

ELCA World Hunger's

40 *Days* OF GIVING

LENT STUDY GUIDE



ELCA World Hunger

Dear friends,

Welcome to the season of Lent and to ELCA World Hunger's 40 Days of Giving!

These 40 days are a season to reflect and remember, to look forward and ahead. During Lent we journey with the Hebrews in the exodus, through the temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness and to the foot of the cross on Good Friday. We remember our dependence on God and one another and reflect on the many ways we have fallen short of what God calls us to be.

These are not easy times for many of us. We know the challenges our world faces. Yet the season of Lent reminds us that God is not yet through with us or our world. Amid our own dependence on God, we know by faith that God is even now at work, drawing us toward the resurrection and restoration of the world.

ELCA World Hunger's 40 Days of Giving invites us to be part of that work and to bear witness to it with partners, companions, friends and neighbors.

In the sessions that follow, we will continue our journey through the psalms that began with ELCA World Hunger's Advent study. We will read the familiar lines of Psalm 23 and encounter the psalmist's plaintive cries in Psalm 130. We will share the joy of Psalm 32 and the promise of rest and security in Psalm 121.

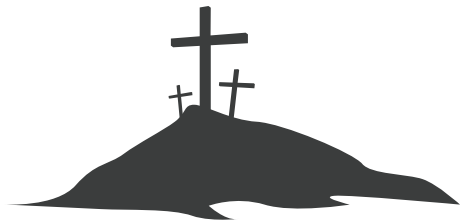
In these ancient hymns, we will encounter our spiritual ancestors, whose faith sustained them through trials and tribulations, and be inspired for the work that lies ahead of us today.

Join us this season — on your own, in a small group or with your congregation — as we encounter the psalms anew and unite in our efforts to end hunger.

In peace,

Ryan P. Cumming

Ryan P. Cumming, Ph.D.
Program Director, Hunger Education



LENT STUDY

Session 1 — Psalm 32

“You are a hiding place for me.” —Psalm 32:7



Psalm 32 is a fitting way to begin the season of Lent. The season has most commonly been understood through the centuries as a time of fasting and preparation for Easter, a time when new Christians were often baptized. As early as the second century, theologian Irenaeus of Lyons wrote of a time of penance and prayer leading up to Holy Week when Christians and those seeking baptism should fast for a period of 40 days or 40 hours (the translation is unclear) while reflecting on their sin and their need for God’s grace.

The psalm for this week draws us into the emotional and spiritual experience of repentance and forgiveness. “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,” the psalmist writes, “whose sin is covered” (verse 1). The verses describe the internal turmoil with vivid and visceral language, such as “groaning” (verse 3). The “heavy” hand of God bears down on the psalmist, sapping their strength to keep going (verse 4). When they experience forgiveness, it is like being “surround[ed]” by gladness and finding a comforting, secure “hiding place” (verse 7).

That experience of shame and isolation lies at the heart of what sin really is and how it impacts us. The psalmist, for example, suffers in “silence,” while their body “wastes away” from the effects of what

we might today call depression (verse 3). So often, we understand sin as simply disobedience. We view God as a law-giving judge who demands our compliance with specific rules. Repentance and forgiveness, then, are concerned with our confession of what we did wrong and our promise to do better next time.

The psalm, though, offers a deeper understanding of the dynamic between sin and forgiveness and between us and God. Here, sin is a visceral and painful experience of being locked out of relationships, of feeling that we cannot become our full selves. Forgiveness goes beyond merely the acceptance of an apology for wrongdoing and points toward God's desire for true reconciliation and wholeness. The psalm recognizes how, on this side of the full reign of God, life can wound us and leave us yearning for words of welcome, comfort and love.

What the psalmist describes is the experience of stigma. The word comes from a Greek term meaning "mark" or "puncture," which seems apt when one considers how deeply being stigmatized can cut. To be stigmatized is to be made to feel ashamed or broken because of something we have done or, more often, for who we are. This is one reason why food pantries and other hunger ministries are often underutilized by the people who need them. To be hungry, all too often, is to be stigmatized for circumstances beyond one's control, so neighbors commonly try to deal with hunger or food insecurity on their own. The social and emotional costs of stigma are simply too high.

This stigma is reinforced often in the ways we talk about hunger. Language such as "the hungry" or "the poor" makes it seem as if a person's whole identity is nothing more than the challenges they face. People dispensing angry rhetoric about "freeloading" or calls for "self-sufficiency" ignore the hard work people do to avoid or escape hunger or poverty — and our lack of control over the systems or events that may drive us into them.

The psalmist takes comfort in knowing that, with God, there is no stigma. In God the only “mark” we carry is being God’s children. This faith motivates the robust hunger ministries that accompany neighbors every day. Food pantries and other feeding programs may provide food, but perhaps the most important part of all our ministries may be building a community that reinforces God’s love of all rather than society’s stigmatizing of some.

The ministry of Christ the King Deaf Church in West Chester, Penn., is a testament to this faith. Christ the King provides a place of welcome, worship and fellowship for neighbors who are deaf or who have hearing limitations. Through DeafCAN!, Christ the King’s community human services program, the church reaches across six counties and into the lives of over 250 individuals and their families every year. Recognizing that inaccessibility in many communities can create significant communication barriers for people who need help to meet their basic needs, DeafCAN! provides support for deaf neighbors who are hungry, homeless, imprisoned or ill. It is the only program in Pennsylvania to provide dedicated service for immigrants and refugees who are deaf or have hearing limitations; the state of Pennsylvania used the DeafCAN! Sensory Service Provider (SSP) program as a model for its own.

With a Domestic Hunger Grant from ELCA World Hunger, DeafCAN! was able to purchase personal protective equipment so that the SSP program could continue safely. The leaders of the program are also looking ahead to establishing the first transitional housing facility for deaf people recently released from prison and, potentially, for others in need of stable housing. Through its work with deaf immigrants and refugees, DeafCAN! has also created new opportunities for support, especially through teaching English and American Sign Language classes and citizenship classes. The eastern Pennsylvania chapter of DeafCAN! performed two plays showcasing the life stories of the actors themselves in 2021.

This work is critical to confronting the stigmatization caused by prejudice and discrimination against people based on their abilities. As DeafCAN! puts it, “Being deaf can cut one off from much that the rest of us take for granted: social services, church, neighbors . . . and most cruelly, cut off from their own families.” Stigmatization and exclusion are core drivers behind the higher rates of hunger and poverty that people living with disabilities face in the United States. The inaccessibility of resources, even within many churches, makes it more difficult for all neighbors to get the support they need to thrive.

In contrast to these systems, institutions and communities set up to exclude them, Christ the King Deaf Church provides opportunities for people who are deaf to participate and lead. In fact, the Rev. Beth Lockard, co-founder of Christ the King Deaf Church along with her husband, is currently pastor of the church, and more than half the staff is deaf. Through DeafCAN!, the church and its ministry bear witness to the important role faith communities can play in ending stigma and fostering authentic hope for neighbors made vulnerable by the sins of discrimination, marginalization and stigmatization.

For generations — and too often today — people living with disabilities encounter people of faith who try to link their disability to sin, claiming, like Jesus’ disciples in John 9, that disability results from disobedience to God. Or, well-intentioned people of faith offer to pray that God will “heal” their disability, without asking first whether a neighbor who is disabled desires or even needs such “healing.” Far more important is healing the systems and communities that exclude neighbors based on their abilities. The ministry of Christ the King Deaf Church and the words of Psalm 32 teach us that God’s healing penetrates more deeply, healing the wounds caused not by the sins we commit but by the sin that is pressed upon us, the stigmatization that, perhaps like a heavy hand, “dries up” our strength (vs. 4) and pushes us to remain silent (vs. 3). The Psalm is a reminder of the sin that pervades our communities, separating us from God and one another, and leaving so many of us feeling alone.

The call to return to God during Lent – to prepare, to fast and to repent – is twofold. On the one hand, it is a way to remind ourselves that being made to feel ashamed, burdened, excluded or “cut off” is not part of God’s plan for us. On the other hand, it also opens us to recognize the many ways that we, the church, have failed to be the loving, welcoming, affirming presence God calls us to be in the world. The ministry of Christ the King Deaf Church and DeafCAN! is not a specialized, localized ministry; it is the ministry to which God calls the whole people of God – ending not just physical hunger, but the emotional, mental and spiritual hunger from which we yearn for release.

REFLECTION

Questions

How does Psalm 37 shape or reshape your understanding of sin?

Think of a time when you experienced someone stigmatizing or stereotyping you. How did this make you feel?

How does or how can your faith inform your encounters with people (even strangers) who are experiencing hunger and homelessness?

Consider your own context. How does your congregation, school or workplace provide a welcoming environment to people of diverse abilities? What could you be doing better, and what action steps could you take toward that end between now and Easter?

LENT STUDY

Session 2 — Psalm 121

“My help comes from the Lord.” —Psalm 121:2



Just over two years ago, after decades of working, Susan became disabled. “I was newly poor and relatively terrified,” she wrote. “With literally everything stripped from the budget except a roof over our heads and very modest transportation, the monthly budget showed a balance of negative \$5. The meaning of food insecurity became abundantly clear.”

Late in life, Susan had adopted three boys. Her circumstances made her worry nonstop about their futures and how she would keep the promises she had made to them.

The psalm for this week in Lent opens with a similar worry and prayer. “I lift up my eyes to the hills,” writes the psalmist. “From where will my help come?” (verse 1).

One of the more frustrating responses people offer to stories of food insecurity in the United States is that one can easily figure out where to go during hard times. No matter how often the stories are shared, no matter how persistent rates of food insecurity are, one still hears:

“Can’t you just get welfare?” (No — it doesn’t exist in the ways you think it does and hasn’t since the mid-1990s.)

“You can get food stamps, can’t you?” (Sure, but these average only \$175 a month and for certain age groups are available for only three months.)

Unfortunately, the reality for many food-insecure families and individuals in the U.S. is that public programs are often difficult to access, and many people lack social support systems that can help them when something goes wrong. Even if programs and support systems are available and accessible, being food insecure or living in poverty carry stigmas, much like the ones we discussed in the last session of this study. This can make it hard to know where to turn and to find the confidence necessary to make that turn once we arrive at it.

For Susan, coming from a middle-class background meant having to face the stigma of food insecurity head-on. She remembers watching a food distribution at the West View Hub (“the Hub”), a community center serving neighbors in Pittsburgh. “I still had the haughty air of someone who recently belonged to the middle class, so rather than inquire, I watched.” After some time, a person from the Hub started to talk with her. The Hub was distributing milk and eggs, and there was a long line of clients. Susan had planned to observe only, but a volunteer invited her to find a place in the line, and she went home with food and money to spare for the week. For her, the change was immediate. “All of a sudden I went from negative \$5 to plus \$45 for the month,” she wrote. “I could breathe.”

The food pantry is just one part of the Hub, which is supported by an ELCA World Hunger grant through Berkeley Hills Lutheran Church, an early partner in the work. In addition to food, the Hub provides a local library, internet access and other support the community needs. More importantly, the Hub fosters new relationships among neighbors. “The food pantry [was] just the beginning,” explained Susan. “We found a home there. We found family there.”

Through ELCA World Hunger, our church is committed to supporting transformative, integrated and holistic ministries that address

the root causes of hunger. To put it more simply, these ministries break down barriers within communities and work with other partners to address the multiple needs people face. If we are serious about our church ending hunger, each of these steps will be important, yet we also need to remember that the most important ministry is being present.

God's invitation for us to build a just world where all are fed comes out of our own experience as people saved by grace. As told in Holy Scripture, the entire history of the people of God is the story of God being present with the people, especially when they felt alone. Look at Psalm 121:1-4:

*I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?
My help comes from [you,] Lord, who made heaven and earth.
[You] will not let your foot be moved; [those] who keep you will not slumber.
[They] who keep Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. (vs. 1-4).*

Reading this psalm, indeed reading all the Bible, we might sum up the character of God in a single phrase: relentless presence. God is relentlessly present with the people. From the Garden of Eden to Egypt to the wilderness, God is present. From Israel to Judah to exile to return, God is present.

The spirituality of the Lenten season — indeed, a key purpose of Lenten fasting — is to remind us of our dependence on God. We remember in these 40 days our need for God's grace, God's provision and God's help in the moments when we can't help ourselves. Yet we also remember that the good news of grace is the good news that God will be relentlessly present with us "always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

That is part of what makes the work of the West View Hub so important and so transformative for neighbors such as Susan. Being present, listening to our neighbors' needs and offering words of welcome and hope are what it means to be saved by a relentlessly present God.

This season, we are called to remember our times of need when God showed up and to remember our calling to do the same. As church, we respond to hunger for many reasons. Sometimes our compassion pulls us to meet the needs of our neighbors. Other times we may feel a sense of responsibility to care for the people God places in our midst. At all times, though, we do this work because we are set free by grace to be relentlessly present in our own communities, so that every time a neighbor, friend or stranger wonders, "From where will my help come?" the people of God will reply, "Here."

Here — you are welcome.

Here — you will be fed.

Here — we will meet our needs together.

REFLECTION

Questions

How has the church been present for you in times of distress?

How might your personal ministry or the ministry of your congregation change if you focused on being relentlessly present with and among your neighbors?

Where is God calling you to be relentlessly present this season?

LENT STUDY

Session 3 — Psalm 95

“For the Lord is a great God, and a great King
above all gods.” —Psalm 95:3



Let's get this out of the way: Psalm 95 is a weird psalm. It's so odd, in fact, that choosing a single verse to use as an epigram for this session was difficult. Yet even from its most perplexing language we might still be able to glean insights that help us better understand the work of God in the world.

In *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), J. David Pleins describes how many of the psalms, including Psalm 95, appear to have been used as parts of liturgy during worship and festivals. This psalm, in particular, appears to be the first in a series (95-99) grouped together as “psalms of God as king.” Each offers lofty praise of God, often in language that would have been used to praise a human king.

Psalm 95 opens with praise of God as the creator of the “depths of the earth . . . the mountains . . . the sea . . . and the dry land” (verses 4-5). The psalmist calls the people to “worship and bow down” before the Lord (verse 6). We might imagine the first half of the psalm being used to call the people to a worship ceremony celebrating the work of God the Creator and the majesty of God the King.

What's perplexing about the psalm is that, right after these verses, the tone of the psalm changes abruptly. After this exuberant call to worship the Creator-King, the voice and theme shift. After verse 8, the speaker is no longer the psalmist but God, the tone not one of celebration and praise but of chastisement and threat. "Do not harden your hearts," God says, or like your ancestors before you, you "shall not enter my rest" (verses 8, 11). The change is so abrupt that many scholars believe the psalm is two different pieces (verses 1-7 and 8-11) that got mashed together. The difference is so stark that one can hardly discern a single theme for the whole psalm.

Regardless of why these two pieces might have been joined, some of the psalm's references tie it both to earlier Hebrew Scriptures and to later Christian Scriptures, such as Hebrews 3:1-4:11. One of the closest ties is its mention of the incident at Meribah or Massah, where, the psalm relates, "the people hardened their hearts against God, rupturing the relationship for forty years" (verse 10).

So, what happened there?

The story of Meribah/Massah is recounted in two places in the Bible: Exodus 17 and Numbers 20. Moses has led the people out of slavery in Egypt. In the first months, they reach the wilderness of Sin (Exodus 17:1) or Zin (Numbers 20:1), which was between Elim and Mount Sinai. From there, they journey and camp in stages. Upon arriving at one site (the Exodus and Numbers accounts differ), the people confront Moses and Aaron. They have been walking in the wilderness for weeks. They're tired and hungry, and now there is no water. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" they complain to Moses (Exodus 17:3). Moses pleads with God, who instructs him to go ahead of the people with some of the elders of the community and, with his staff, to strike a rock, out of which water will flow.

The Hebrews in the wilderness knew then what we know today: without water, there is no life, whether they were enslaved or free. We can imagine their desperation and frustration, perhaps even their anger. What is this new "life" that they are led to, without food or water?

Scarcity of water affects nearly every aspect of a community's life. Without water, adequate food cannot be grown. Without water, food cannot be washed or handled safely, so there is an increased risk of disease. Without adequate water nearby, people — typically women and girls — must travel miles to get what they need each day. Without water, the threat of violent conflict increases as people fight over this scarce resource. The risks of hunger, poverty, disease, conflict and death all increase when people lack access to the water they need to live. That's one reason helping neighbors access clean, safe water is a core part of the work supported by ELCA World Hunger. We cannot end hunger without it. The complaint of the Hebrews is not unfounded.

Yet, from the book of Exodus to Psalm 95 to the book of Hebrews, the incident is used as one more example of disobedience and faithlessness. Even the two names given to the place, Meribah and Massah, reflect this. "Meribah" means "test"; "Massah" means "quarrel." The names mark the place where the people tested and quarreled with God.

Often this type of Bible story is used to argue that we should "have more faith," trust more fully in God or pray harder. Faith and prayer are important, but neither is going to draw water from a rock. Would that it were otherwise, but prayer didn't even draw water from the rock for Moses.

That's the crucial aspect of the story. It would be nonsensical to believe that none of the Hebrews prayed for water before complaining to Moses and Aaron. Anyone who has known the pangs of thirst or watched a loved one suffer the same knows that prayers for water would not have been far from the hearts and tongues of the people. The story reveals not that God will provide a miracle of water if we pray hard enough but that God will equip leaders to help the people access the resources they need to live. In response to the people's need, God *instructed* Moses to gather a team of elders and lead them to a place where water would flow. God even equipped Moses with the right instrument (a staff) and

directions (“strike the rock”) to make it happen. The lesson is not merely to trust that water will flow from a stone but to know that God has, first, provided enough resources through creation to meet our needs and, second, works miracles through the equipping of leaders to access those resources.

We don’t need to go back to the ancient Hebrews to see this dynamic at work when it comes to water. In Ghana, water scarcity threatens the lives and livelihoods of nearly 90% of the population. Even in urban areas, more than half the people lack access to clean, safe water. In developing countries such as Ghana, almost 80% of illnesses and deaths are caused by water-borne diseases, which in turn are driven by people needing to rely on unsafe water sources. Torgbui Agbeve, a community chief and a participant in a project of the Good News Theological Seminary in Ghana, reports, “I used to go to the River Todzie with some of my people to beg them to grant us access to their river, but they would refuse.”

With support from ELCA World Hunger, the seminary is working with community leaders such as Torgbui to increase access to safe water. The work is part of a larger project that also creates jobs through a local cottage industry producing plant-based detergent and other products. Since the project began, more than 1,000 people from more than 80 communities have participated, and the seminary plans to expand the work to even more communities.

The project is effective in large part because it focuses on equipping local leaders to work together to make change happen. It may not be as dramatic as Moses striking a rock, but the community’s work is no less a sign of God working through individuals and communities to help them live and thrive.

Torgbui Agbeve’s story of begging at the river also reflects what we know about God’s provision of water. Often there is enough to go around but access is denied or restricted to a few.

That may be what connects the two parts of Psalm 95. Trusting in God’s promise doesn’t mean praying harder or being more obedient;

it means knowing that God, who created the sea, the land and the mountains, creates abundantly, blessing the world with the resources we need to live. It means knowing that the same God will equip the leaders that communities need to thrive.

We work toward a time when we “will hunger no more and thirst no more” (Revelation 7:16) does not necessarily mean praying for a miracle to come but rather bearing witness to — and investing in — the miraculous ways God is already working through leaders and communities to bring that promise to life.

REFLECTION *Questions*

What does it mean to trust in God? When does that seem easy? When does it seem difficult?

How can faith in God the Creator shape responses to hunger, poverty or water scarcity today?

In what ways does your congregation equip new leaders to meet emerging needs?

What is the difference between abundance and scarcity? How might focusing on abundance change how we view ourselves, our world and God?

LENT STUDY

Session 4 — Psalm 23

“You prepare a table before me.” —Psalm 23:5



The community of Cataño, Puerto Rico, is vibrant, with residents talented in music, art and sports, yet it also faces a number of challenges. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income is about \$18,600, nearly 12% lower than the average in Puerto Rico. Forty-six percent of people in Cataño live in poverty. So when Hurricane Maria passed through, the devastation compounded ongoing challenges and added new ones. Leaders of Tu Puedes, a project based at Iglesia Evangélica Luterana del Divino Salvador, recognized the increased need and responded by providing both community support for sustainable livelihoods and counseling for mental and emotional wellness. This support was crucial after the hurricane because many residents of Cataño faced the frustration and grief of life after a disaster.

To aid the community, Tu Puedes organized a support group for people who serve as caregivers to family members with Alzheimer’s disease. Providing care for a loved one is taxing work — physically, financially, mentally and emotionally. In the support group, caregivers found a safe, supportive place to voice their emotions

and share experiences with others who understand what they are going through. The support group helped to create a community where the caregivers could learn from each other, be present with one another and be heard. Tu Puedes also offered relaxation workshops for caregivers and their loved ones and financial support following Hurricane Maria.

By working with community members, Tu Puedes is helping to create tables — safe spaces of welcome and support — for neighbors. These tables are central to the work of ELCA World Hunger because hunger is about not only the food we eat but also the tables at which we are welcome.

The psalm for this week in Lent, Psalm 23, is one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. Its rich language offers a variety of metaphors for understanding God. Most popular, perhaps, is the first, that of the “shepherd” who provides secure rest in “green pastures” (verse 1-2). The most vivid, though, is the image of God as the perfect host, who “prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies,” with cups overflowing (verse 5). As a gracious host, God even anoints the guest with oil, a symbol of welcome and respect at ancient banquets. Even when surrounded by enemies, the psalmist experiences the abundant welcome of God, the perfect host, to a banquet table where the psalmist will be treated as an honored guest.

Being invited to the table symbolizes more than just being fed. In both Old Testament and New Testament times, to have a place at the table was to be welcomed, to be treated with respect. At banquets, specific rules governed who was invited to recline by the table and join in the meal with the host. We see this over and over again in the gospels, especially in parables that involve banquets. We also see the rigidity of these rules in the accusations leveled against Jesus for dining with people who would otherwise have been deemed unclean or unwelcome.

For the ancients as, indeed, for us, to be fed is one thing but to be welcome at the table is another.

How often in our communities do we find tables that are more exclusive than inclusive, more threatening than welcoming? Perhaps these are not dining tables but other gathering places that reflect society's perspective on who is truly welcome and who is not. We can easily find roundtables filled with experts who talk *about* communities but rarely *with* them. Or we might find tables where the wealthy and powerful network with political decision-makers as few of us will ever be able to do. Tables are places at which relationships are built and decisions are made. When inclusive, they can be safe spaces for communities to come together. When exclusive, they can reinforce the discriminatory and stigmatizing practices that keep us apart.

Indeed, at the very heart of who we are as church stands a table: the table of Holy Communion. Martin Luther referred to Holy Communion as a "sacrament of love." In dining at this table, he wrote, we remember our neediness before God, recall those not present at the table and commit ourselves to "tak[ing] to heart the infirmities and needs of others, as if they were [our] own." To be at this table is to be formed by the sacrament of Holy Communion. To be the people of God is to be formed by a table where all are welcome and all are fed.

Of course, our calling goes beyond this. Worship and the sacraments take their most authentic form when they carry us back into the world, prepared not just to dine at the table but to *be* that table — that community of welcome, of hospitality, of safety and grace with and for our neighbors.

This is a lofty goal that we aim for as church together. Ending hunger will take more than calories, water wells or sustainable jobs. It will take tables — inclusive spaces that bear witness to a new kind of community, where new relationships are formed, where each guest is welcomed and valued, and where every cup overflows with all that is made possible when God draws us together.

REFLECTION

Questions

Think of a time when you were welcomed to a table — perhaps to dine, to communicate or to share your ideas. What did the experience feel like?

How does your congregation invite and create a hospitable place for new people at “the table” when decisions are made and visions for the future are shared?

How can creating safe spaces, such as the Tu Puedes support groups, contribute to ending hunger?

What other metaphors for God can be found in Psalm 23? How might these metaphors shape new ways of understanding the work of the church?

LENT STUDY

Session 5 — Psalm 130

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in [God’s] word I hope.” —Psalm 130:5



The 40 days of Lent are drawing to a close, and so, too, is our journey through the psalms. From the plaintive cries of Psalm 32 to the quiet comfort of Psalm 23, we have glimpsed the spiritual depth of these hymns and reflected on what they might mean for us today, centuries after they were first recorded.

The psalms can often seem dated, repetitive or obscure. Many of them originated from liturgies or festivals long since passed from memory. Others may be so familiar that we tend to skip over them. Yet within them we find the spiritual turmoil of a people who have experienced the heights of joy at being God’s chosen and the depths of despair at being victims of war and exile. We find lofty praise and pleas for mercy and peace. The psalms reflect the richness of worship and earnest prayer, the spirituality of our ancestors in faith.

Within them, we also uncover the close links between liturgy and community life. Though many of the psalms are tailored for use in religious ceremonies, they paint a portrait of a God who, above all, cares about God’s people. The God of the psalms provides abundantly, loves fiercely and pursues relentlessly, at once the restorer of Jerusalem (Psalm 122), the executor of justice (Psalm 146), the unceasing keeper of Israel (Psalm 121) and a “hiding place” for those stung by stigma and shame (Psalm 32:7).

Each of these images points us toward the realization that our many attempts to divide our life as people of faith from our life as neighbors and citizens of the world fall short of what God calls us to be. True worship, authentic worship is worship lived out in the world. Liturgy finds its most complete expression not in beautiful ceremonies but in beloved community.

The stories we have shared of work supported by ELCA World Hunger throughout the world are stories of worship come to life, of the living liturgical presence of God in our midst. Each of these stories could be its own psalm, filled with earnest prayers, with lofty praise and thanksgiving, and with new insights into who God is.

As we look ahead to the passion of Jesus, the pain of Good Friday and the joy of Easter Sunday, the psalms remind us that we are still discovering who God is and who we are called to be. They remind us too that we find the surest answers by carrying our faith into the world, God's creation and the many communities we are invited to accompany around the world.

The psalms express what our ancestors found in their search for answers. What will we find as we continue the search? As we encounter new neighbors, as we hear stories of God at work through our partners, companions and congregations, what song will we sing?

We face great challenges. Rates of hunger are no longer falling but rising. Price increases make it harder for us and our neighbors to save for the future — or, in many cases, even envision one. With the psalmist, we “wait for the Lord, my soul waits” (Psalm 130:5). Yet like the psalmist, we find hope in God's word because “with the Lord, there is steadfast love” and the promise of redemption (Psalm 130:7).

What psalms will sustain us? Perhaps more urgently, what new psalms are being written in our hearts now, as we bear witness to — and share in — God's ongoing work toward that future?

REFLECTION

Questions

Think about the lessons and stories you've read this Lent. What did you, your group or your congregation learn about the psalms, the work of ELCA World Hunger or other perspectives?

What is something that challenged you, your mindset or your group? How did you lean into that discomfort?

How will you begin or expand your support of the ministries described in this study?

As you wrap up this journey through Lent with ELCA World Hunger, what is shaping your experience of Holy Week? How does the death and resurrection of Christ bear witness to our hope in God's promised future?



ELCA World Hunger

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