



## Parallels

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This past week, I received an uplifting story about a family building a Habitat home together. They are tackling the problem of unaffordable housing one house at a time. Common Ground, a Presbytery partner, announced its new agenda for community organizing, and it includes a focus on jobs, especially for those reentering society after incarceration. The members of Common Ground are tackling the problem of recidivism and unfair employment in Wisconsin communities. At least a dozen people came together to donate necessary furnishings for two apartments to house 5 men, who have escaped labor trafficking. Our churches are tackling the problem of exploitation through care for individual workers.

Even though our Presbytery focus has shifted to food security, our Matthew 25 efforts in other areas have not ended. More than a year ago, we dove into Matthew 25 by looking at access to affordable medical care, then secure housing, then criminal justice, and most recently the exploitation of workers. We didn't solve any of those problems. We can't check off a box and pretend our work is finished. Our examination of these Matthew 25 categories (hunger, sickness, vulnerability, imprisonment, displacement) gave us a glimpse at the vastness of the problems, but it didn't end the problems. Our examination gave us a glimpse of the pervasiveness of human suffering.

I was struck this past week at the parallels between Matthew 25 and Psalm 107. The psalmist lays out these same areas of human despair: hunger, thirst, sickness, imprisonment, crushing labor, and displacement. For each, we hear the assuring song that God will change and restore the people. God is rescuer and comforter. God is provider and liberator. As the church we celebrate how God frees us from these situations.

Because we are people of the New Testament though, we don't stop with Psalm 107. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus does what Jesus does best: he turns it all upside down. The lord places himself in the position of weakness, suffering each of these situations. Astonished followers ask the question, "Lord, when did we see **you** hungry, thirsty, sick, a stranger or imprisoned?" Surely the lord could not have experienced such hurt; the lord is the one who resolves the hurting. Psalm 107 recounts the Lord's authority and goodness, not weakness and suffering.

Jesus doesn't let us stop with Psalm 107, confident in God's love and comfort. Instead, we are called into service ourselves. We are invited into a ministry of responsibility toward our neighbors, a ministry of compassion and aid, a ministry of hospitality and accompaniment.

At our November 18 Presbytery Gathering – coming soon to a Zoom screen near you! – we will "wrap up" our exploration of food security. We won't have solved the problem of hunger. In many ways, we will just be starting to recognize it. From there, we act. We offer help to individuals who need it, we combat the root causes of the problem, and we advocate for change. Yes, we find assurance in Psalm 107. No, it's not enough. Thanks be to the God of the Psalms and the gospels who shows us the way of love.