



Allison Shelley for LWR

SEASON OF HOPE

MIDWEEK LENT SERVICE HOMILY NOTES

Lent is a season for deepening our relationship with Christ. In Matthew 25: 34-46, where we are called to ask,

'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?'

Through your five mid-week Lenten services, journey around the world with your congregation as you explore how your gifts to Lutheran World Relief bring you into relationship with the hungry, thirsty and naked.

FOR EACH WEEK, THERE IS:

- 1 a story of Lutherans at work in the world with LWR,
- 2 reflection questions to help you put the story into the context of your congregation's life, and
- 3 an image which corresponds with each story to share during your homily.

*Thank you for joining LWR
in a Season of Hope!*



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FOOD SECURITY

“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food...”

ALI FORACH fled conflict in Mali and has been living in Mbera refugee camp in Mauritania since 2012. The camp is located in the Sahara Desert and surrounded by hills of sand. Local communities around the camp shared their food, but this caused tension when food was especially scarce. What Ali and his fellow refugees really needed were the skills to grow enough food to feed themselves and their families — no small feat in a place where water is hard to come by and the desert heat can reach 120 degrees during the day!

Thanks to the support of Lutherans in the United States, Lutheran World Relief implemented farmer field schools. 5,000 people — refugees and members of surrounding communities — learned how to start crop nurseries, grow seedlings and prepare and use organic fertilizer. Ali and his neighbors also learned how to irrigate their crops with solar-powered pumps, bringing water to the surface of what was once dry land. Now, over 75 acres of garden plots of crops like peanuts and watermelon have sprung up in the camp and surrounding villages. And these skills will spread far beyond Mbera — Ali says he wants to bring what he has learned back to Mali!

1 *The bread which Jesus provides is everlasting. How is that reflected in our mission to not just end hunger but deliver food security?*

2 *Ali and his community found themselves forced into a barren land but discovered ways to meet their needs. In our faith life, do we often find ourselves in desolate places? What tools are we given for faith to grow even in those places?*

3 *Ali plans to take what he has learned as a refugee to share with his community at home. How do we share all that has been entrusted to us with others? Can we name the places in our lives where God has taken dry land and made it grow, and can we share that with others?*

PICTURE THIS!

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WATER

“...or thirsty and gave you something to drink?”

It was a struggle for **FABIAN OSPINA FLOREZ** and his wife Luzdela, coffee farmers in the town of Manzanares, Colombia, to earn a good, steady income for their family. The water they used to process their coffee — a critical step in coffee production — was running off and being absorbed into the soil, negatively affecting their coffee quality. Household waste water was also contaminating their sources of fresh water. The water their livelihoods depended on was hurting, not helping.

With training from Lutheran World Relief, Fabian, Luzdela and their neighbors learned farming methods that are more environmentally-friendly, including how to install and repair systems that prevent waste water from coffee processing from contaminating the fresh water supply. They've also received improved coffee processing equipment that requires less water and produces less waste. Fabian and Luzdela, as well as other families, have installed new sinks, toilets and septic systems that decontaminate household waste water before it goes back into the environment. The result? Clean water to drink — and to brew a steaming cup of coffee!

- 1 *What needs, other than thirst, does water address in our lives? As disciples of Jesus, water means even more for us as it delivers us into relationship with Jesus through baptism.*
- 2 *In the same way that small drops of water come together to form a mighty river, small choices like the coffee we drink can make a difference in the lives of those in poverty. Something as small as a cup of coffee and where it comes from can be incredibly important to a family we've never met.*
- 3 *The saving act of Jesus on the cross restores us to the life that God intends. In response, we are called to help restore dignity to our neighbors around the world, sometimes by means of installing new sinks, toilets and septic systems in communities.*

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REFUGEES

“And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you...”

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defines a refugee as a person who has suffered from war or persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or social group and has crossed an international border. At the end of 2016, there were 22.5 million refugees worldwide, and more than half were youth like **HALIMA**, a 17-year-old Palestinian refugee living in the Ein El Hilweh refugee camp in Lebanon. Having left nearly everything behind in their homeland, Halima’s family worried most about providing basic necessities like food, clothes and toiletries. Halima, like many young girls living in the camp, even had to share personal hygiene items like towels with family members.

Lutheran World Relief is able to provide refugee families with these basic necessities by distributing Mission Quilts and Kits of Care made by Lutherans in the United States! LWR partnered with American Near East Refugee Aid to distribute Personal Care Kits to Halima and her neighbors. Halima now has her own towel, which she also embroidered with a traditional Palestinian pattern during a training session at the camp. Her Personal Care Kit not only provided necessary hygiene supplies and the dignity which comes with that, but also allowed Halima the chance to see the beauty that can be created by her own hands.

- 1 *In the season of Lent, we all reflect upon how sin and brokenness have led us outside the borders of the Kingdom of God. But God’s grace restores our citizenship and calls us to new life. How should we respond to those who have been driven from their earthly homeland?*
- 2 *Lent is a season for us to set aside distractions from our life in Christ. What are we blessed to have in excess of what we need? How can we use these blessings for the sake of those who have little?*
- 3 *Jesus calls us not only to see the stranger, but to welcome them as we would him. What does it mean to welcome a stranger who is halfway around the world from us? Is it easier or harder to welcome a stranger who is close by?*

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EMERGENCIES

“...or naked and gave you clothing?”

The ISIS occupation of Mosul, Iraq, was devastating for eight-year-old **ZAHRAA** and her family. Zahraa survived the three-year siege that left most of West Mosul destroyed, but her older sister was killed in front of her in their home by an ISIS bombing. Her family needs to rebuild their home and livelihoods, and Zahraa also needs healing from the trauma of living under ISIS.

Lutheran World Relief is one of the only humanitarian organizations present in West Mosul, focusing on providing the psychosocial counseling children and families like Zahraa so desperately need at special community centers. At the “I Am Safe” community center, Zahraa’s healing comes in creative outlets, like drawing. The first time she came, she drew her deceased sister. Only a few weeks later, Zahraa was drawing birds and flowers, mountains and the sun, a house with big windows. She and her family are finally able to start putting their lives back together and heal the scars of war and occupation.

- 1 *When you think about responding to emergencies and helping communities overseas rebuild their lives, what has just happened? A hurricane? An earthquake? What about a war?*
- 2 *It’s easier to see the physical things that are lost in emergencies: lives, homes, clothing, jobs. In the story of Zahraa and her family, we see how their sense of security and hope has been lost. Working to restore security and hope is an important step in restoring communities.*
- 3 *We began this season professing that we are dust and to dust we shall return. The impact of disasters are such a powerful reminder of this. But the promise of Christ to be amongst those left naked by the world is stronger.*

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HEALTH

“And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”

In South Sudan, severe drought and civil war has brought the country to the brink of famine. Infants and young children, already the most vulnerable to the effects of extreme poverty, weak infrastructure and lack of access to basic services, are so severely malnourished that they are at risk of starvation. Many of these children are also suffering from malaria or diseases causing severe diarrhea, which only makes malnourishment worse.

Lutheran World Relief, with the support of U.S. Lutherans, has partnered with IMA World Health to set up three emergency treatment centers in areas of South Sudan where no other medical facilities exist. At these centers, medical providers measure the height, weight and mass of children to determine if they are malnourished. Children and mothers nursing infants receive 24-hour care until they are disease-free and the children reach a healthy weight. Mothers also receive highly fortified food supplements to keep their children’s weight up once they return home. Just under 100,000 women and children will receive health care at these centers.

- 1 *Of all of the situations we’ve found Jesus in this season, here he is the most vulnerable: lacking the two most basic human needs, health and freedom. This story from the work we make happen around the world finds people at their most vulnerable: children in need of those basic nutritional building blocks of life.*
- 2 *We all have been sick and experienced how much a visit or call from a friend can bring comfort. This is a difficult thing to offer to those halfway around the world, whom we’ve never met or maybe even do not speak the same language as us. Yet God calls us to be present. How can we do that with the most impact?*
- 3 *Throughout this season, where has the Spirit most worked in your heart? How will you continue to be present to those in need around the world?*

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