

Introduction for “Rosie”

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Richmond Heights, Ohio

Bread for the World Sunday
October 19, 2014

Two weeks ago, when Malala Yousafzai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Ban Ki Moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations, said that the world was reminded that what terrorists fear most is “a girl with a book.”

We can only pray that the attention Malala has brought to the plight of young women and girls in many parts of the world will open the door to education and training and opportunity for many gifted people who are currently prevented from helping us work our way through difficult problems because of their gender.

This morning, we’re going to hear from another little girl, a fifth-grader from Collbran, Colorado, named Rosie. Some of us first heard Rosie’s story when we went to see the documentary about hunger, *A Place at the Table*, when it was screened at the Cedar-Lee Theater a couple of years ago. We also screened the film here at church a few months later. We’re going to watch a few minutes of that documentary as this morning’s message because Rosie’s story bears repeating. We can never hear too often what it means for any child to be excluded from contributing her or his best to the world because she or he is hungry.

Rosie, like Malala, is bright, articulate, and wrapped in dreams. Like Malala, she’s also aware of the factors beyond her control that stand in the way of her realizing her dreams. In Rosie’s case, it’s not gender discrimination, it’s poverty, which is the reason she’s hungry. And the reason she’s poor is not because she’s the child of a lazy welfare mom or a doped-up dead-beat dad, but rather because of the myriad decisions we allowed to be made in our name that have created a permanent welfare class in the world’s richest democracy.

And like Malala’s plight, Rosie’s plight, at its heart, is not an issue of scarcity; it’s an issue of justice. The answer to poverty is not wealth; the answer to poverty is justice. And justice is based on priorities – the things we consider important. Sort out the priorities – with the laws, policies, and practices that flow from those priorities – and poverty will take care of itself. It always does, it always will. That’s one of the ideas that drives Bread for the World, in whose work we participate.

We’re also going to hear this morning from Barbie, a working mother in Philadelphia, and from Tremonica, a second-grader in Mississippi, whose stories will remind us – or so our Bread Team hopes – of the paradoxes and ironies and details of hunger in the richest country on earth.

Their stories are all different, but they have one thing in common: they are the stories not of statistics, but rather of people, very much like us, whose lives are just as valuable to the world and precious to God as ours are, and whose lives may never be what they could be because of decisions we’re making and continue to make. These are the neighbors we’ll never know, not because of geography, but rather because poverty and hunger is keeping them from being the neighbors God has given us to love as we love ourselves. Their poverty is our loss.