

Bread for the World Sunday 2016

Pray always and do not lose heart....
And will not God grant justice
to His chosen ones who cry to Him
day and night?

— Luke 18: 1b, 7a

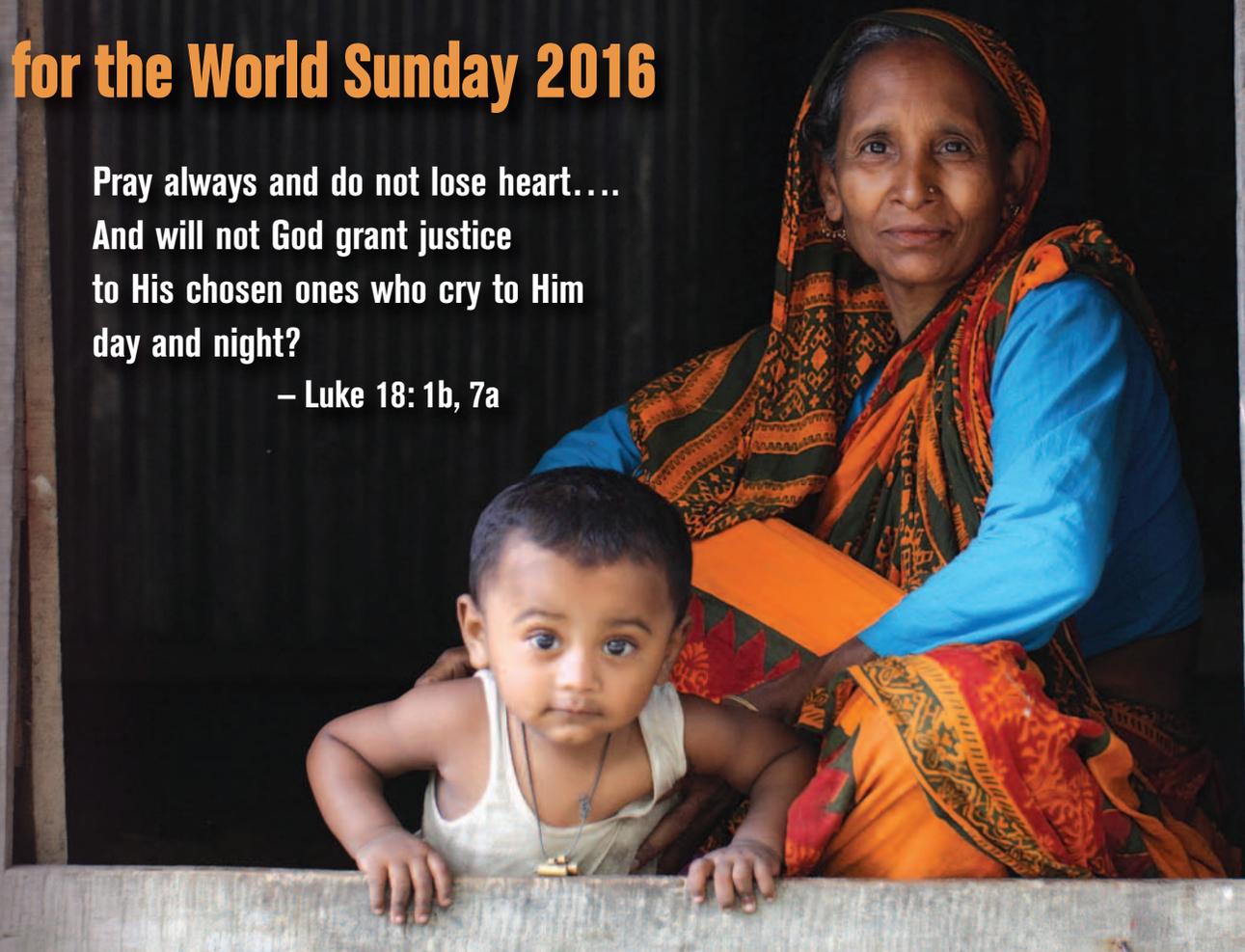


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Bread for the World Sunday is an opportunity to join others in praying for those who struggle with hunger—and to rededicate ourselves to efforts that help end hunger.

Our prayers and our actions are especially urgent at this time. Severe drought and civil strife have caused acute malnutrition in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Syria, and other parts of the world. Poverty and violence have pushed many in Latin America to leave their homes and risk everything to escape. Humanitarian assistance and long-term solutions to hunger are more important than ever.

In the United States, the fall elections will bring about historic changes. The political campaigns have been marked by deep divisions and profound disagreements about our nation's future. In the weeks and months ahead, Congress and the newly elected president will be making decisions that will affect the lives of millions in our own country and abroad.

Our shared commitment to ending hunger leads us to address a range of issues that affect hunger and poverty: refugee migration and immigration, mass incarceration, and inequality and discrimination based on race and gender.

Putting our faith in God, who listens to our cries for help (Luke 18:7), we renew our prayers for all those who suffer from need or injustice. We also pray for our newly elected leaders that they might govern with wisdom, encourage healing, and work for a future in which all have an opportunity to prosper.

Finally, we pray that our new president will make ending hunger—in our own country and around the world—a national priority. Strong U.S. leadership is needed to ensure that we achieve the international goal of ending hunger by 2030.

Our faith is in Christ, who makes all things new, and we place our hope in God's vision of a world without hunger.



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

A Lectionary Study: Luke 18:1-8

By Dr. Greg Carey

The Parable of the Persistent Widow puts us in an uncomfortable spot. We admire the Widow, whose determination wins her justice. But if we're honest with ourselves, we may well relate to the Judge, who is reluctant to administer that very same justice.

The widow seeks justice—no more, no less. The parable's language reveals that someone has wronged her, and she wants restoration. Luke's Gospel repeatedly demonstrates awareness of widows and their reality. The righteous widow Anna recognizes Jesus and prophesies to all who will hear (2:36-38). Jesus recalls how Elijah raised a widow's only son (4:25-26), and later Jesus restores life to the only son of another widow (7:11-17). Immediately after Jesus criticizes the scribes—"they devour widows' houses" (20:47)—he points out how a poor widow's generosity deepens her impoverishment (21:1-4). The Persistent Widow stands among other widows in Luke's story, and she's seeking justice.

From the beginning, however, the spotlight rests on the judge: "There was a certain judge in a certain city." The parable tells us what the widow says to the judge, but it also tells us what the judge thinks and what he says to himself. Several of Luke's parables tell us what one character says to himself. Modern translations obscure this, but in Greek this is how he responds to the widow: "For some time he was unwilling."

Unwilling indeed. The judge did not want to help the widow. Jesus nowhere explains why that is the case. Perhaps the judge is too lazy to act; he doesn't want to be bothered. Given the judge's public status, he might have ties with the widow's oppressor. We must accept that we don't know exactly why the judge is reluctant. The point is, this vulnerable woman's plight does not move him to do the right thing.

As with the judge, our problem lies not in our ability but in our will to do justice. Confronted by the scope of hunger in our world, we might find ourselves tempted to lose heart, precisely the response Jesus warns

against in Luke 18:1. We face a hard truth: our question, like the judge's question, involves whether we are willing to execute justice.

The capacity to end widespread hunger already lies in our hands—not as individuals but as citizens of the United States and of the planet. This is why Bread for the World and other organizations call us to become advocates for justice.

The parable of the Persistent Widow invites us to step out of our secure homes and offices. It invites us to take sides with countless widows and others who face hunger and its many effects.

Dr. Greg Carey is professor of New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary. He also serves as scholar-in-residence at Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He is author of Luke: All Flesh Shall See God's Salvation (2012) and Sinners: Jesus and His Earliest Followers (2009).

A Reflection on Persistence: Luke 18:1-8

By Rev. Beth Bostrom

Every year we walk the halls of the Senate office buildings, the House buildings, the grounds of the Capitol in between.

We tell stories of children who come to school hungry, who carry home an extra backpack full of canned goods and pasta on Fridays, who attend summer programs that offer breakfast or lunch.

We talk about our experiences in other countries, seeing the disparity between our lives and the lives of our sisters and brothers

elsewhere, the universal importance of children to have food in order to

concentrate, learn, and grow.

We return year after year. We write letter after letter, and make phone call after phone call to let our elected representatives know what we see, what we believe, how we need them to represent us. Sometimes our visits to see senators or representatives can feel like pestering the judge to grant justice.

We return because our faith lies in the assurance that God is with us in this struggle. We see the prophets calling again and again for compassion and care for those who are hungry and vulnerable, for widows and orphans and strangers. We see Jesus lifting up those who are dismissed, ignored, and shoved aside.

We return because we believe that each retelling of the story makes a difference in the hearts of those we

address. Christ often taught through stories and parables, sometimes even telling several stories to make the same point. And so, we raise our voices. We proclaim the good news of God's abundance. And we call on our elected representatives to hear these stories, to let their hearts be moved, and to work for justice and compassion.

We return because hunger can be ended by 2030. God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

On June 7, Rev. Beth Bostrom joined more than 300 others in Bread for the World's annual Lobby Day. Her visits to members of Congress and Luke 18:1-8 inspired this reflection. Rev. Bostrom is pastor of Roseland United Methodist Church in Sebastian, Florida, and serves on the board of directors of Bread for the World.



A Litany for Bread for the World Sunday

God of the universe, we bless you for bringing forth wonders beyond our imagining and for providing us who bear your image a suitable place in the midst of your vast creation. Bless us, we pray, with your continual care and grant us an appreciation for the sacredness of all that you have made. Holy and gracious God,

have mercy and hear us.

God of love, we bless you for the goodness of relationships with others, and for giving us companions and partners in this life. Help us, we pray, to value all people as our neighbors, that we might care for everyone in need, especially those who lack food and shelter. Holy and gracious God,

have mercy and hear us.

God of righteousness, we bless you that you care enough to be angry at injustice. Open our eyes, we pray, to see how our actions and lifestyles contribute to the exploitation and deprivation of others. Move us to repentance and give us vision for a more equitable and sustainable future. Holy and gracious God,

have mercy and hear us.

God of mercy, we bless you for coming among us as one of us in Jesus Christ to deliver us from sin, death, and evil. Forgive, we pray, our complicity with the powers that defy you, that rebel against your will, and that draw us away from you. Give us faith to trust your life-giving promises, and inspire us to proclaim your grace in all that we say and do. Holy and gracious God,

have mercy and hear us.

God of compassion, we bless you for remaining with us through your Holy Spirit, the Advocate. Empower us, we pray, to be persistent advocates on behalf of those who are poor, powerless, or marginalized. Guide us to use our democratic power for the common good of all people, that none may go hungry. Holy and gracious God,

have mercy and hear us.

God of hope, we bless you for the witness of all your faithful ones who have trusted your Word and embodied your love in selfless service to others. Give us confidence, we pray, that our labor on behalf of others is not in vain. Guard us from despair and fill us with your peace and joy. Holy and gracious God,

have mercy and hear us.

We trust your mercy, O God, and we long for the day when you will make all things new, offering these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

This responsive prayer was written by Rev. Dr. A. C. (Chris) Repp, senior pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Champaign, Illinois. Dr. Repp was formerly pastor of Epiphany Lutheran Church in Carbondale, Illinois. He is a co-author of Gift and Promise: the Augsburg Confession and the Heart of Christian Theology, released by Fortress Press in August 2016.



Bulletin or Pulpit Announcement

Today we join with churches across the country to observe Bread for the World Sunday. Moved by God's grace in Jesus Christ, we pray for all of those who suffer from hunger and want, and we rededicate ourselves to ending hunger in God's world.

Prayer of the Day

Holy and righteous God, you hear the prayers of all who cry out to you in distress. Open our ears to those in need and transform our hearts, so that we who have been abundantly blessed may be a blessing to others, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Prayer Before or After Communion

O God, you feed us with your very self, living bread for the life of the world. May we who share this blessed meal embody your compassion and faithfully show forth your love on behalf of all who hunger, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Benediction

May the blessing of God be upon you. May the light of Christ illumine your way. And may the gifts of the Holy Spirit abound in your life to the glory of God and the good of all creation. *Amen.*

How Your Church Can Celebrate Bread for the World Sunday

1 Select a Sunday or weekend when you will celebrate.

Bread for the World Sunday is scheduled for October 16, but you are welcome to participate on another date if that works best for your church. Announce the date in your church newsletter, weekly email, and on social media. Make sure you have the resources you'll need. Free resources in English and Spanish are available—including bulletin inserts and a Bread for the World Sunday poster. To order or download, visit www.bread.org/sunday.

2 Plan which elements in your worship service will address hunger. Perhaps there can be a special announcement at the beginning of the service or an opening prayer. The sermon might address the response of faith to hunger. Many churches have a “mission moment” before the offering or collection. Is there a role for children to play in the service?

Prayers for the day are an ideal opportunity to remember those who are hungry—and our nation's decision makers who can change the policies and conditions that allow hunger to persist. Use the enclosed responsive prayer or have members contribute their own prayers. Additional prayers and worship resources can be found at www.bread.org/sunday.

3 Devote a Bible study or adult forum to the Christian response to hunger. You might invite a guest from a community feeding program or someone who has emigrated from a country where hunger is acute. You can order or download resources designed for youth and adult Christian education at www.bread.org/store.

4 As part of your Bread for the World Sunday celebration, you may want to conduct an Offering of Letters—taking time to write brief letters to members

of Congress. The 2016 Offering of Letters is urging Congress to provide robust funding for maternal and child nutrition in developing countries. For a sample letter and more information, visit www.bread.org/ol2016.

5 Encourage members of your church to vote in the November elections and, after the elections, to contact those candidates who win. To learn how people of faith—working in a bipartisan way—are asking political candidates to address hunger, visit www.bread.org/elections.



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6 Gather a special offering or collection. You may wish to allocate the funds to a denominational hunger program, a local feeding program, and Bread for the World. You may order free offering or pew envelopes at www.bread.org/sunday.

7 Your congregation as well as individuals can join thousands of others who have committed to ongoing prayers for an end to hunger. To make your prayer commitment and to sign up for bi-weekly prayer suggestions, visit www.bread.org/pray.

Bread for the World and *Guideposts* magazine are partners in calling for *a week of prayers to end hunger*, beginning the week of October 16 (World Food Day). Visit www.bread.org/weekofprayer to learn more.

8 Plan now to send members of your church to Washington, D.C., for Bread for the World's annual Lobby Day in early June 2017. This is a life-changing opportunity to join others in worship, learning, and speaking to members of Congress about making the end of hunger a national priority.

About Bread for the World

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. God's grace in Jesus Christ moves us to reach out to our neighbors—whether they live next door, in another state, or on another continent.

The individuals and churches involved in Bread for the World represent a broad range of Christian faith traditions. We embrace and reflect the growing diversity of culture, ethnicity, and religious practices.

Bread for the World's work is made possible by contributions from tens of thousands of individuals and thousands of churches across the country. We invite you to join us by visiting www.bread.org/join or calling 800-822-7323.



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