God’s Concern and Our Responsibility

God is a God of history, constantly transforming our world. We can see evidence of God’s hand shaping our world and surprising us.

Scripture shows us a God who hears the cry of enslaved people and delivers them. God used Moses to appeal to the Egyptian government to release the enslaved Hebrew people. This began the long journey of the Israelites great exodus from Egypt. “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today…” (Exodus 14:13)

God also uses enlightened rulers as agents of deliverance. In Psalm 72, King David offers prayerful instruction for his son Solomon, who will become the ruler of a nation. David’s expression of devotion and care for his people, near and far, is a foreshadowing of the righteous reign of Christ and his promise and covenant. “For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper… From oppression and violence he redeems their life… (Psalm 72:12-14)

God even uses the enlightened intervention of foreign governments. The good and faithful governor Nehemiah rebuilds a community, giving life and restoring dignity to the people, with the support of the God-inspired benevolence of King Cyrus of Persia. (Nehemiah 5:1-6)

Jesus is God at work in history, as sins were forgiven, sight restored, and sickness healed. As members of the body of Christ, we are a transformed people listening for God’s invitation to create life-giving changes.

As citizens of the United States and stewards of God’s creation, we have a unique calling. The way the U.S. responds to those in need is God’s concern and our responsibility.

GOD IS CALLING US TO SHARE IN THIS NEW CREATION.

At the turn of the millennium, the global Jubilee campaign for debt relief was an international example of a response to great need. So, too, are the Millennium Development Goals, international targets for reducing poverty that most of the world’s nations agreed to in 2000. Isn’t this God at work in our time, responding
again to the cries of people enslaved by poverty and hunger?

Reforming U.S. foreign aid policies and programs is our chance to join God in creating something new. Making these changes can touch millions of lives and transform poverty and despair into life and dignity. Increasing the effectiveness and delivery of foreign assistance can move peoples from suffering to dignity – mothers can live through childbirth, infants can survive the clutches of parasitic illness, boys and girls can learn to read, and parents can earn enough to feed their families.

God is up to something and is calling us to share in this new creation.

Living on $5 per day or less in the United States

Transforming U.S. foreign aid does not exclude transforming U.S. domestic aid. We read stories about people in the developing world living on $1 or $2 a day and it’s easy to think that’s all happening somewhere else. But there is also extreme poverty in the United States, and many Americans would be shocked to learn there are actually families trying to get by on a few dollars per day right here in the U.S.

Rebecca Blank, an economist at the University of Michigan and the Brookings Institution, studies this group and has recently published a report highlighting some new and disturbing trends. While this group has always existed, the numbers have been increasing since welfare reform legislation in 1996.

Blank describes these families as "disconnected," and by that she means those in which the parent does not work, or works only a small amount, and the family does not receive cash welfare payments as part of the national welfare program Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

Blank's study focuses exclusively on families made up of single mothers. She estimates there are some 2.2 million single mothers, with an average of 1.8 children per mother, or about 4 million children, who are disconnected. The average annual income of this group is between $4,287 and $4,435. Using a simple calculation, that comes to roughly $4 - $5 per day. Three people (single mother, two children), over 365 days, use up $4,435 at a rate of $4 - $5 per day.

Families this poor are likely to have many problems. Some of the most common are:
- Less education and more learning disabilities
- High levels of past or current levels of substance abuse
- High rates of depression and forms of mental illness as well as more physical health problems
- Young children or larger families and are more likely to be caring for someone with health issues
- A history of domestic violence or violence in a current relationship

The point is the current welfare system does a terrible job in making sure these families get the help they need. These families may be poor for the reasons above, but they are disconnected because the welfare system fails them. Blank explains, "Federal requirements create a strong incentive for states to remove disadvantaged women from their caseload through time limits and sanctions: this may increase the number of disconnected women and their children who face serious poverty."

Welfare reform legislation in 1996 was intended to get welfare-dependent parents into the workforce and begin moving them towards self-sufficiency. For the majority of parents who have been on TANF, it has at least gotten them into the workforce. But for the hardest cases, meaning parents who face the greatest barriers to obtaining or maintaining a job, welfare reform has been a cruel reckoning. As Blank's research shows, this is not an insignificant number of families.

For a large share of Americans, the U.S. labor market no longer works as a reliable way to build a stable career and support their families. This was true before the job losses of the current recession (as of October 2009, there were 7.6 million fewer jobs since 2007). Unless there are structural changes in the economy, it will be true again once the recession is over.

A TOTAL OF 16 U.S. STATES HAVE POVERTY RATES OF 15% OR HIGHER

TOP 10 STATES WITH PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY
1. MISSISSIPPI – 20.6%
2. ARIZONA – 19.6%
3. NEW MEXICO – 19.3%
4. DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA – 17.2%
5. ARKANSAS – 17.1%
6. KENTUCKY – 17.0%
7. GEORGIA – 16.9%
8. TEXAS – 16.6%
9. LOUISIANA – 16.2%
10. TENNESSEE – 15.8%

Down on the bottom of the economic ladder, where too many people who once had middle-income careers now reside, the real value of wages when adjusted for inflation has been declining for years.

One in four jobs does not pay enough to lift a family of four out of poverty. More than 1 in 8 people in the U.S. lives below the poverty line, which is $21,946 for a family of four in 2009.
Child hunger is a significant problem in the U.S. and President Obama said he wants to end child hunger in the U.S. by 2015.

Nearly one in four kids – 17 million children – struggle against hunger in the U.S. While hunger affects people of all ages, it is particularly devastating for children. Even short-term episodes of hunger can cause lasting damage to child development, putting children at risk for a range of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physical problems.

As we work to reform U.S. foreign aid we cannot forget that U.S. farm policy also needs reform. There is hunger in America as well as other parts of the world and U.S. farm policy is where ending hunger begins.

Join the Walk for the Hungry
Saturday, March 19th

Contact
jfremsn@loyno.edu
504-458-3029