge that many causes of world hunger are related to social, political and economic systems created by us, by humans. Is food production affected by global warming? How do I, through my consumption of products, impact global warming? How does the food I buy at the supermarket impact the economy of the country where the food is produced? How do I benefit from today's global economy shaped by yesterday's era of colonialism? How much do I ignore the politics of

²³ Robert Burns Country, Complete Works, accessed on December 8, 2013, <http://www.robertburns.org/works/55.shtml>

²⁴ Hunger Notes: 2013 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics, accessed on December 8, 2013, <http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>

²⁵ Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, accessed on December 8, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man's_inhumanity_to_man#In_reference_to_religion

power in my own nation's capital when it comes to policies and practices in developing countries? World Hunger statistics show that actions taken by people and organizations over the last thirty years have helped. The number of people suffering from hunger or undernourishment has been reduced over the last twenty years. If action can make a difference, how much is my inaction cause of hunger in the world?

In his 1976 song "Green Fields of France," Eric Bogle writes in passionate response to the massive losses of World War as he sits by the graveside of "young Willie McBride." Drawing on Burns' phrase, Bogle defines or redefines our 'inhumanity' as 'blind indifference.'

But here in this graveyard that's still No Man's Land
The countless white crosses in mute witness stand
To man's blind indifference to his fellow man.
And a whole generation who were butchered and damned.²⁶

Blind indifference. Does it describe our reaction to the world's problems, especially those that are far away? The generations of people suffering from hunger and undernourishment are filled with people who have names. How many people will die from hunger in these decades when the wealth of a few defies human understanding? Are we blind? Do we not see the problem of hunger in the world? Or do we see it and are simply indifferent to it?

Burns proposes that some may be blind to hunger because they are "favourites of fate, in pleasure's lap carest?" Others, Burns suggests, are simply "mis-spending" their "glorious, youthful prime!" allowing "Alternate follies [to] take the sway; Licentious passions [to] burn." If we see hunger or undernourishment, what would stop us from doing what we could to help? Is our blindness a result of indifference, too concerned with our own problems to care for others, too weary from previous requests for help to hear another? Have we become what Burns calls a "Fellow-worm"?

And see his lordly fellow-worm
The poor petition spurn,
Unmindful, tho' a weeping wife
And helpless offspring mourn.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke describes the members of the early Christian community, saying, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." This religious community made food and eating together an essential part of their life together. Furthermore, "they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." For them, sharing what they had with those who were in need was a norm, and for those outside their community, their practice inspired "awe" and "goodwill." The members of this community not only did this in the temple, but they "broke bread at home" as well "and ate their food with glad and generous hearts." Luke describes the Christian community as sharing their food and possessions and enjoying the bounty of their tables with hearts secure. They are secure in the knowledge, as Isaiah says, that the "Lord, establishes peace for us; that all we have accomplished, the Lord has done for us."

Lent is a time for us to open our eyes to the suffering in the world, a suffering that Jesus experienced first-hand as he was betrayed, rejected and crucified. In his sermon in today's reading, Peter exhorts the people to "save themselves from this corrupt generation." Every generation—be it the generation of Robert Burns, of Samuel Pufendorf, of William McBride, of Peter and the early Christians, or the generation of today—has to confront the suffering in the world and make decisions about how to respond, about what to do for people in need.

As the Psalmist sings, we believe that, "The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." As those who heard Peter's sermon and exhortation, can we "welcome his message" and begin a

²⁶ Celtic Lyrics, Green Fields of France, accessed on December 8, 2013, <http://celtic-lyrics.com/lyrics/225.html>

life of "breaking bread" both in worship and at home? Can we welcome the Christian narrative of a benevolent and loving God who by grace comes into our lives, unites us to Christ and makes us a part of the divine mission to bring freedom to those who are held captive to the injustices of this world? Say with me,

"Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you."

Week Two: Luke 6:43-45

"No Good Tree Produces Bad Fruit"

Optional additional readings: Psalm 14, Isaiah 27:2-9

In Markus Zusa's novel, *The Book Thief*, nine-year-old Liesel Meminger is adopted by the Hubermanns when her own father "abandons" their family and her mother is forced to give her up in the midst of the turmoil that was Nazi Germany. Quickly it becomes clear, however, that Liesel is a "thief." She is the book thief and the story's central character.

Fascinated with the life-giving power of the written word so much so that she takes books when she has the opportunity, Liesel is mortified by a Nazi book burning ceremony she witnesses during which an officer gives a speech about the importance of cleansing the German society from "immoral" and "indecent" thoughts by burning books. Despite such claims, of course, it is the Nazi menace that poisons the village in which she lives. Defiantly, Liesel's new family conspires in the most dangerous and useful thing they could do: they save a life. Max Vandenburg, a Jewish fist fighter and the son of a WW I German soldier who saved Liesel's foster-father's life, is hidden by the Hubermanns in their basement.

Max befriends Liesel, in part, due to their shared affinity for words. He writes two books for her and presents her with a sketchbook that contains his life story. But as the world around her continues to descend into hatred and suspicion, Hans Hubermann, Liesel's devoted foster-father, puts Max and his own family at risk. A skilled house painter by trade, Hans is horrified by the Nazis' persecution of the Jews, and he brings scrutiny to himself by painting over anti-Semitic slurs on Jewish-owned homes and businesses.

Hans' impulsive kindness eventually gets him into serious trouble. In the film version of *The Book Thief*, Hans intervenes when a Jewish neighbor is being dragged away by the authorities. Suddenly the attention shifts from his neighbor to Hans, as a Nazi officer insists upon identifying the man who has spoken up on behalf of a Jew and *writes* Hans' name in his *notebook*.

Tormented unto death by the frightening reality of his name written in a book, Hans laments his action which he knows has put everyone at risk. He cries out, "How could I have done such a thing? How could I have done such a thing?" Liesel, doing her best to comfort him, softly says, "Because we are people, Poppa. It is what people do."

In our Lord's sermon on the plain (St. Luke's version of the Sermon on the mount in Matthew's Gospel), St. Luke shares with us this saying: "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit" (Luke 6:43-44). To clarify, our Lord adds, "Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush."

At a certain level, the meaning of this saying is obvious: when an apple tree bears apples, it is then that you know what kind of tree it is. It is an apple tree. Equally true, of course, an apple tree will only produce apples and not pears. If pears blossom, it is a pear tree and not an apple tree.

"No good tree produces bad fruit," says our Lord. We know, of course, that Jesus is not providing us with a lesson in horticulture or botany. He invites us to make an analogy with people. What a person *is* and what a person *does* are inextricably bound.

When Liesel in *The Book Thief* says to her foster-father that he has risked himself and his family for the sake of his neighbor because that's what people do, we realize the truth is that is not what all people do. It is what *Hans* does, because that is who Hans is. Many of his neighbors chose to do nothing.

You and I are the baptized children of God. We were washed—no, more than that, our old selves were *drowned* in the baptismal font—and a new, clean self arose from those waters: a son, a daughter of God.

If that is who we *are*, then what does that mean about what we *do*? What kind of fruit is borne by a child of God?

In a local newspaper on the day after Black Friday when holiday shoppers make their mad dash to find the greatest bargains, an article appeared on the front page entitled, "Confessions of a Savings-Savvy Shopper."

"It was almost 10 minutes to 6 (Thanksgiving) night," the savings-savvy shopper confessed, "and I was feeling the adrenaline coursing through my veins as the Walmart associates ripped the cellophane off the cardboard DVD displays. I turned to my 17-year-old sister...who was about to have her first Black Friday shopping experience. 'Now, I want you to know; if you fall, I am not stopping for you.'

"'What?' her sister said. 'Why would you do that?'

"'I just want you to know this is the Hunger Games, and I can't be held up.'"

I am not certain if she was joking. I hope so. But what was her sister's reaction according to this savings-savvy shopper? "Whatever."

In the United States one in six people face hunger, the highest number ever recorded. In 2012, 5.1 percent of all U.S. households (6.2 million households) accessed emergency food from a food pantry or soup kitchen one or more times. Federal programs such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) offer nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families. But SNAP, as I write this, is likely to face the largest cuts in history, resulting in more and more people turning to food pantries and food kitchens for help.

How will we, the baptized people of God, respond to our neighbors in need? Our actions will reveal our character just as the appearance of fruit announces the kind of tree bearing it. "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit."

Week Three: Luke 16:19-31

"Will We Ever Learn to Listen?"

Optional additional readings: Psalm 105:1-11, Isaiah 27:10-13

About a week ago I asked the children to write the prayers of the church. One of the writers started with a petition that said: "Dear God, thank you for our sins." We talk so much about sins in our worship services that it must be a good thing, right? Well, wrong. But why do we talk so much about sin here in church and almost never about sins at other places?

Sin is a word that we have dropped from our vocabularies. But we do sometimes behave in ways that hurt ourselves, hurt each other, and hurt the world. If we are brave enough and honest enough about our spiritual life, we can admit that we often make choices in our lives that lead away from God. So how do we make sense of sin? Martin Luther said, "The only sin is to turn away from God." The nature of sin consists of turning away from God and focus on oneself, or being just downright selfish. As human beings we have a tendency of being selfish.

In Lent, as we set out on this journey of forty days, we set out with awareness that the path we take is difficult and full of obstacles. As in the days of the prophets, we are called to listen to the voices that are telling us it is time to repent, to return to God. We are called to recognize our own human limitations—to stop pretending that we are God, that we have all the answers; that we are in control of everything. How will we go about it?

Jesus tells the story of Lazarus to point out that some of the Pharisees were ignoring the needs of their own people just like the rich man—and we may be surprised at the reluctance of those religious leaders to understand Jesus' concern. But why might we be surprised? Again, we need to see what this is teaching us. In Jesus' day, the assumption was that a man like Lazarus was that way because of his or his parents' sin. In our day, isn't the assumption often that a person in Lazarus' condition, the homeless, the poor, the down and out, are that way because of their "sin" of laziness or poor judgment or that they're scamming us?

God has given us, God's children, a wonderful and challenging ministry exemplified by Jesus Christ. It is our job to make our community, our society, our nation, our world, a place where fairness and justice flourish. It is our responsibility as part of God's creation to participate with God in that creation by correcting the imbalances we see all around us.

In the story of Lazarus, God's eternal judgment has everything to do with how we use wealth in this life and whether we attend to those less fortunate in our midst. Our temptation is to explain away a story like this without getting involved and being compassionate. But the message has been clearly stated. Like the rich man's five brothers, we have been given all the warning we need. But do we ever learn to listen?

Each of our passages today reminds us that those in need are our responsibility. God expects us to care for the poor. It's all through the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. Every prophet, from the Old Testament to the Liberationists and beyond, reminds the people that the poor are our neighbors and that none of them should ever have to beg for the crumbs that fall from our tables. Isn't that image from the gospel heart-rending?

How do we welcome the poor and the strangers in our communities? Sometimes we overlook Lazarus laying on the doorsteps of our churches. A teacher in our congregation shared the following story: "Vacation was around the corner and I said to a boy, 'aren't you happy that you soon are going to have vacation?' He dropped his head and murmured, 'Not really.' 'Why not?' the teacher wanted to know. 'Well, it means I am going to be hungry.' I just didn't make the connection," she said. "For over thirty years at the beginning of the school year I passed out the applications for free or reduced lunches, but what was going to happen to these kids during vacation?"

Sharon Wilson shared this story with our congregation after attending our Synod Assembly's workshop about a summer food program. And now she was pleading with the congregation to do something for the kids during the summer month. Although there are state funds available, we raised the money within the congregation, our neighboring churches and the local Lion's Club. And last summer we did feed an average over thirty kids per day who attended the community playground activity during the summer.

During Lent we get a chance to listen to the cry of the prophets and turn around. The change starts now, before we can do any celebrating. Now is the time to clean up. Certainly, forty days is not long enough to get out of some of the problems in our lives and communities. However, it is a time to be honest with ourselves and with God about who we are, what we've done that we shouldn't have, what we've left undone that we should have done, and what we plan to do about it, today.

"Dear God, thank you for our sins." The awareness of our sinfulness leads us to be humble before God and each other. No one can say to be free from sin. We are all sinners before God. And we all need to ask for forgiveness. Amen.

Week Four: Luke 16:1-13

"Dedicated, Determined, Dependable"

Optional additional readings: Psalm 117 and Isaiah 28:14-17

The advertising motto for a television station says, "Dedicated, Determined, Dependable." That seems to be a pretty good motto. As I read about the unjust steward, I think of how he was, in fact, all of those things. He was dedicated—dedicated to saving his own hide. He was determined—he set all of his powers

to achieve that end. And he was dependable –he was single-minded in his pursuit of that goal: you could depend on him, when push came to shove, to always think of himself first.

That's not, perhaps, what we would hope for in a human being. Those words sound so good: "Dedicated, Determined, Dependable." They are everything we hope for in an employee. Or a television station, I suppose. The question, of course, is: "Toward what end?" It is that question which takes us right to the center of the Gospel.

The steward is not what we would call "virtuous." He has no qualms about stealing from his employer to save his own hide. We think of that as a peculiarly American trait. But it's a trait that has been in the human race ever since Adam and Eve said, "the devil made me do it." Faced with the possibility of dismissal, and his lack of desire to pursue a "blue-collar" career, this man ingeniously sets about insuring his future, by canceling the debts of those who owe his master, ingratiating himself to a wide variety of well-heeled people. Everyone who owed his master now owes him. If the story was being told today, it might involve the revolving door of government advisers and politicians, and the "special interest" groups they cater to while in office, who hire them when they leave government service.

The man's behavior is disgraceful. But the point is not about the man's virtue, but his industriousness in securing his future. The question Jesus raises is, "how industrious, how single-minded are we about working for the Kingdom of God?" Not simply getting to heaven, but securing our faith, and working for the kingdom Jesus has envisioned? Most Christians, asked about their prayer life, say that they just don't have enough time for it. Many also don't have time for Bible study, Sunday School, worship—for any of those things that would build up their faith. They want a better world; they want God's kingdom to come and his will to be done, and they wonder why God doesn't do something about it! They expect it to magically happen, without their having to work up a sweat. They're like the guy who expects his retirement to magically happen, without planning for it; or the kid who thinks they should get an "A" just for showing up in class. Then they wonder why the world is in such a mess, and why their faith is so weak!

This past year, I took a trip to Haiti, along with nine others from six churches. Every Christian should experience something like that at least once in their life, because it gives you new eyes with which to see the rest of your life. I've traveled to many places, but never seen such poverty—people still living in patched tents, four years after the earthquake, with little hope of things improving soon; a government that is out-of-touch with the needs of its people; a society where class divisions matter very much.

Yet we also saw amazing faith, resilience, and a joy that is infectious. We worshipped with people who live in ruins, people with nothing, yet whose faith puts ours to shame. We brought food to a village, sharing with them in Sunday worship and, afterwards, I had to share with them: "I think of Paul, bringing a gift to the Jerusalem church from the other churches. He told the churches that, as the Jerusalem church shared the riches of their faith with them, it was right to share their wealth with that church. That is what church is about—God gives gifts to the church that, in sharing them, all his people may be filled."

Which is, after all, the greater gift? Some beans and rice that will last a few weeks, or an experience of worship so joyful that it is life-changing? We got the better end of the bargain! It is not a sacrifice to go on a mission trip. It is not a sacrifice to work for justice, peace, a better world. It is not a sacrifice to "give up" a lifestyle focused on acquisition. Good stewardship is a matter of learning to see our world differently, through "renewed" eyes. In light of the truth that is revealed to us, we wake up, we respond, we change course. The biblical word for that is "repent." That is what the steward did—the new reality being the loss of his job.

Our "new reality" is that God's rule is breaking in upon us. As Luther said, "his kingdom will come on its own," the only question being whether he will reign in our heart and in our life.

The steward is "dedicated, determined, and dependable." He sets out to pursue a course, and does not waver until he has accomplished his goal. If we are serious about our faith—if we believe he has come to reign—we will do the same. If we want a faith-walk with God, we will do whatever it takes—plan, set a course, and stick to it until his kingdom comes. The life of faith is for those who are "dedicated, determined, and dependable."

Jesus goes on to tell us that even the small stuff is important. When the stranger comes in the door of the church, notice them, care for them, minister to them. When you go out to eat, remember that you represent Jesus to your waitress. In all you do, remember who you are, who you represent, what he has called you to be—a "little Christ." Being a Christian isn't just about the big things, because life is composed of small events, chance meetings with people we may never see again, day to day routines. The person who is faithful in these—who pays attention to the details of their days, and knows how to live as a disciple of Jesus in these events—is the one who is the one who can be trusted with the big stuff.

A final note about this unjust steward: he knows how to use what he has to achieve his ends. He doesn't hang on to his resources, but knows how to put them to good use. He knows he only has a short time so, rather than stash money away, he gives it away by the bucketful. In so doing, he gains the friends he will need later on. He realizes that money isn't an end in itself, but only a means to an end. Its value is relative to the good he can produce with it. And that is precisely what Jesus means when he says, "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitation."

If an unrighteous, worldly person can make money for his master in this way, how much more so can we, God's children, use it for eternal purposes! If a worldly person can see the proper place of things as tools to achieve worldly ends, how much more should we be able to see them as tools of the Kingdom?

Week Five: Luke 24:13-35

"Recognizing Christ at the Table"

Optional additional readings: Psalm 125, Isaiah 41:17-20

Two disciples are walking toward Emmaus when a third person joins them. It's Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, but they don't recognize him. Their eyes are kept from seeing who he truly is; Jesus is a stranger to them. He asks them what they're talking about.

"You must be new here." They tell him of recent events in Jerusalem: Jesus of Nazareth had been betrayed, arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified. These two disciples were among many who had hoped that Jesus would redeem Israel.

Jesus, still a stranger in their eyes, begins to teach them. God's promises, written in the scriptures, have been kept—but not in the way the disciples may have imagined. Suffering had to be part of the story. The disciples' hearts, so cold from the week's trauma, begin to glow.

Warming to this person, they insist he stay with them through the dark hours of night. Gathering with Jesus at the table, the two disciples recognize him in the breaking and sharing of bread.

When Christ blesses, breaks, and shares the bread with them, he is no longer a stranger. They know him! They've heard him teach before. They've seen him feed people by the thousands. His proclamation warms their hearts. His meal opens their eyes. When they share the bread, they finally recognize him for who he is: not an out-of-touch stranger, but their own crucified Lord, once dead but now very much alive.

When we gather at worship, our hearts are kindled by the Word, and in the Eucharist we recognize our crucified and risen Lord, whose body and blood are given to us. In that moment of sharing, of receiving

the bread and wine, do we recognize Christ? Having been fed by Christ's body and blood, are our eyes opened?

Whom else do we recognize? Whom else might we truly see? Our neighbors? The hungry in our communities?

How easy it would be, and routine, not to recognize them. How easy, instead of truly seeing the hungry people in our midst, to believe all that the culture proclaims about them: *there but for the grace of God go I; hunger and poverty are unavoidable; they ought to be grateful for whatever help they get.*

Because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, our words about the hungry—and everyone else—can be more hopeful. We are reminded that to share bread with them is to meet the living Lord. We see them not as a burden, or a slogan, but as human beings in full, whom we are called to invite to the table and regard with dignity.

We gather at the table of grace, and when we have shared the bread that is Christ, our eyes are opened. Our hearts burn within us because of the promise that all creation is redeemed. We recognize the image of God that is in every human face. We remember the Bible's stories in which God feeds the hungry and calls the faithful to do the same.

In Luke's story of the resurrection, the moment of recognition happens at a shared meal. Whatever kept the disciples from recognizing Jesus (was it grief? fear? exhaustion? hunger?) vanishes in a moment, even as Jesus himself vanishes. To eat together is to have one's hope restored. To break bread with a neighbor is to see the Lord of life who abides with us.

Lent is a season of renewal. After the two disciples shared the bread with Jesus, they got up and went out into the world to share the news that he was alive. The day's journey with Jesus had renewed their hope. Having heard again the good news of your redemption, what will you do?

Having dined at the table of a generous God, how will you respond to the hungry world?

Children's Sermons

Charlene Rineer, Contributor

Week One: A Heart for Our Neighbors

Acts: 2:44-47a

⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

(Prop needed: large paper heart—one side says "Love God", and other side says "Love Your Neighbors")

When the church first started up after Jesus died on the cross and had risen from the dead, folks had a hard time knowing what to do. Peter and other apostles gave them some advice. What do you think they were told to do? *(Kids' response)*

Peter told them if they truly loved God they needed to repent and be baptized so they would receive the Holy Spirit. *(Show them the heart with "Love God".)* Once that happened the believers would meet together to learn, fellowship, worship, and pray. As they grew in their faith what do you think happened? *(Kids' response)*

(Turn the heart over to "Love Your Neighbor".) The believers' hearts were touched, and they became generous. They began to truly love their neighbors and gave to all who were in need. They cared for the goodwill of all the people. As we love God and grow in our faith with worship, study, and prayer we are also called to love our neighbors. How can we care for others? (Kids' response)

(Share some ideas if they get stuck.) Those are some wonderful ideas. Remember as you go about your daily routine to take some time to care for others. We can share God's love with our neighbors as we help them with their needs. Let us close our time together with a prayer: Dear God, we are called to love you and to love our neighbors. Help us care for their needs. Amen.

Week Two: A Tree and Its Fruit

Luke 6:43-45

⁴³ "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

(Prop: pieces of fruit)

Look at what I have here. How many of you like fruit? *(Kids' response)*

What is your favorite fruit? *(Kids' response)*

A lot of our favorite fruits grow on trees. If the tree is good and healthy it will produce good fruit. If a tree is not so healthy, it will produce bad fruit. What helps a tree be good so it can produce good fruit? *(Kids' response)*

Right; water, sun, and soil with nutrients help a tree produce good fruit. In Luke we hear that a good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good. What helps a person be good so their heart produces good? *(Kids' response)*

Staying close to God by reading the Bible and praying are key. A lot of times we hear about the fruit of the spirit. God's spirit working in us helps us be faithful. What are some of the fruits of the spirit? *(Kids' response) (Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control)*

As we continue to grow in our faith by remaining close to God we will continue to do good for others. Our heart will be filled with the spirit of God. We will do God's work with our hands. Let us pray: *Dear God, thank you for helping us be faithful so we can produce good works to help others from a pure heart. Amen.*

Week Three: The Rich Man and Lazarus

(Modified from sermons4kids.com – The Rich Man and Lazarus)

Luke 16:19-21a

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table;

(Prop: an alarm clock with a snooze button) Do you use an alarm clock to wake up in the morning? (*Kids' response*)

A lot of alarm clocks have a button called a snooze button. When your alarm goes off you can hit that button and go back to sleep. In about ten minutes, the alarm will go off again. Maybe it is nice to get that extra sleep, but there are some problems with snooze alarms. The first is that if you keep on hitting the snooze, you may be late or miss out on something completely. The second problem is that if you keep hitting the snooze, you may get so used to the sound of the alarm that you don't even hear it and you will sleep right through the alarm. Did either one of those problems happen to anyone? (*Kids' response*)

Did you know that God sometimes sounds a "wake up" alarm in our lives? He speaks to our hearts and says, "It is time to wake up and follow me." Some people hit the snooze button and say, "Not now Lord, call me again—a little bit later." Some people hit that "snooze" so many times that they get to where they don't even hear God's voice. When they finally wake up, it may be too late. That is what happened in our Bible story today. Jesus told a story about a rich man who wore the finest clothes and lived in luxury. A beggar named Lazarus lay outside the rich man's gate. Lazarus was hungry and he was hoping that the rich man might have pity on him and give him the leftovers from the rich man's table. But every day the rich man passed by Lazarus without even giving him a thought. I imagine that he passed by Lazarus so many times that he eventually got to the point that he didn't even see him at all. Lazarus was the rich man's alarm to help those in need. God is sending "wake up" calls to people today. Let us pray that we will listen to his voice and help others in need: *Dear God, when you sound the alarm telling us it is time to wake up and follow you, may we never be guilty of hitting the snooze alarm saying, "Later, Lord." Instead, let us rise up and help those in need. Amen.*

Week Four: The Plumb Line

Isaiah 28:16 - 17a

Therefore, thus says the Lord God, see, I am laying a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: "One who trusts will not panic." I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet.

(Prop: building blocks and a plumb line)

(*Start by building a block wall with a helper or two*) Who likes to build with blocks? (*Kids' response*)

Sometimes when I build with blocks my walls fall down because they are not set up correctly. They start to go crooked. (*Show the plumb line.*) Does anyone know what I have here? (*Kids' response*)

It is called a plumb line. Builders use it to check the straightness of a wall. When you build you need to make sure that your walls are set up properly and straight. In the verses from Isaiah we hear that justice and righteousness are that line for our faith. If we are just and right, then our faith is straight on. We are doing what we are called to do. What do justice and righteousness mean to you? (*Kids' response*)

Justice and righteousness can be about fairness and doing what is good for all. Sometimes it is hard to be fair and just. That is where the foundation stone comes in. When you are building, your foundation needs to be strong. In Isaiah we also hear about the cornerstone which sets the sure foundation. Who are they speaking about? (*Kids' response*)

Christ is known as the cornerstone. He is what holds us all together and makes us strong. If your foundation is not strong, then whatever is built upon it can crumble. Therefore, we are to build our life of

faith on Christ. He is sure. If we build our life on Christ, then we can withstand whatever comes. Our faith in Christ then can help us to do what is just and right. If we struggle, then we just need to come back to that sure foundation that we have in Christ. Let us pray: *Gracious God, thank you for Christ the cornerstone of our lives. As we build our life on Christ, we will be made strong in our faith. Out of that faith help us strive for justice and righteousness. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.*

Week 5

Luke 24: 30-32

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

(Prop: whole loaf of bread)

In the scripture of Luke, we hear about a time after Jesus' death when he appeared to some of his disciples. They walked along the road talking to him but did not realize who they were speaking to. It was not until after he broke bread with them that they realized it was Jesus. Where in church do we use bread? *(Kids' response)*

Right, in communion. We break the bread and share it with all who are present. It is a time for us to remember what Christ has done for us. What are some things that Jesus did when he was here on earth? *(Kids' response)*

Great! Jesus did a lot of wonderful things while he was on earth. He was sent to reveal who God was and to save us all. As we share in the breaking of the bread at communion our eyes turn to Christ giving his life for the redemption of our sins. Just like the disciples' eyes were opening and hearts burning in them, our hearts are set afire to share Christ with others. The disciples ran to tell others their news. How do we share Christ with others? *(Kids' response)*

As this Lenten season comes to an end remember what you have learned and tell others about Jesus. Help those in need and spread God's love. Welcome others to the communion table so they can share in the glorious gifts that God has given us. Let us pray.

Gracious and giving God, thank you for Christ who offered himself for our sins. As we break bread together help us see Christ. Let our hearts burn in us to tell others about you. Amen.

Prayer Cube

On the next page is a free pattern for a table prayer cube to make a prayer resource for your family mealtime during Lent!



Make a Table Prayer Cube

Come, Lord Jesus,
be our guest, and
let your gifts
to us be blessed.
Blessed be God
who is our Bread,
may all the world
be clothed and fed.
Amen.

1. Print this page.
2. Cut along the edges and then decorate.
3. Fold along the inside lines and form a cube. Glue the flaps into place.

Gluing flap

Gluing flap

"The eyes of all
look to you, and you
give them their food
in due season. You
open your hand,
satisfying the desire
of every living thing"

Come, Lord Jesus,
bless this food.
We thank you
for all things good.
Use us as you would.
In Christ's name.
Amen.

Thank you, Jesus,
for giving us
food each day.
Watch over us
as we work and play.
May we always stop

Gluing flap

Gluing flap

Our dearest God, bless us
and these your gifts which
you have given us. While
your word nourishes our
soul let this food nourish
our bodies. We praise you
for the gifts you have given
us. Help us to share them
with our neighbors. In
Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Gluing flap

Gluing flap

Jesus, make me
full of light;
Guide my hand
both day and night.
Always show me
that you care.
Teach me that
I, too, can share.

Gluing flap