

Faith and Fair Food

L e c t i o n a r y C o m m e n t a r y

Second Sunday in Lent, March 4, 2007

The Rev. Matthew Lang, Pastor
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Lectionary Readings

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalms 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

My generation, Generation-X, is characterized by a healthy sense of irony. This is handy when it comes to ridiculing public officials, world leaders, and church bureaucrats. It is less helpful when it comes time to act. Our irony too often paralyzes us. We are trapped in the belief that “all is vanity” and “there is nothing new under the sun.” We are quick to critique, we delight in deconstructing, but when it comes time to take a stand, well, to take a stand may open one up to the clever and insightful mockery that is one of the strengths of my cohort.

Surely we would have had fun with old Abram and his trust in a God who promised him descendents as numerous as the stars in heaven. We would have made parodies of Psalm 27, labeled by the editors of my NRSV study Bible as a “Triumphant Song of Confidence.” Yeah, we’ll see about that. On the other hand, the lament over Jerusalem sounds about right. No matter how just the prophet, no matter how talented the prophet, no matter how intelligent the prophet, and no matter how faithful the prophet, the prophet will be rejected *in the very place in which the prophet is needed most*. Oh, the irony. To sum up the world view of many in my generation: what we do does not matter, nothing we try works.

However, this outlook eventually breaks down. It cannot account for the fact that God was faithful to Abram who became Abraham. It cannot account for the fact that people still sign triumphant songs of confidence (and even win Grammy awards for doing so). And although there is still reason to lament over Jerusalem, it cannot account for the fact that the Christian story does not end with a lament.

It also cannot account for the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. The CIW is a community-based worker organization whose members are largely Latino, Haitian, and Mayan Indian immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida. They know more

than anybody that conditions for working people in this country are lamentable. They know that the wages they get paid and the conditions in which they work are lamentable. They know that our fast food nation's obsessions with instant gratification and enormous profits are lamentable. So they lament.

However, they also believe that they shall "see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Therefore, they can say with confidence the prayer of the oppressed found in Psalm 27: 7-13. They know that the Lord is gracious to them and will answer them, the Lord will take them up and they will not be left defenseless against the false witness and violence of their adversaries. So they organize. And they make partnerships, with religious bodies like the PC(USA) and with students and with human rights organizations – fast food customers who care. And together, the CIW's story becomes our story and it does not end with lament.

Nor does our story end with winning farmworkers higher wages from Taco Bell/Yum! Brands as we did in March of 2005. Just as the Christian story is a series of laments and deliverance, so too is the story of the CIW and the Fair Food movement of religious, student and human rights allies. Currently we are lamenting the wages farmworkers get paid by the growers who supply tomatoes to McDonald's, and CIW is again organizing for their own deliverance. And they are coming to my home, Chicago, on April 13th and 14th. I'm excited. Really. Sincerely. It will matter. And if the church continues to stand together with them, we may bring a little more goodness into the land of the living.

Learn More and Take Action!

Join the CIW and their allies from the faith, student and human rights communities April 13th at McDonald's Headquarters in Oak Brook, IL and April 14th for a Fair Food Parade in downtown Chicago. Learn more about these two days of action as well as the entire "McDonald's Truth Tour 2007: Behind the Golden Arches" at www.ciw-online.org

Learn more about the Alliance for Fair Food, which the PC(USA) helped to found at www.allianceforfairfood.org. The AFF is a network of religious, student, human rights and labor institutions and individuals that work with the CIW to achieve human rights for farmworkers by demanding the retail food industry engage in socially responsible purchasing.