

Motivating for Ministry: World Hunger

By Ken Sehested

What can the church—the Body of Christ, the advance column of the coming kingdom of heaven—do about world hunger?

I have some suggestions to bring for your consideration this afternoon. It is a strategy that involved three parts: information, inspiration and instigation.

Information

Of the three parts to my information, the first—**information**—is the most obvious, so obvious that we tend to overlook its significant role. Enthusiasm and sincerity cannot make up for what you lose when you fail to do proper homework.

The few times my friends have been unsuspecting enough to ask me to keep their plants while they were away, I always have them write out detailed instructions about which is to be watered, how much, and when. I am afraid I have something of a black thumb when it comes to vegetation. Some plants require a lot of water, others very little. If like me you don't know the difference, you will end up killing both.

There is a surprising amount of sheer ignorance about hunger in this country. You can still hear parents in this country encouraging their children to eat all their food by appealing to “the starving children of China and India.” The reality is that last year India actually exported grain. (That is not to say there is not poverty, especially in its teeming cities.) And every observer returning from the People's Republic of China remarks on the near total absence of malnutrition in that country: a rather remarkable feat for a country with at least four times the population of our country and considered technologically primitive.

Specialists in the area of hunger and economic development like to refer to the “myths” of hunger awareness in this country. Here are just a few of those myths.

First, and probably foremost, we typically think of world hunger as the result of natural disasters—floods, droughts, etc.

Over the past decade we have, with the help of our sisters, become increasingly aware of the power dynamics in human affairs referred to as "sexism." Men are paid more than women for the same work. Men are promoted faster, receive more attention and greater benefits. Men's work is traditionally valued more than women's work. Cooking at home is most likely done by a woman, but cooking in a fancy restaurant is done by a man. Mending family clothes is usually the woman's job, but **tailors** of fine apparel are usually men. This occurs even in agriculture. The majority of the world's farmers are women, but in poor countries women are affected by hunger and malnutrition sooner than men.

My point is this: It's time we applied our analysis of sexism to the whole created order. **We need to stop blaming mother nature for causing hunger.** Hunger has much more to do with what **people** do to people than with what **nature** does to people.

Second, we tend to think the United States government plays Santa Claus to the world. I can still recall my high school civics teacher (who was also the head football coach) going into what must have been a weekly tirade about how our country threw away so much money trying to be friendly to poor countries, only to have those same countries be thoroughly ungrateful for all we had given them.

The reality is that the vast majority of all foreign aid dollars are spent in this country. Most foreign aid bills have clauses that require the recipient nation to buy goods and services from businesses in this country. Foreign aid is actually a real boom to U.S. merchants.

Listen to these facts: According to the Department of Commerce, U.S. companies receive \$3 in profit for every \$1 invested in Latin America. That is a pretty good investment opportunity! Again: In 1980 the United States contributed a smaller proportion of its Gross National Product to official development aid than any industrial country of Asia or Western Europe, with the exception of Switzerland. There simply is no justification for the popular image of this country playing Santa Claus to the world.

Third, we think of hunger as a food shortage problem. The truth is that the world now produces more food per capita than ever before in history. There is more than enough for every man, woman and child in the world to meet the minimal

standard of 2400 calories per day. Virtually every nation in the world has sufficient arable land to produce enough food for its own populace.

You have heard the old proverb that if you give a hungry person a fish he will eat for a day; but if you teach him how to fish he will eat for a lifetime. Well, that is not exactly correct because once he learns to fish he also has to be able to purchase fishing tackle and even skill and equipment are not worth much if there is no access to the fishing hole.

Hunger is not a food shortage problem. It is a food distribution problem. And that means, fundamentally, it is a question of who gets to make decisions and in whose interests.

Fourth, Americans like to focus on overpopulation as the cause of world hunger. The usual sentiment is, "Well, why don't they just quit having so many babies? Then there would be enough food for their families."

Few Americans are aware that this country and Europe went through their own population explosions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There was, of course, more than one factor that curbed this growth, but the major cause seemed to be the coming of the Industrial Revolution—economic growth. The vast majority of development specialists today would say that population growth—as serious as it is—will not be seriously curbed until poor nations begin to experience economic growth and some limited amount of economic security.

In some poor countries, there remains the social stigma of childless families. Many babies are a sign of male virility. But even more importantly, with the reality of infant mortality rates and with the prospect of growing old without any form of pension or social security, many parents will have as many children as possible. They are useful workers and a source of support when the body grows too weak to work.

Blaming overpopulation for causing hunger is a bit of twisted logic for U.S. citizens, given the fact that sixty percent of us are overweight. The average caloric intake of one of us could support four Third World peasants. The world can afford far fewer North Americans than Latin Americans. It takes 400 pounds of grain a month to fatten the average American cow in a grain lot. On the other side of the world,

the average Columbian eats 400 pounds of grain a year. Talk about sacred cows!

Finally, we tend to place our hope in technological solutions. We're anxious for a quick fix. We pray to the gods of science to save us from the mess we've created.

A couple of decades ago there was a scientific breakthrough hailed as the answer to hunger. It was called the "Green Revolution." Simply put, we were able to create a hybrid grain—something like a "super grain"—that grew faster and provided enormous yield. The problem was that it required comparable amounts of water and fertilizer. So who did it end up helping? the local elites in Third World countries who could afford the expense of growing it.

This is not to say that new technologies are not still needed, but hunger remains fundamentally a human problem not a technical one. If new technologies are created, whose benefit will they serve? Unless the dominant strata of political and economic power is altered—unless the poor are given the power to make decisions for themselves—the potential for human cleverness and ingenuity will only fortify the current arrangements. The revised, non-standard version of the Golden Rule is the one enforced in today's world: "Them that has the gold gets to make the rules."

Every political issue is ultimately a spiritual issue. (I'm using the word "political" here in its broad, generic sense—rather than in its partisan or party sense.) The consistent theme of scripture is that our relationship to God is reflected in our relationships with our brothers and sisters. The book of I John says it without any circumspection: "If someone says they love God, but they hate their neighbors, then you know they're lyin' through their teeth." (That is a Sehested paraphrase.)

Inspiration

This brings me to the second element of my strategy for combating world hunger, the need for what I'm calling **inspiration**.

I have talked with countless pastors and lay leaders who complain that their people "know" about world hunger, but they just cannot seem to get motivated to do anything about it.

We do not do what we should because we do not understand who we are. And we do not understand who we are because we are a biblically illiterate people.

Our denomination is in serious need of more information, more people willing to serve and train, higher quality educational materials, greater agency emphasis, and certainly more funds. But the greatest need we have—one that outweighs all the other needs put together—is genuine spiritual renewal, nothing less than revival. And I'm suggesting that one primary way we can ready ourselves for a truly Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit is through a renewed emphasis on Bible reading and study.

You may be thinking about now that I got confused in my preparation for this address . . . that I thought I was getting ready to speak at the Pastors' Conference rather than to the campus ministers!

There is a lot of talk about the Bible among our people these days, a lot of bickering over who takes the Bible most seriously. It is alternately humorous and depressing to observe. But the Bible isn't the real issue in all that squabbling. The real issue is control over a billion dollar corporation. The most well-worn bit of humor in circulation today is the story about the two pastors discussing what they would do if the convention split, whereupon one replies that he is going wherever the Annuity Board goes!

Our experience at SEEDS in working with local churches is interesting in this regard. You would think that since hunger concern is supposed to be one of the "liberal, social issues" that we would have most success working with "liberal, socially-minded" churches. If you will allow for a little exaggeration, I would have to say the opposite is true. Although such churches are in fact the ones that talk about the issue the most, they are frequently the least courageous when it comes to action. I do not think it is a coincidence that, as a group, these are some of our most socially and economically mobile congregations.

Notice the way Jesus poses the ultimate contradistinction on the question of loyalties: "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Luke 16:13, NASB) And who is this mammon character? Was it a first century Palestinian deity competing against Yahweh God for the affection of the Hebrew people? No! "Mammon" was an everyday, garden-variety term

meaning "wealth," "possessions," "security," "money," "influence," "power." "Faith," said Clarence Jordan, "is not a stubborn belief in spite of all evidence. That is not faith, that is foolishness. Faith is not belief in spite of evidence, but a **life** in scorn of the consequences."

The common thread that links the very different sorts of congregations SEEDS has worked closely with on hunger issues is not their theory on the interpretation of scripture, not their relative support of the Cooperative Program, not whether their pastors were trained at Southern or Southwestern, not whether they observe open or closed communion, not whether their choral music was Buryl Red or J. S. Bach, not their position on the security of the believer. The common trait these churches share is their willingness to take personal and institutional economic risks for the sake of those who have no power to return the favor. The common link is their ability to see inherent value and worth in people for whom the world's economic, political and social systems have little or no use. Their theological sophistication may be nothing more than a conviction that "Jesus doesn't want people to be hungry," but their willingness to make personal sacrifices is an eloquent testimony to their faith. E. F. Schumacher was fond of saying that "an ounce of practice is generally worth a ton of theory." Let me baptize that statement and say that an ounce of discipleship is generally worth a ton of theology and doctrine.

What I am saying is that—despite our profession to the contrary—we have a tightly-controlled and culturally-conditioned reading of the Bible. I would go so far as to project that future church historians will compare the offers of grace by twentieth century evangelical churches to the offers of dispensation by the sixteenth century Roman Catholic Church. Correspondingly, I am suggesting that the necessary antidote now, as it was then, is to encourage Christians to read the Bible for themselves and in a new, fresh way.

Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners* magazine, has written about an experiment you might try for yourself sometime. During his seminary days, he and a small group of other seminarians who met together for prayer and Bible study decided to read through the entire Bible with a special purpose in mind. They marked every passage which dealt with issues of

wealth and poverty; every passage where God was quoted as having special concern for the weak, the poor, the hungry; every passage where the implication for righteousness and faithfulness to God was reflected in our relations with other people, particularly with those who suffer. When they finished, they took an old Bible and cut out each of those passages. They were absolutely amazed when that project was finished. Why? Because there was precious little material left! When that process was finished, the Bible had been effectively stripped of its most dominant theme.

Let me give you an analogy relating to agriculture. Some of you probably know of the double-bind affecting many rural areas of third world countries. In order to have fire to cook their meager meals, many peasants end up clearing the hills on which they live of all trees in the search for firewood. When this denuding takes place, when the soil has no anchors to keep it in place, the rain erodes away what precious little topsoil is there. This vicious cycle is so devastating that in time there is neither food to eat nor firewood to cook it.

This same sort of process is at work in our congregations in relation to our study of Scripture—that source-book that shapes our fundamental identity. With ever-increasing feats of ingenuity we continue to rip away the deep root system which gives the Bible its coherence and significance for the living and ordering of our lives according to God's standard of righteousness and faithfulness and obedience. And under the pounding rain of the world's pressure to conform our lives to its values and its purposes, the authority of Scripture—its ability to form and shape our behavior in radically different ways—is eroded. The rich and fertile soil out of which we live as growing and maturing disciples of Jesus is washed away to form the mud floor of rivers, lakes and oceans.

The preaching from our pulpits continues this subtle, deadly assault on the World of God. The inerrancy folk among us are as susceptible as anyone. We continue to relativize, compromise and homogenize Scriptures' clear teaching regarding its picturing of God as having a distinct bias toward the poor, the hungry, the outcast, all those who suffer. With the anchor of this teaching uprooted, chopped up and burned in the fire to satisfy our personal and institutional cravings, Scripture is left to the whims of interpreters who are free to mold its authority into support of the status quo.

Let me give you a couple of true stories that illustrate this process.

Last year I read a Baptist Press story about a prominent pastor in our convention, the leader of a growing, large congregation. In a church newsletter message to his congregation, he talked about a burden which gripped his heart. He started off by saying how joyful he was that the church continued to grow. Then he said that if the church continued to be faithful, it would continue to grow. And that's where the problem came in. The church was already short of parking space. Continued growth would only add to the problem.

With this in mind, according to the pastor, he went to the Lord in prayer and began searching the Scriptures for counsel. Being a good Baptist, I decided to open my Bible and read along with him. Although he did not actually give reference to the exact passages, I was able to use my concordance to look up the "Sell what you have" passages. Listen to what I found. The first text is Matthew 19:21. "Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be complete, go and sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.'" Then in Luke's gospel (12:33-34): "Sell your possessions and give to charity . . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

I am sure all of you here are at least vaguely familiar with the field of study known as the psychology of perception. The insights provided by this academic discipline are ones that help us understand why we see and perceive certain sensory stimulations and ignore others. As perceptual psychologists have demonstrated, we unconsciously use certain mental grids or screening mechanisms that allow some information in and keep other information out.

For example, when I am driving down the highway, unless I am hungry or out of gas or needing to use the bathroom, I generally pay no attention to billboard advertisements; or, if you are a parent of small children, you learn to discriminate between the different ways your child cries. Some cries indicate only momentary episodes of irritation. You get to where you hardly notice those. Others are genuine cries of pain or fear that need attention. If I were to ask you to close your eyes and tell me the color of the floor tile (or carpet) in this room

or the color of the clothes of the person sitting next to you, most of you would not be able to answer correctly.

We simply make choices not to pay attention to some information. We screen out certain bits of data in order to pay attention to others.

That is what we do with the Bible, too. In the story I just told you about the pastor's reference to Scripture, what was blocked out, screened out, was the point of why we are commanded to "sell all that we have." The logic of Scripture is that we do this in order to give to the poor . . . not create new parking lots for wealthy churches.

And here's another story that illustrates this. Many of you here know about Gary Rand, a contemporary Christian musician and Southern Baptist. (And if you are not familiar with Gary's music, or with another musician, Darrell Adams, you should be. They are both excellent composers and singers who are writing a new genre of contemporary Christian music that draws on those biblical passages that refer to themes of justice.)

Gary works closely with his wife, Lenora, who is the lyricist of the pair. Several years ago they wrote a song based on Isaiah 58 that was inspired by a letter from Lenora's mother. In the letter Lenora's mother mentioned several passages from Isaiah 58 that contained some of the most gorgeous images and poetic metaphors she had ever come across. Things like: "Your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily . . . The Lord will satisfy you with good things and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a well-watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters fail not." This is really breathtaking material. But Gary and Lenora noticed that some of those sentences began with the word "then." Thinking that to be an odd way to start a sentence, they decided to read the whole chapter. You can imagine their amazement at what they found. Starting in verse 6, it reads: "Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; . . . then shall your light break out like the dawn."

You got the idea. Isn't it odd how we screen out the "if" parts of the passage and move straight to the "then" parts?

We have been conditioned to mentally and spiritually ignore the “if” parts of the Bible—the requirements of obedience and faithfulness—and go straight to the “then” parts—the promises and rewards. Several months later Gary told me how a bookcover caught his eye while browsing in a Christian bookstore. The title was **All the Promises of the Bible**. Out of curiosity, he looked up some of those passages in Isaiah 58 in the book’s index. Sure enough, several of the verses from the chapter were listed, but in every case the book’s editor had failed to start the sentences with the word “then.” It was simply: “The Lord will satisfy you with good things.”

So you will not think the Isaiah 58 case is an isolated one, let me briefly run through just a few other texts that illustrate the same point.

When the subject of hungry people comes up, a platitude often heard in response is, “Ah, well, the poor will be with you always.” It is a shorthand way of saying we should be resigned to that fact, that there is really nothing we can do. Some people even think they are quoting Jesus. It is true that they are expressing his meaning. Jesus was simply employing a technique common in the New Testament where a speaker would quote part of an Old Testament passage, knowing that the listeners would recall the entire text. Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 15:11, which reads like this: “For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’ ”

Here’s another example from the prophet Isaiah. There is probably not a Southern Baptist preacher worth his salt who does not have a sermon on Isaiah 1:18. It is truly one of the most moving and reassuring texts in all the Bible: “ ‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ Says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.’ ” But never have I heard that thought associated with the verse immediately preceding it, verse 17, which reads: “ ‘Learn to do good; Seek justice; Reprove the ruthless; Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.’ ” Only then does it say, “ ‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord.”

Virtually all of us associate the abomination, the sin, of Sodom and Gomorrah with deviant sexual practices. But when

the prophet Ezekiel refers to the abomination committed by the inhabitants of those sister cities, listen to what he cites: "Behold this was the guilt of your sister Sodom; she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy." (Ezekiel 16:49, NASB)

Ephesians 2:8-9 is usually the first reference in every different version of a soul-winner's and personal witnessing guide: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." But the verse immediately following, verse 10, is never listed: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Also in Ephesians 4:28: "Let him who steals, steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good. . . ." Sounds like something out of a Department of Justice public service announcement. But the verse doesn't end there. It goes on to say why this should happen: "In order that he may have something to share with him who has need."

All of you are familiar with the common formula reading for observing the Lord's Supper found in I Cor. 11: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread. . . ." etc.

But have you ever paid attention to the material immediately above those verses? Starting with verse 20, Paul admonishes that rambunctious congregation at Corinth this way: "Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? **Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing?**" Notice the way he links together two things we usually keep separate—despising the church of God and humiliating the poor.

You cannot get a higher Christology than that found in Hebrews 10. That is the passage that elaborately describes Christ as the ultimate high priest, making the supreme sacrifice in our behalf. Beginning in verse 19, the author thunders this overpowering assurance of forgiveness: "Since therefore,

brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the view, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

Then, with only a semicolon’s brief pause, the thought follows through to completion: “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. . . .” William Barclay suggests that a better translation of this thought would be: “And let us **incite** one another to love and good deeds.”

You will notice that I have not even touched the Gospels. In the synoptics alone one out of every ten verses mentions the deeply spiritual issues involved in the use of wealth and relation to the poor. In all my teen-age years of doing youth revivals, in all my years since of listening to or preaching sermons, I have not yet seen someone come forward at the hymn of invitation to make the kind of confession of faith in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior as did Zacchaeus. Do you remember when he let Jesus come into his heart? Do you remember what his first response was? He said, “Lord, I’ll give away half my goods to the poor, and if I’ve cheated anybody, I’ll return four times as much.” When folks start walking the aisle at the close of our church services and evangelistic crusades in **those** terms, the church will once again claim its identity as a scandalous institution in the world’s eyes.

A couple of years ago I did a program for the Georgia Tech BSU in Atlanta. I started off by asking the students to write a definition of Christian discipleship, requesting that it be brief—limited to a maximum of two sentences. After giving them three minutes, I listed two columns on a blackboard, one titled “nouns,” the other “verbs,” and asked them to give me examples of both that they had used in their definitions. After that listing, I had different students read seventeen different Bible passages that speak of God’s special concern for poor and hungry people. Then I gave them a chance to revise their definitions if they chose to do so.

After the program, the BSU president came up to me and said, “You know, when you started out by talking about Chris-

tian discipleship I was really confused . . . I thought you were going to do a program about world hunger. But I finally realized what you were doing after we read all the Bible verses.”

Let me catch you up on where I am in all this. First, I talked about the need for doing homework—the need for good and accurate information is obvious if we are to do anything effective about world hunger. Second, if the plight of the poor is ever to be a legitimate part of the church’s agenda—if we are to begin to see it as a part of the core curriculum of the church and not just an optional elective concern for those who have taken care of the requirements—then we are going to have to get back to some serious Bible study. We are going to have to be part of a new reformation, where Bible reading is promoted with a renewed vigor and intensity. We are going to have to return to the primary source of our identity.

Instigation

Information . . . inspiration . . . and finally, **instigation**. We are going to find outlets for acting on our information, empowered by our inspiration. We are going to have to instigate new forms of ministry whereby we can hear **from** the poor and not just hear **about** the poor.

Information and inspiration, you see, are like the alternating currents of electricity in a wall socket. If nothing ever gets plugged in to that electrical outlet, it’s really pretty useless. We can only complete the circuit when the information and inspiration components get **instigated** into concrete and direct efforts of compassionate ministry.

The pungent little epistle of James gets uncomfortably and embarrassingly specific about this very point: “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is it?” (1:15-16) Can’t you just hear the contemporary versions of that posture of piety? “God bless you, brother . . . Jesus saves . . . God had a wonderful plan for your life. God will lift you out of poverty if you’ll just ask Jesus into your heart.”

The thing I would like to emphasize at this juncture is that this compassionate outpouring of our lives for the sake of those who are broken is not a revised form of what we refer to as “works-righteous.” We never have, never can, and never

will be able to justify ourselves in the eyes of God. We shall never be promoted to any rank higher than that of being saved solely through the merciful initiative of God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What I am saying is that **we** are the ones in need of this ministry. The streets that lead us to the broken lives and spirits of the poor and the hungry are the very avenues we must travel if we want a glimpse of the battle front where God is waging war with the devil, where the struggle with the Prince of Darkness—what Paul referred to as the “principalities and powers” of this world—is taking place.

If it has been awhile since you read Jesus’ own discription of what is going to happen at Judgment Day—that moment when history as we know it ceases and God comes to fully reclaim, renew and recreate the world which was made in tender loving-kindness—go back to your room this evening and work your way through it—Matthew 25:31-46. Read it very slowly, one word at a time. As many times as I’ve preached from it, referred to it, written about it, I still get chill bumps. I look forward to the day when the fire and brimstone, when all the sparks and smoke and flames produced by the orators at meetings like the one we have gathered for this week will be generated by the explosion Jesus sets off in the parable. **Jesus . . . our lord and savior . . . our high priest . . . the subject of more sermons, devotions, articles, hymns and anthems than even the most pious among us could endure . . . the one by whom we have access to the throne of Almighty God. . . .**

This very one, Jesus, Son of God . . . encountered in the faces of the hungry, the faces of these dying of thirst, in the faces of strangers—those “foreigners” and illegal aliens who steal our jobs away . . . found in the faces of those without adequate clothing . . . found in the faces distorted with disease and sickness . . . found in the faces of those in cell blocks and solitary confinement.

This very Jesus . . . born in a manger, actually a feeding trough for cows . . . wrapped in swaddling clothes—which sounds picturesque and quaint, but actually means he was wrapped with rags, scrap pieces of leftover garments.

This very Jesus . . . of whom his mother, Mary, rejoiced while he was still **in utero**: “He has done mighty deeds with his arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thought

of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed." (Luke 1:51-53)

This very Jesus . . . who welcomed children into his presence the way we would welcome the President of the United States.

This very Jesus . . . who taught that bewildering, foolish doctrine that if we are to find our lives, then we must give them away, offer them up, for the sake of those with no power to bless us, no power to thank us, no power to return the favor.

This very Jesus . . . who finally demonstrated with his own flesh all that he had been trying to say . . . who watered that ominous Garden with his own tears and then offered up his own blood under the charge of political subversion.

This very Jesus . . . who after three days in the grave blew back the stone and went to his cowering, cowardly entourage of peasants, widows, farmers and fishermen to comfort and encourage them to remain faithful.

This very Jesus . . . who said "Anyone who would follow me must take up his cross." . . . Who said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also **do** the works that I do." . . . and of whom it was written by the church's first and foremost theologian: "It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only **believe** in him but **also suffer for his sake.**"

It is this very same Jesus whom we meet in our compassionate encounters whose bodies are so lacking in simple calories that they become self-cannibalistic, each one eating away at its own tissue in the maddening will to survive.

This very Jesus is the One whom the church must learn to recognize not only as the Savior of its eternal destiny—but also the **Lord** of its living history. It is to his pattern of living and dying that we are called to be converted. It is in his footsteps that our cravings and desires will be satisfied; it is through participating in his suffering that our grief becomes the fertilizer for the growth of joy. And hear me, brothers and sisters—when joy breaks out in the church, all heaven will break forth upon the earth.

And now for a word with our sponsor. Let us pray.