

**PENTECOST:  
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

**Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Proper 18**

**September 6, 2009**

**Isaiah 35:4-7a**

**Psalm 146**

**James 2:1-10 [11-13] 14-17**

**Mark 7:24-37**

**Confessions of a Bleeding-Heart Liberal**

I must admit, I'm a sucker for justice. My good conservative friends even call me a bleeding-heart liberal. This being the case, the passages for this week were right up my alley! Psalm 146 sings of a God who "gives food to the hungry" and "executes justice for the oppressed" (verse 7, *RSV*). Praise the LORD, indeed! Isaiah's vision of return is utopian, and James' rhetoric reminds us of whom God chooses: "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith?" (2:5b, *RSV*). Before I grow too smug, however, I'm reminded of last Christmas.

After a long day of taking Christmas dinner to homeless people on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, I just wanted to go into my office and start working on my to-do list! Well, that morning my sermon was at the top of the list. In preparation, I was reading a book by Taylor Field, the pastor of East 7<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church also known as Graffiti. The upcoming sermon was on love, so I thought that this book would give me some insight on Taylor's love for the Lower East Side, the very place we were serving Christmas dinner the night before.

I was thinking about how cool a guy Taylor was when my secretary interrupted me and told me that Ernesto was here. I didn't put down the book; rather, I had to think whether or not I was going to let Ernesto into my office. He was somewhat of a regular benevolence issue. I just helped him with some groceries in the recent past and I really needed to work on my sermon, so I was wondering if I should just say I didn't have time to talk! He always takes at least an hour. After a big sigh, slumped shoulders and a folded book, I told Mary to send him in.

Ernesto walked into my office very humbly like he always does. After our exchange of greetings, he holds out a Christmas gift bag and tells me to open it. He said that his family back in El Salvador makes these belts and he wanted me to have one for Christmas. He had an excitement in his eyes that I've never seen before. It was his turn to give something to me and he was beside himself with joy. Instead of spending an hour helping Ernesto, Ernesto spent fifteen minutes helping me. The irony of my being

bothered by a “benevolence case” while writing a sermon on love was profound! Ernesto had another gift with him, so he left and walked through Wilton, CT, in the cold of December probably delivering a gift to another unsuspecting “care giver.” He left me in my warm office pontificating about what kind of jerk I was. May God have mercy on us both, but especially Ernesto.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by the Rev. K. Jason Coker, pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. Visit [www.wiltonbaptist.org](http://www.wiltonbaptist.org) to learn more about the ministries of Wilton Baptist Church. Rev. Coker is an ordained minister with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Liberia –**

With thanks to God for the success of the Society’s main projects, and with prayers for funding for the printing and distribution of the Klao (Kru) Bible and for a vehicle to allow Bible Society staff to work in rural areas, and with prayers for peace and love to prevail in Liberia; **Sierra Leone** – With thanks to God for political stability, for the launch of the Kuranko Bible, Kono New Testament, the Krio and Mende audio Scriptures, and the *Good Samaritan* program, and with prayers for growing religious tolerance that is encouraging many people to come to Christ; **Nigeria** – With thanks to God that Bible distribution has reached high levels and that demand for the Scriptures continues to rise, and with prayers for the ability to meet this growing need, for audio Scripture work among rural communities, and for God’s grace as Bible Society workers make their presence felt in Abuja, the capital; **Guinea** – With thanks for God’s blessings, and with prayers for the completion of the construction of Bible House, for a strong team to work for God’s glory, for sufficient funds to carry out all projects, and for fruitful collaboration between the churches and the Bible Society.

**Activity Corner: “Faith in Action” Calendar and Commitment Prayer**

Supplies needed: Bible; pens or pencils; photocopy of calendar page for September (with boxes for each day).

Read Psalm 146 and James 2:1-17. How does the psalm writer describe God’s faithfulness? How does the writer of James connect actions with faith? Read Mark 7:24-37 and compare this account with Matthew 15:21-28. How does Jesus respond to the woman’s request? How does the woman demonstrate her faith? Based on these readings, discuss the role of faith in relation to our daily actions. Distribute copies of the September calendar to each member of your household and invite them to fill in the remaining boxes for the month with a “faith action.” On the back of the calendar, encourage them to write a prayer of commitment, asking for God’s guidance in putting their faith into action each day.