



Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

The Power and Promise of Peace

LENTEN FAST – WEEK SIX

POVERTY IS THE WORST FORM OF VIOLENCE

Mahatma Gandhi said it well, "Poverty is the worst form of violence."

During the recent electoral season, many concerned people and organizations sought to bring to public consciousness the fact that increasing numbers of people in the United States and around the world are living in the violence of poverty. One of these groups, entitled LET JUSTICE ROLL, was organized by the National Council of Churches and the Center for Community Change in cooperation with a wide range of related bodies. LET JUSTICE ROLL held services and rallies around the country to alert people to the seriousness of the issue; challenged public officials and themselves with the question, "What will you do to abolish poverty?"; encouraged voter registration, particularly among poor people; and recruited people to work to abolish poverty in their own communities, nationally and worldwide. LET JUSTICE ROLL did not cease its work following the electoral season. Rather, it is continuing and intensifying its work and, along with many other people, will do so until poverty is no more, until the violence that constitutes poverty is finally overcome. Working together as one committed people, we will yet prevail.

LET JUSTICE ROLL sought to focus particular emphasis on the devastating impact of poverty on our children. Of the 36 million people in the United States who are living in poverty, 13 million are children. The Children's Defense Fund reminds us that these 13 million children are much more likely than non-poor children to die in infancy, have a low birth weight, lack adequate health care, decent housing, and sufficient and nutritious food. They are at least twice as likely as non-poor children to suffer stunted growth or lead poisoning, or to be kept back in school. These conditions will not change without renewed commitment on all our parts and without public policies that work to support children and their families rather than policies which further undermine their well-being. Centuries ago, a voice was heard in Ramah, "lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." (Jeremiah 31:15b) Rachel will continue to weep until God's way for our children becomes our own.

The following responsive reading, read at each of the rallies/services held by LET JUSTICE ROLL, envisions a society where poverty is no more, where justice rolls down like mighty waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. It points to specific actions which when taken by faithful people and a responsible society will provide the embodiment the vision inspires. You may wish to use this reading during Holy Week or at any other time during the liturgical year:

A RESPONSIVE READING

Leader: In the spirit of the ancient Hebrew prophet, Amos, whose thunderous voice still comes to us afresh: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream," we lift our voices in a new vision for our nation and all its people.

All: We lift up a vision, that EVERYONE will have their basic needs met regardless of income, geography, citizenship, or other condition.

Leader: We offer a vision where EVERYONE will have access to nutritious food and affordable housing.

All: EVERYONE will have comprehensive and affordable health care. High quality education will be offered at every stage of life.

Leader: In the spirit of the non-violent revolutionary, Mahatma Gandhi who said, "Poverty is the worst form of violence,"

All: EVERYONE will be given a way out of poverty, as all will have the opportunity to work, be compensated fairly, earn enough to meet their basic needs, and be treated with dignity.

Leader: In the spirit of the illustrious civil rights leader of our nation, Martin Luther King, Jr. who said, "there's nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it,"

All: We advocate for all FAMILIES, so that they are given respect and support for their care-giving responsibilities. We seek changes in policy regarding childcare, sick leave, and support for those balancing the needs of young and elder dependants.

Leader: In the spirit of the great prophet Mohammad, who said, "Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity...Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty."

All: We affirm that EVERYONE must pay a fair share and advocate a progressive tax policy for the common good.

Leader: In the spirit of Jesus, who came to bring "good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of God's jubilee."

All: We proclaim that we will work for the day when EVERYONE is valued by our society and poverty is known no more. Amen.

It is true. Rachel does continue to weep for our children. But the Lord does not leave Rachel nor us desolate. Rather, the Lord says: "Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future, says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country." (Jeremiah 31:16-17) That is the future we seek on the far end of the violence we abhor.

PRAYER

God of us all, we ask your transforming presence in these days of challenge. Give to us the vision, the commitment and the courage we need to be your faithful people. Help us build a world fit for children. Amen.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

The Center for Community Change
www.communitychange.org

The Children's Defense Fund
www.childrensdefensefund.org

Economic Policy Institute
www.econop.org

Joint Center for Poverty Research
www.jcpr.org

Let Justice Roll, National Council of Churches
www.nccusa.org

National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice
www.nicwj.org



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