



Katie Willis Rhodes

# Hungering for Action

BY JESSICA MAUDLIN

In my work with the Presbyterian Hunger Program, I work with Earth Care Congregations that are hungry to honor God's very good creation. These are congregations that feed that hunger by pledging to integrate environmentally friendly practices into multiple facets of their church life—worship, education, facilities and outreach. These churches show that they take seriously God's charge to "till and keep" the garden.

In my personal life, my fiancé and I have chosen to live out part of our charge to "till and keep" as foster parents. In the last five years, we've had eight tiny humans in our home.

## Little Moose

One of these little people we nicknamed Moose. Moose came to us at three months old. The great grandmother who had been caring for him was unable to continue to do so, and her only words of advice were

that we would know when he was hungry.

Wow, you all!

This little man was hungry all the time! Not your normal this-is-a-small-person-so-there's-frequent-eating kind of hungry. It was a non-stop, nothing but a bottle would comfort him, unable to sleep for more than an hour without a bottle, inconsolable crying hungry.

Something about that just didn't sit right with me. An unhelpful doctor suggested that he was "a big boy" and that maybe he was just hungry. By that point I knew some things about babies, and I didn't believe that was true.

Under a different doctor's supervision, we tried everything to help Moose. More formula less often, less formula more often, rice in the bottle with the formula, a little water in the bottle between feedings, an early start on baby food.

And guess what? None of that helped.

## Listening Carefully

Something wasn't right. He was stiff as a board when I held him. He wouldn't sleep. He had respiratory problems and illness after illness, so much so that a few months in, I found myself with him in the back of an ambulance when a visit to our new pediatrician went south quickly.

Moose's hunger and his response to that hunger was telling us something very important. We just couldn't hear it. And because we couldn't hear it, we couldn't respond appropriately to it. Six months into the journey, we found someone who did know. This person could hear what Moose's body was saying and presented us with some life-changing and lifesaving information.

Our Moose had allergies.

Milk, wheat and corn—you know, most of the basic baby diet ingredients—were all causing potentially life-threatening issues. One of the issues was that he was unable to take the nutrients his body needed from the food he was consuming.

Moose didn't need more food. He needed to be to be nourished.

Equipped with this piece of understanding about Moose's hunger, we adjusted our course of action and very quickly we had a different baby. He slept, the rage dissipated, he let us hold him, snuggle him.

Responding actively to the hunger, listening to what it meant, and changing our actions accordingly opened a whole new world for this little man.

## Filled or Nourished?

I thought about this experience with our little Moose recently when I came across a blog post on the Sermon on the Mount. The author, Fin Sheridan, talks about coming to a different understanding of Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they



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seeking the blessing of our hunger being filled, we leaned fully into seeing the blessing of the hunger itself? If, instead of noticing hunger and answering with the expected food, we considered what nourishment is, what can deliver that, for how many and at what cost.

What might our lives look like if the rumblings of our spiritual and emotional hunger drove us to seek different answers, different sources, different plans?

### Get Up, Go Ahead

When I get too comfortable with my reading of scripture, I find it helpful to seek out different translations of what I think I know.

In looking for a slightly different take on the Sermon on the Mount, I came across a reflection on the Beatitudes from Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Christian.

Because the Bible as we know it is a translation of a translation, we sometimes get a wrong impression. For example, we are used to hearing the Beatitudes expressed passively:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

“Blessed” is the translation of the word *makarioi*, used in the Greek New Testament. (This word puts the receiver in a passive position.) However, when I look farther back to Jesus’ Aramaic, I find that the original word was *ashray*, from the verb *yashar*. *Ashray* does not have this passive quality to it at all. Instead, it means “to set yourself on the right way for the right goal; to turn around, repent; to become straight or righteous.”

When I understand Jesus’ words in the Aramaic, I translate like this:

Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for you shall be satisfied.

Get up, go ahead, do something, move, you peacemakers, for you shall be called children of God.

To me this reflects Jesus’ words and teachings much more accurately. I can hear him saying, “Get your hands dirty to build a human society for human beings; otherwise, others will torture and murder the poor, the voiceless, and the powerless.” Christianity is not passive but active, energetic, alive, going beyond despair.<sup>2</sup>

will be filled.”<sup>1</sup> Fin mentions that for much of his life he’d been caught up with pursuing and focusing on the promise of being filled.

He says, “I wanted the rumblings of my soul’s stomach to stop. I wanted my desire fulfilled, not stoked. By grace, I partook, I tasted and saw. But then, I became inoculated. I had just enough of God in my life to be disinterested . . .” He goes on to say that in this season of his life he has begun to pray for something different—to be kept hungry.

It seems like such a bizarre request—to ask for more hunger instead of more satisfaction. But it caused me to pause and wonder what would have happened in our story with Moose if he suddenly wasn’t hungry? What if he’d just accepted another bottle, what if I’d found a way to soothe the crying and raging? We would have addressed the symptoms but left the cause—his need for nourishment—unanswered.

Who might we become and what change could occur if, instead of

“Get up, go ahead, do something, move,” Jesus said to his disciples.

I love this. It’s powerful. It gives us direction. We aren’t held captive by our hunger, our thirst. In this Beatitude we can hear the challenge to “Get up, go ahead, do something, move,” knowing that this challenge comes with a promise that our life circumstances will not go unseen and unaddressed.

In this season of your life, may you be able to ask yourself questions about your spiritual hunger. May you be able to use that hunger, learn to listen to the voice of God speak to you through that hunger, and embrace the opportunity to be challenged by it.

And may you never ever be afraid to let it move you to be the person you were created to be. 🍓

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## Notes

1. Fin Sheridan, “Hungry for Hunger,” *Faith Hacking*, April 20, 2018; <https://faithhacking.ca/hungry-for-hunger-d5da73125637>.
2. Elias Chacour, *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli Who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2001), 143–144.



## Learn More

When you’re feeling inspired to “Get up, go ahead, do something, move,” the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a number of offices, programs and networks offering action and awareness-building around caring for the world and those who live in it.

### Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP)

The PC(USA)’s environmental work (Sustainable Living and Earth Care Concerns) is currently a part of the Presbyterian Hunger Program. PHP produces, promotes and distributes faith-based environmental resources for individuals, congregations and presbyteries. Learn more at [www.pcusa.org/environment](http://www.pcusa.org/environment).

### Earth Care Congregation Certification

Earth Care Congregations are congregations that have committed to the “Earth Care Pledge” and accomplished a specific number of actions toward caring for God’s earth in four categories: worship, education, facilities and outreach. Congregations earning 25 points in each of the four categories will be certified as Earth Care Congregations. A *Guide to Greening Presbyterian Churches* provides congregations with worksheets, resources and instructions for becoming an Earth Care Congregation. Download the guide and learn more at [www.pcusa.org/earthcarecongregations](http://www.pcusa.org/earthcarecongregations).

### Presbyterians for Earth Care (PEC)

PEC is a national eco-justice network that is dedicated to environmental wholeness with social justice, seeking to be a prophetic voice for substantive change in the church and in the world. PEC equips Presbyterians with worship and devotional information, connections through biannual conferences and numerous General Assembly overtures to create Presbyterian policies that care for creation. PEC also produces monthly and seasonal newsletters with book reviews, art and other resources. Become a member or learn more at <http://presbyearthcare.org/>.

### The Eco-Stewards Program

The Eco-Stewards Program seeks to educate, train and inspire young adults (ages 20–30) in eco-stewardship within the

wider context of Christian faith. The overarching goal of this grassroots initiative is to help young adults connect and share their passions for faith and environmental stewardship through participation in place-based learning programs that explore how faith communities are responding to environmental challenges. Learn more at <https://ecostewardsprogram.wordpress.com/>.

### Fossil Free PC(USA) (FFPCUSA)

FFPCUSA is a grassroots organization in the PC(USA) made up of members and friends of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Since 2012, they have responded to a biblical call to care for God’s good creation by calling on the denomination to divest from the fossil fuel industry. In addition, the organization works with other Presbyterian-related organizations to reduce dependency on fossil fuels by individuals, congregations, presbyteries, and synods. Learn more at [www.fossilfreepcusa.org](http://www.fossilfreepcusa.org).

### Office of Faith-Based Investing and Corporate Engagement

Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) implements the General Assembly’s policies on socially responsible investing (also called faith-based investing) by engaging corporations in which the church owns stock. The General Assembly’s investment policy identifies specific concerns that MRTI is to promote pursuit of peace; racial, social and economic justice; environmental responsibility; and securing women’s rights. Learn more at [www.pcusa.org/mrti](http://www.pcusa.org/mrti).

### Presbyterians 4 Carbon Dividends

This is a team of Presbyterians affiliated with the Citizens Climate Lobby, which is working on the Carbon Dividend Act. The 223rd General Assembly (June 2018) determined that one faithful action our church can take in addressing climate change is to support carbon fee and dividend policies (CFD) because they offer a just and effective way forward to avert the worst of climate chaos, rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and transition us to a clean energy future. Learn more at [www.presbyterianmission.org/eco-journey/2018/07/27/general-assembly-policy-on-carbon-pricing/](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/eco-journey/2018/07/27/general-assembly-policy-on-carbon-pricing/).