



Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Devotion to Justice

A series of devotions from the
Justice Table on the topics of

Women and children ◦

Hunger and poverty ◦

Creation care ◦

Immigration ◦

FALL 2013

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Many thanks to Disciples Women who compiled these devotions on behalf of the Justice Table convened by General Minister and President Sharon Watkins.



We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us. – Disciples identity statement

WATER: A Source of Life

John 4:7-15

Living on an island — a speck of volcanic rock in the middle of the vast Pacific — we are surrounded by water but have a limited source of fresh water. We have become spoiled by a false comfort that our water is unlimited so we continue building more golf courses and taking long showers. We hear stories about the growing number of people who don't have access to clean water but our comfort clouds our awareness and we remain unmotivated to do anything.

When Jesus asked for a drink from the woman of Samaria, he, on one level, is acknowledging the importance of water to our physical health; to life itself. Without a regular/steady source of water, any living part of creation would perish. When Jesus offers the woman "living water", he is proclaiming a spiritual truth that reminds us of an additional level of life. Without the nourishment from this spiritual well, our physical selves would lose all sense of purpose.

This obviously relates to other teachings of Jesus that could lead us toward a balanced life; one that is healthy in body, mind and spirit. The inter-connectedness of this balance is easy to understand; when one part suffers, they all suffer. It's easy to fully understand the physical result of the body not receiving any water; death. However, we find it more difficult to grasp the significance of a lack of spiritual nourishment. We see people functioning quite well within healthy bodies who don't exhibit any definitive spiritual practice. So, what happens to our theory about a balanced life and the importance of spiritual health?

Perhaps, our care for the sources of clean water can become a metaphor for the living water of faith. As our physical life is dependent upon water so is our spiritual life dependent upon faith — and all that is sacred. These sources of life are so inter-dependent that our care for one (or lack of) has an impact on the other.

Our protection and preservation of the rain forest, the watershed and the aquifer has a direct impact on the entire ecosystem of the planet: the land,

our food supply, climate change, air quality and the ability to sustain life. Without water, there is no life.

Without faith, life is incomplete. Clean water and a healthy faith require daily decisions in order for life and health to be sustained; conscious usage, wise/moral choices, common sense, and consideration of others.

For instance, non-potable water can be used on golf courses and road mediums while household gray water and water catchments can be used on lawns and gardens. Likewise, using kindness and compassion to cultivate relationships is much better than using power and selfishness.

We must preserve our sources of life: clean water and spiritual health.

John Heidel

Christ Church, Uniting Disciples and Presbyterians, 1300 Kailua Road,
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Creation Care

Questions for further reflection:

When was the last time we questioned a development that threatened a local watershed or aquifer?

Are we doing everything we can (as individuals) to preserve and conserve our local clean water supply?

Looking deeper into the lives of those who are physically strong and healthy, is it possible to discern evidence of unhappiness or incompleteness?

How can "living water" be made manifest for those who act with violence or express prejudice? Or, those whose lives are controlled by greed and/or power? Or, people who are lacking in compassion and kindness?

Also, looking deeper, can we identify alternative expressions of spiritual nourishment?

- moral character based on a love and respect of all humanity and all creation
- people living with compassion and kindness who don't follow a particular creed or belief system
- good people all around us who don't fit into our neat categories of Christian denominations
- people of other faith traditions who have a different name for God and whose forms of worship sound and look different. Is it possible to have a healthy spirit without a healthy body — or a healthy mind?

Thinking about the way in which all people of the earth are connected by water systems, can we ignore the protection and care of clean water and remain spiritually healthy?

Employee or Slave?

Acts 16:16-19

Scholars tell us that the fortunetelling done by this girl was done involuntarily, that it was a demonic spirit that spoke through her. This spirit uses the term “Most High God” to talk about who it is these men are preaching about. This demonic spirit recognizes the presence of God.

When we read what she says it is sometimes difficult to understand why Paul would be upset about it. But it is believed that she is being disrespectful or saying it in a mocking fashion because it is not she who is speaking but a spirit speaking through her. Paul has had enough and he casts out the demon by calling on Jesus’ name.

Her owners are furious because they have been making quite a bit of money from her fortunetelling. They did not give her the information, they did not invite her participation, and they give her none of the profits. She is a slave and is only a possession to them, although a valuable possession because of the income they get from her activities. Once Paul has cast out the demon she is worthless to them and they have lost their comfortable way of making a great deal of wealth with no real effort from themselves. They don’t see what Paul has done as rescuing this girl from a demon but rather he has destroyed their business.

This woman is indeed a slave, a human, trafficked by owners who insist that she perform for their profit, against her will or ability to choose, with none of the profits going into her pocket. When she is unable to earn money for them she loses any value to them even though, as a person, nothing has changed.

Slavery and trafficking of humans, sadly, is not a new phenomenon. Any time a human is forced or coerced to engage in activities against his/her will, it is slavery. When humans are bought and sold for profit it is human trafficking. Human trafficking or any kind of modern day slavery is morally wrong, yet often it can be right in front of us and we do not recognize it or name it for what it is.

Like the young girl of Acts 16, there are many young girls who are waiting for the servants of God to release them from evil forces.

Rev. Dr. Patricia Donahoo
Disciples Women, Indianapolis, IN
Women and Children

Saving the Sons of the Widow from Slavery

2 Kings 4:1-7

Her name could be Rose; she is single because her husband passed. They had two boys. He was a hard worker, an hourly employee with no retirement plan. They had gotten in credit card debt, beyond imagination. Now she has the creditors calling her everyday almost 24/7. She is terrified she could lose what she has; house, car, and even children if she can't supply for their basic needs. She went to the local Pastor to seek help. They had a conversation.

This story clearly demonstrates that God cares for God's people and that God works in sovereign and mighty ways that extend far beyond what we are able to do or think as God reaches out to meet needs according to God's will. It does deal with a financial problem or need and as such it particularly speaks to our physical needs. This is a beautiful story of faith and provision.

Elisha readily received a poor widow's complaint. Those that leave their families under a load of debt know not what trouble they cause. Elisha put the widow in a way to pay her debt and to maintain herself and her family. The best method to assist those who are in distress is to help them to improve, by their own industry, what little they have. Becoming a mentor leads people to do things for themselves.

The widow must pay her debt with the money she received for her oil. Though her creditors were too hard with her, they must be paid, even before she made any provision for her children. We pay every just debt, and give everyone its own, though we leave ever so little for ourselves. Rose learned how to get out and stay out of debt. She realized that she needed to keep her children from making the same mistake — falling in the slavery of debt. Proverbs 22:7 say, "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender" (ESV). Justice is taught by getting the children involved. There's an old Native American proverb that goes, "Tell me, and I'll forget. Show me, and I may not remember. Involve me, and I'll understand."

The Pastor walked with this widow in a journey of getting out of debt by learning to use what she had (verse 2) and setting her and her children FREE for the rest of their lives!

Arlene Pimentel: Disciples Women- Quadrennial Assembly
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Women and Children

Brother Sun, Sister Moon

James 1:17

Some of the most famous words attributed to Francis of Assisi are these: “All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made, and first my Lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and light you give to us through him. How beautiful he is, how radiant in all his splendor! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness. All praise be yours, my Lord through Sister Moon and stars; in the heavens you made them bright and precious and fair...”

I suspect many would view St. Francis’ words as whimsical or strange. Who goes around calling the sun her “brother” or the moon his “sister”? Not many, but I’ve come to appreciate the way Francis and others over the centuries have viewed various elements of God’s Creation as family members. In fact, I wonder at times if some of our environmental woes may have been averted if we had not lost grasp of our familial connection to the rest of the earth. Everything that exists — the sun, moon, earth, plants, animals, humans — has the same source, God. We all come from God and we all belong to God. That makes us family, does it not?

Two key ingredients in any healthy family are love and respect. Where these virtues are absent trouble is inevitable. This is true not just for our immediate family but also for our extended family that includes all of Creation. Every person and everything that God has made deserves our love and respect. If we do not extend them this there will definitely be trouble.

The rest of Creation is due our love and respect, if for no other reason, because God made it and it manifests God’s glory. Francis’ words reveal his belief that praise comes to God “through all” that God made. Recognizing that all of God’s Creation should be viewed as family helped Francis see the beauty inherent in God’s handiwork. This beauty, in turn, led him to offer his worship and praise to the Maker of heaven and earth.

Each day and each night we have visual reminders in the sky of God’s goodness and love. Let us give thanks for “Brother Sun” and “Sister Moon”

and the light they shine upon us. Let us also join with them in offering our praise to “the Father of the heavenly lights” (James 1:17). It’s a wonderful thing, after all, when families can do things together...

Dr. Chuck Summers
First Christian Church, Henderson, KY
Creation Care

Invisible Women

Matthew 25:34-40

No one sees them. They are locked away, forgotten, and in most cases, disappear from their children's lives. Their stories might show up in the news or make an appearance as another number in the statistics before they are erased from society. Out of sight, out of mind. These are the women incarcerated in the Chilean penal system.

Three women sat around my dining room table last week: a "carabinera" (Chilean policewoman), the head of the social work department of a local college, and a social worker about to retire. They had planned a mother's day activity at the prison with permission to have a party including the children of the mothers in jail and mothers whose daughters were in jail. They spent the day travelling all over the region picking up the family members, fixing up the space for the party, and organizing people from the community to lead games, do beauty treatments, and make gifts.

"I picked up seven cousins, all under twelve years of age, who have their three mothers in jail; an elderly grandmother cares for them all. I had to help dress the children, ironing their moist clothes, still not dry after hanging over a charcoal burner. They were shocked at seeing a police woman ironing!" "A grandmother let me pick up her granddaughter on the condition that I stop into her windowless house, spotless in the middle of one of the shantytowns, to have a cup of tea."

The stories spill out, one after another. I listen and ask questions; they come to these conclusions: "We must do more. One day in and out of their lives is wrong. We will create the first organization in Chile to attend to the needs of women deprived of their freedom as well as their families. We will research. We will get volunteers. We will know everything there is to know about women in prison. We will find ways to keep their children from following their mothers into a life that leads to prison. We will support women whose daughters are in prison." Around my table, as we savor "picarones" (fried dough smothered in a kind of syrup), the "Mosiacos" (Mosaics) Foundation is born. "We will raise our voices for those who have

lost their voice: We will tell the stories that have not been told. We will paint a mosaic of hope for these invisible women.”

Elena Huegel
Global Ministries Missionary
Pentecostal Church of Chile, Chile
Women and Children

Creative Justice

Proverbs 22:6

A young carabinero (Chilean policeman) showed up to a week-day worship service in full uniform creating quite a stir in the congregation as no one recognized him nor did they know his reason for coming to church. There are mixed feelings in Chile towards policemen. Some remember the human rights abuses of the dictatorship while others appreciate their national police force known to be one of the least corrupt in Latin America.

During the sharing of concerns, he politely asked permission to speak and walked to the front of the sanctuary. "You probably don't know who I am," he began. "I grew up in one of the roughest areas of this town. I was often hungry and cold; my father beat me. I was surrounded by alcoholics and drug addicts. When I was a small child, my grandfather occasionally brought me to Sunday school at this church. Here, I was fed, and I learned that I was important to God. I was loved no matter where I came from or what happened to me at home. I have come back today, after all these years to say 'thank you' to the woman who was my Sunday School teacher. Sister Rebeca," and he turned to the woman who has been teaching Sunday school in that church for over 30 years, "Thank- you for the gifts of dignity, respect, and hope that you gave me. Even though you could not change my home life or the social conditions around me, I chose to become a policeman so that I could do my part to make this world a little more just for children who grow up in situations like mine. Thank you for believing in me. I have never forgotten you."

Creative justice can occur when a victim cannot meet his or her needs for justice through the legal or other systems of society. One of the forms of creative justice is when the victim works to make sure that the same damage or crime he or she has experienced does not happen to others. As we struggle to make society more just for all those who are victims of systemic injustice, may we also remember that as the church, we also have unique opportunities to open the doors through which those who seek justice can find creative ways to make wrong right.

Elena Huegel
Global Ministries Missionary
Pentecostal Church of Chile, Chile
Women and Children

Only a Story

Genesis 1:1-5

What a story! God speaks and the world emerges from chaos. God narrates the sun and moon, the plants and animals, the night and day into existence. God's Story started "in the beginning," but it didn't end there. From Genesis to Revelation storytelling keeps God's generative power alive and functioning. Jesus' primary mode of communication was parables. Today we keep faith vital by telling compelling stories. Storytelling! As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. A-men. A-men!

It was "only a story"
about light and darkness
water and dry land
seeds and fruit
fish and birds and beasts.

God made it all up.
Such things didn't really exist,
but in the telling
they came to life:
"LET THERE BE LIGHT"---
AND THE LIGHT APPEARED.

Then God imagined another creature
into existence.
The creature couldn't
swim like the fish,
or fly like the birds,

or run like the beasts.

All the creature could do
was tell stories---Made-up stories.

“IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT...

“ONCE THERE WAS A MAN

WHO HAD TWO SONS...”

“CALL ME ISHMAEL...”

“IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES,

IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES...”

“IN THE BEGINNING, GOD...”

They are “only stories”

But in the telling

They came to life.

And new worlds are created.

Doug Bland: Pastor, Community Christian Church Tempe, AZ
Co-Executive Director for Arizona Interfaith Power & Light: a religious
response to climate change
Creation Care

Playing Favorites

Genesis 37:3-4

Jacob's favoritism to Joseph makes my blood boil. How can anyone treat one child special; to the detriment of other children in the family, and relationships between children? It sets up hard feelings and imbalances the family. It doesn't often end with the favored child as a prince who protects the others, forgiveness and reconciliation, and everyone living in peace and prosperity.

A small child comes to my house every day. From our first meeting, he offered to help me clean. I imagined he was eager to get paid. It felt pushy, but "at least he had good initiative and connected work to pay." I was warned to be wary of offers, especially to watch this child, who likes to "pick up and touch things." I waited, other children are often with him, and I didn't want to play favorites.

I don't give him things to do, but he jumps in to do things for me. He offers to share things with me; a treasured piece of candy. Funny thing, he never asks for money. He asks for a piece of bread or fruit. I began keeping food "put away" because his "begging" seemed habitual. I imagined he was growing, a "bottomless pit," an appetite you cannot keep up with.

Yesterday he asked again for bread. "Didn't your family just have lunch?" He said yes, but he did not get any; he was sleeping and when he woke there was nothing left in the pot. I remembered his father was deathly ill for months and just returned to the fields. He is also always in bare feet or sandals, no socks. One cold day I asked, "Where are your socks?" "They are dirty." The socks he wears with his school uniform are his only pair.

Human nature bonds us with our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, children in our church. But God calls us to be responsible for all children in God's family; every hungry and cold child. Justice does not allow favorites; it is detrimental to other children, and relationships between children. It sets up hard feelings and imbalances for generations. The favored child rarely becomes a prince and protects the others. Favoritism stands in the way of

forgiveness and reconciliation and everyone living in peace and prosperity.
May God empower us to act in love beyond our favorites.

Rev. Dr. Loletta Barrett

Global Ministries, United Congregational Church, Kalkveld Namibia
Women and Children

Release for the Captives

Luke 4:18-19

In this passage Jesus is reading from a prophetic scroll in the temple in his home town of Nazareth.

As we look at the injustices in our world, this scripture should be our clarion call to action. As I studied human trafficking and more specifically the human trafficking of the more than 100,000 children who are lured into domestic minor sex trafficking each year in the United States, the spirit of the Lord came upon me. That spirit could also be called anger, indignation or a burning desire to do something about the children that are being victimized everyday by pimps and men that want to use them.

Can we bring some good news to the children who are captured in bondage? Can we arrange for their release? Can we bring sight to those blinded to the children's suffering by their greed? I say YES WE CAN! Yes we can make right this injustice.

So where do we start, we start with education, learning as much as we can about this injustice. We spread the word to everyone we know. We teach our children about these dangers. We work with an anti-human trafficking organization or group in our area. If there isn't one we start one. Let us bring the Lord's favor on God's people by doing what is necessary to bring justice to the children and the adults trapped in slavery. In this way, with God's help, the "me" in this scripture will not only be about Jesus, but it will be about us, too.

Micah 6:8and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

LaVerne Thorpe
Vice President of IDWM, First Christian Church Mesa, Arizona
Women and Children

Church and Children

Matthew 12:18

In 2004, the National Council of Churches put out a Comprehensive Policy Statement, “The Church and Children: Vision and Goals for the 21st Century”.

The statement focuses on and encourages churches to

- include children in their full worship life;
- support loving and safe families;
- advocate for access to excellent public education, health care, economic security;
- work for a violence-free society that is emotionally and physically safe; and
- nurture healthy child development by ensuring that all children have access to the arts, culture and recreation.

So often when churches think of pursuing justice, we think of liberating those in prison, feeding the poor, pursuing peace...all very good things. But are churches thinking of how they can find justice for children? Are they taking the steps to ensure the goals stated above? If so, how? If not, why?

The study guide offered here:

<http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/churchandchildrenbrochure.pdf> is a resource for congregations to start looking at the question of justice for children and what amazing implications might follow if the church embraced these goals. It is my prayer that all churches will look at children as full members of the body of Christ, that they might take seriously what children have to teach us about the Kingdom of God, and that they might strive to bring justice to children in situations where it is so desperately needed.

Rev. Olivia Stewart Robertson: Minister of Family and Children’s Ministries
Disciples Home Missions
Women and Children

God's Love Song

Luke 5:16

Jesus' prayer life was honed in the wilderness among the wild beasts during the temptation and in the wilderness he was most at home. As the Incarnate Word through which all Creation was called, Jesus had an affinity for the wild like a Seagull has for the ocean breeze or a dolphin for the waves. There he drew close to God and in God he discovered himself.

To draw close to Jesus is to be drawn close to the Creation he loved. There we come into contact with the Word in ways nowhere else available and learn lessons nowhere else taught.

The Psalmist sings, "The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they reveal knowledge (19:1-2). Creation is a love song between the Creator and the Word. Are you listening? Creation is a window into the wonder of God's Love. Are you looking?"

The birds, animals, plants, and even the earth itself, are sacred words speaking the wonder of God; if we but pay attention and listen. Clearly, the author of Job listened to Creation speak as he concluded Job's demand for a reckoning with the Lord of Life.

Chapter after chapter of the best of human argument failed to convince Job of the mystery of life before God. He is finally silenced in the ashes and dust of repentance by the immensity of the Master's wisdom inescapably displayed by one wonder of Creation after another. Where human argument and reason fail; Creation succeeds. Perhaps the humbleness before the Master of Creation this sacred text teaches is something we can learn more easily than Job. We will if we enter into the wild places and there listen to the Word of Life speaking.

Rev. Frits Haverkamp: Northside Christian Church, Knoxville, TN
Green Chalice Congregation

Creation Care

“Who has let the wild ass go free?”

Job 39:5-8

The last several chapters of the book of Job offer an incredible window into God’s love of creation and of the varied, wonderful creatures God placed on the earth. Most of us are familiar with the overall storyline of Job. He thought he had lost everything, pitied himself, declared himself righteous and cursed God. Granted, Job had experienced great suffering and the entire text is, in many ways, terrifying (though one must recall that for the rest of his family and his animals, who were dead, Job was at least still alive). God responds to Job with the powerful voice of the whirlwind. And in this divine answer, human beings are, not so subtly, reminded that we are not the center of the universe.

God asks Job, and through him all humanity, a series of questions — where were you when the earth was formed? Did you create the rain? Did you give the horse strength? And as God lists the beautiful traits of myriad creatures, Job’s self-centered world begins to melt away. But something else happens as well, God’s other creatures are elevated. They do not exist for humans, they exist for the glory of God and for themselves — the other animals have inherent value, they are complete without any humans around at all. The wild ass is free, and God is the one who loosed the bonds of the ass. The ass ignores the driver (the human) and ranges the mountains. The wild ox cannot be bound. The horse laughs at fear and divine wisdom fills the wings of the hawk.

Job 39 is a divine hymn to the beauty, independence and self-worth of the animals God created. It is a reminder that humans are just one of the many amazing parts of God’s creation. If we open our eyes and ears to the beauty and richness of all of God’s creatures, we, like Job, will begin to understand things too wonderful, which we did not know.

Dr. Laura Hobgood-Oster: Professor of Religion and Environmental Studies
Bethany Beach Christian Church, DE and Southwestern University, TX
Creation Care

Excuse me...

Matthew 25:40

“I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me — you did it to me.”

As a former teacher, I could write a book about the interesting excuses my students (both the children and adults) gave me for not completing assignments. There are always exceptions and believe me, there’s no excuse that a teacher hasn’t heard. The common denominator to the excuses was that most of the time they blamed everyone else but themselves.

My sister Luz Amanda and her women’s network have opened up a daycare, job training center and support ministry for the women. My sister Rosette and her sisters have started a soap making business. Another group of sisters have established a microcredit union that supports women to allow them to become self-sufficient entrepreneurs.

This isn’t unusual, but let me add the rest of the story.

Luz Amanda and her network are located in Colombia. Rosette and her sisters founded the soap making business and the microcredit union in the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. All of these women are in the midst of poverty, war torn countries, violence against women and danger on a regular basis. These factors would serve as valid excuses or reasons not to be able to complete their assignments. Yet in the midst of what appears to be no material resources, they have resurrected successful ventures with faith, perseverance and resilience.

No excuses.

I will never forget the words of wisdom from one of my Colombian sisters in Christ during my visit. “Whenever you’re frustrated and feel that you can’t do something, remember your Colombian sisters and then you’ll realize if we can do it, you can too.”

No excuses.

Years later, her words and actions resonate continually within my spirit. Her simple, yet profound wisdom remains a bit unsettling because it places the responsibility on....me. There are no excuses. As I thought about my goals and desires, I was literally embarrassed at the excuses I had for delaying them. Even though I had access to far more resources than my sisters, they were accomplishing life-changing ventures.

These brave Congolese and Colombian women are ministering to populations that are overlooked and ignored by others. The importance of the call diminishes their excuses.

We are not called to make excuses, but to make good.

No excuses.

Sheila Spencer

Director of Christian Education/Faith Formation – Disciples Home Missions
Light of the World Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis, IN
Women and Children

Strawberry Fields Forever

Matthew 20:1-16

In California, Kate and I would from time to time buy strawberries from a roadside stand. The stand was located within the limits of Los Angeles County where nearly ten million people reside. We never found a stand selling corn or tomatoes but there were several next to strawberry fields.

As we admired the baskets of strawberries we had just purchased, we could almost hear over our heads the melody of “Strawberry Fields Forever” and the question of how long would the growers of strawberries hold out. How long could the offers made by developers of new housing projects be resisted? Of course the real defenders of the strawberry fields in Los Angeles County, those who keep the fields flourishing and financially viable, are not the growers.

Those of us who buy the strawberries don't ask the cashier if they are cultivated and picked by “legal” workers. We don't ask if they earn the \$8 minimum hourly wage in Los Angeles County. We breathe in the scent of fresh strawberries and are lifted by gratitude that the fields are still there. But we know that they wouldn't be if the workers, the brown skinned men and women, earned a wage above the poverty level for a family.

It's the same in the fields seen on the drive along California's U.S. 1 up the coast. How can those fields be farmed on some of the country's most valuable real estate? If their workers have been at it for more than five years, don't they deserve to be considered “legal”? Do we really want to continue to punish them through our immigration system?

Doug Smith and Kate Moyer, ordained DOC ministers
Long Term Volunteer Missionaries with Global Ministries
Mesa Conjunta "Roundtable" in San Luis Potosi, Mexico
Immigration and Refugees

A Victim of Her Circumstances

Genesis 16:1-10 Hagar's Song

Genesis, chapter 16, offers insight into the life of a young Egyptian woman named, Hagar. This pregnant slave girl is filled with confusion and distress. Everyone around her is uncomfortable. She did not choose this predicament for herself. Like other women, she became a victim of circumstances. After giving birth to Abraham's first son, Ishmael, they were asked to leave the security and comforts of what they had always known, only to go into a new reality called, the unknown. Although, complex in nature, Hagar's life and the story of her womanhood is seen in an unhealthy light. There were several injustices committed. Rereading this story, reminds me of the number of women and children who are still being exiled, every day from amongst everything they have ever known. They are deserted, and left to find their own way? We cannot fix the Hagar story.

However, we can change the lyrics to her song.

Today, I am singing a new song. One that promotes inclusion, love, justice and reconciliation for all women. There is a new sound dancing around in my head; while muffling the old tunes of disrespect, abuse and injustice. That tune says, "What would this world exemplify if all women felt empowered and respected?"

Please consider this: Every time a "Woman is affected, a child is affected." Whenever any woman is treated with disrespect, we are all disrespected. In the words of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Today's challenge is choosing to see, hear, and gather persons from all points of exclusion. We must take the time to investigate our communities and spheres of influence, while listening for those persons who may be living a life similar to Hagar's. We must not rest until all have been restored to their rightful places, (a) the arms of God (b) and the whole of Humanity. Friends, the redemption of Hagar's story is she was met by an Angel who assured her of God's presence. She was given direct insight into a

promised future, therefore, some dignity was restored. However, you and I (we) must become the one voice of God, whose total assignment is to sing the lyrics to the new song-quoting “With liberty and Justice for All!”

The Rev. Dr. Christal L. Williams: Associate Regional Minister
The Christian Church in Illinois & Wisconsin, Cherry Valley, IL
Women and Children

What's In a Name?

Acts 4:36

The custom of modifying a person's name to more appropriately represent God's work in their life accompanied God's relationship with God's servants throughout the bible. The intriguing piece, however, is found in how this change of name always reflected the individual according to how God himself saw them, rather than they themselves or even others. Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel; and even Jesus himself changed Simon to Peter demonstrating in this way the transforming work of the Spirit, which would move him from being an insignificant fisherman to a rock within the church. Along with this was a change of location, a time of moving.

As Abram began his journey away from his family and from his land, he was a foreigner. He was an undocumented illegal alien. But he was only this in the eyes of those suggesting he didn't look the same, talk the same or believe the same. In the eyes of the Lord, he was already Abraham! Seeking a better life, not for himself, but for his descendants that did not yet exist!

Times have not changed so much that this custom is not represented in our ever changing world today. But let us wonder if this was at the center of God's intention as we compare in contrast this biblical custom, with the custom of man today where "nicknames" are placed on individuals, usually based solely on circumstances or physical characteristics. We live in a society that is divided on issues surrounding immigration and at the center of this we hear names such as "Wetback," "illegal," "alien," "unwanted," and "criminal" among other, many times worse names, used in a derogatory manner to degrade and minimize the value of another human being.

Our world is full of inequalities. Countries prosper while countries perish. People hunger while others indulge in excess. While these inequalities exist there will always be a fleeing people seeking a better life.

Let us strive to see others through the eyes of our Lord and Creator. Let us look and listen for the characteristics in others that reflect the name that

most appropriately represents God's relationship to God's child and purpose. Could we possibly begin to comprehend the name our Lord would place on another individual? Do we understand the circumstances surrounding this life? Do we have this right to judge? After all, we are ALL part of a bigger Kingdom.

Pastor Lori Tapia: Iglesia Alas de Salvacion, Gilbert, Arizona
Immigration and Refugees

Forbidden Fruit

Genesis 2:15-17

Controversy has surrounded the Adam and Eve story through the years. The story leaves us with many questions. However, controversy aside, the eating of the forbidden fruit is the first sin in the Bible. That sin came to be known for Christians as “original sin,” the fragmentation of God’s perfect world. The eating of the forbidden fruit is where everything started to go wrong.

Speaking to Adam and Eve today, God might say, “You can enjoy fruits and vegetables, breads and beans, cheeses and nuts. Enjoy meat from grazing cows, scratching chickens, foraging hogs and swimming fish.” But what foods would God forbid us to eat?

Food with ingredients we cannot pronounce? Meat from confined animals that never feel rain, wind, or sun on their backs?

Adam and Eve and the generations that followed them suffered the consequences of their decision to eat the forbidden fruit. And we suffer the consequences when we eat forbidden foods through our health and well-being and so do our neighbors and creation.

We are blessed to live in places that can grow good food. Our local farmers grow foods that are healthy and tasty and raise animals with compassion and love. Food artisans put their hearts into their craft to give us breads, cheeses, pastas, and more. Good food is grown, harvested, and prepared in a way that connects us to each other, to the earth, and to God. When we eat good food in community, we partake of communion, we remember Christ, and we bring a bit of wholeness to our fragmented world.

*Gracious God,
May our dining tables be “Justice Tables” and may the food we eat bring wholeness to our community.
In Christ we pray, Amen*

Rev. Carol Devine: Minister Green Chalice
Providence Christian Church (DOC), Nicholasville, KY
Creation Care

Worth Being Spent

Isaiah 58:10

Injustice is a prevailing and ever present ill of society not to be ignored, disregarded or averted. It gives way to economic inequality, human trafficking, environmental degradation, the prison industrial complex, systemic racism and more woes than can be counted resulting in a burdensome list seemingly too great to fight. Yet, we are called to seek justice in the midst of this reality. To spend ourselves for those who hunger and satisfy the needs of those who are oppressed.

No matter how daunting this call may be, we have the power to make a difference in the lives of any who suffer. We are not being set up to fail. We are being invited to join with God in transforming the precious life of another, who is made in the image of God. A meal, a donation, a coat or a protest have the capacity to shine light into the dark situations that are faced during times of oppression and trial. May we be faithful enough to help, strong enough to stand and bold enough to illuminate that darkness.

Most benevolent Creator, forgive our hesitation to seek justice. Bring back to the forefront of our minds how significant changing one moment in one person's life can truly be. Mature us out of attitudes that oppress our compassion and smother the light of Christ within us. May You mature in us the notion that only our needs are critical. Restore us when the work feels endless and burdensome. We submit ourselves to be bearers of justice and barriers of injustice. May Your grace, mercy and love abound. Amen.

Rev. Lashaundra Smith: Pastor
First Christian Church (DOC), Gulfport, MS
Hunger and Poverty

The Problem with Names

Revelation 21:22-27

Life as a refugee is a hard life. There is the indignity of losing one's home. And then add to that the displacing of an entire family, a resettling in a land with different language and different customs and different expectations. Whatever you were in the prior land — a doctor, a teacher, a farmer — very likely bears no relationship on what you are allowed to do in the new place. On top of all this, there is the problem with names.

Many refugees lose their given names when they leave their home and settle in a new place. A few families in our congregation lost their last names when they traveled to Cambodia to a refugee camp. Men were given the initial Y as a last name and women were given a letter H. The US Government had drawn up paperwork to correspond to the legal names Cambodia had given people when they resettled. In a great irony, the process of becoming an American Citizen allows refugees to reclaim those lost names, that lost heritage. By becoming American, they are allowed (finally!) to be called by their names.

Our Lord knows us beyond the names and the labels we wear. Our Lord prepares a place for the faithful even if no other place in the world provides them a welcome. Our Lord finds a way. And with the Lamb, with Jesus the Christ, we are known deeply and completely. With the Lamb, we are home.

Personal experience and panic prompted some of our teenagers to ask a Bible Study teacher about the scripture where the Lamb's book has everyone's name. "How will we know if we're welcome in the new Jerusalem? How will we know if Jesus calls us? Which name will the Lamb use?" The answer the teacher gave was the only answer that mattered. "You'll just know."

Rev. Jolin Wilks McElroy: Pastor
First Christian Church, Charlotte, NC
Immigration and Refugees

Citizenship

Matthew 20:9-12

Since we were little kids, most of us had a well-developed sense of what was fair. When our brother or sister got away with something, we were quick to say, “That’s not fair!” Maybe our parents told us the old adage, “Life isn’t fair.” But deep down, we still cling to the belief that it should be. That’s one reason we’re so incensed when someone doesn’t follow the rules.

For many, the thought of people entering the United States by crossing the border illegally evokes the same outrage: “Who do you think you are? You think you’re so special that the rules don’t apply to you? That’s not fair!”

But that’s just it: it’s not fair.

It’s not fair that I was born on U.S. soil, thereby becoming a U.S. citizen. Because of that fact, I have lived my life free from genocide, political dictatorship, civil war, religious persecution and famine. And then there’s my other citizenship: While I was still a sinner, Christ died for me, making me a citizen in the kingdom of heaven. If ever I should exclaim, “That’s not fair!” it’s because I have received so much more than I deserved.

Immigration is not a simple issue with simple answers. In fact, the more I learn, the more I appreciate the complexity of it all. But I have also found that starting the discussion with recognition that I do not deserve my citizenship — either of them — is a lot more productive than starting it by crying foul.

Can we set our indignation aside, or at least hold it lightly, while we learn about immigration? Because if we do, I believe we’ll find new understanding. And most importantly, I believe we’ll open ourselves to the ways God is working in the Church.

Gracious God, thank you for giving me so much more than I deserve. Help me to live into my citizenship in your kingdom.

Tana Liu-Beers: Immigration Legal Counsel, Disciples Home Missions
Durham, North Carolina
Immigration and Refugees

Moses' Mother and Strategic Decisions for Placement

Exodus 2:1-10

My recent life feels like it has been all about movement. A move from California to Washington, D.C., from a city condo to a neighborhood house, from a community office to a church site, from a single life to marriage. In every change, I have been struck by the number of decisions about placement that have been required: Where should we look for a home? In what new locations will we put items from all those boxes? What living arrangement will best allow my husband's future to now fit with my own? They are strategic decisions, each one small but building upon another, working together to form a new life.

In chapter two of Exodus, Moses' mother Jochebed made strategic placement decisions far more complex than these. Aware she had given birth to a son the Pharaoh wanted to kill because he was afraid of her people; she traded in a certain future of trauma by making a decision to use a little bit of tar. She bravely opted to use a basket for life instead of becoming a basket case of fear. Rather than drowning in panic, she protected her son amid the papyrus — and strategically floated him into the arms of the Pharaoh's princess. Each one was a small decision. But building together, they formed a remarkable future for their Hebrew family — as the princess eventually paid Jochebed to nurse and care for her beloved baby she had protected.

All around us are immigrant neighbors also making their own strategic placement decisions to try to build a solid new home in this country for their families. There's the single mother who walked her children to school every day because she was not allowed to get a license. There's the young woman "DREAMer" who was raised here most of her life but not allowed to accept a scholarship because she was brought to this country without documents as a young child. And there's the father recruited to produce food in America's fields, who now is laid off and must choose to leave his family now settled here or risk being caught and deported.

As people of faith, we also have the chance to make strategic decisions to build just policies for compassionate immigration reform to help refugees and immigrants in our midst build more firm futures. Pastor Natalie Chamberlain from Fresno, CA. shared stories with her congressmen this week of two church children impacted by recent ICE roundups at the end of the recent growing season in the fertile San Joaquin Valley. One was a little boy in her church's pen pal program who broke down crying to his pal because of his dad's deportation. Another child's family had been attending church, but is now gone because they could no longer pay the rent.

As we work in partnership with our denomination's Refugee & Immigration Ministries to welcome newcomers, let us remember the courage of Moses' mother Jochebed and likewise make decisions that help build stronger and faith filled futures for our neighbors, our churches, ourselves.

God who granted Moses' mother with the courage to float a basket that led to the Promised Land and extended the journeys of your Hebrew people, let us listen to the courage of those seeking futures around us, and share our love to build family unity and hope. AMEN.

Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea
Director of Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Disciples Home Missions
Immigration and Refugees

Taking Faith Seriously

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

On World Refugee Day this year, I was at the courthouse supporting a man from my church as he became a U.S. Citizen. His people, the indigenous Bunong people — also among the handful of tribes known as Montagnard — are refugees for many reasons. There is racism, there is the political lashing out against those who fought alongside the Americans during the Vietnam War, there is the Christian faith that now defines life for so many Montagnard people, and there is the inconvenience of these hill tribes of indigenous people living for generations on mineral rich soil that can be harvested and exploited for profit if only all these people would disappear.

Most refugees have left their homeland for a few of these reasons. Montagnards are in the unique position of being refugees for ALL the reasons persons might become refugees. The one that has hurt the deepest, they tell me, is that they are hunted for their faith. When their churches burned down, they have gathered for worship in homes; when they were told that celebrating Christmas would be a punishable offense, they have gathered for Christmas anyway and endured the resulting beatings and torture; when they were told that public gatherings like baptisms would get them fined and arrested, they have baptized in rivers under cover of darkness. These are a people who take their faith seriously. I am awed by what they have lived through for their faith in Jesus.

The man who now pledged allegiance to the flag had passed through the waters, through the fires, through the floods. Now he decided to put his lot in with the country that had become his home. As it turns out, wherever he has gone, he has carried Jesus with him. In this land or that one, living in a traditional Bunong village, or in a suburban Charlotte home, he and others like him have carried hope in Christ like a light to show them the way.

I marvel that, on the Sundays when it's too rainy to go out and people stay home from church; on the Sundays when it is too lovely to be inside and people opt to do something other than church; on the holidays when all the

extra family and celebrations crowd out church; Montagnards in Vietnam and persecuted people around the world are risking their lives to gather together, to worship, to share a little of the light they have found that will, one day, lead them to their true home.

Rev. Jolin Wilks McElroy: Pastor
First Christian Church, Charlotte, NC
Immigration and Refugees

God Gives Freely

2 Corinthians 9:9-11

God freely gives his gifts to the poor and always does right. God gives seed to the farmer and provides everyone with food. He will increase what you have so that you can give even more to those in need. You will be blessed in every way, and will be able to keep on being generous. (2 Corinthians 9: 9-11, Contemporary English Version).

In God's good creation, God has provided enough for everybody to have their basic needs met. If we have been blessed with stewardship over a part of God's abundance for all, then we, as people of faith and conscience, have both the responsibility and the privilege to share these blessings with others, especially those most in need, through our personal giving, our community involvement, and our advocacy for public policies consistent with this understanding of God's purposes.

O God of abundance, you have blessed your children with enough and more than enough to meet all of our needs. So fill us, we pray, with such an abundance of gratitude that we will freely share our blessings with others and do our part to ensure that, in all areas of life, your abundance is more equally shared, leaving no one poor or hungry or homeless. This we pray in your Holy Name. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston
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Director, Disciples Justice Action Network (DJAN)
Hunger and Poverty

Greatness of a Nation

Psalm 72:11-14

Make other rulers bow down and all other nations serve him. Do this because the king rescues the homeless when they cry out, and he helps everyone who is poor and in need. The king has pity on the weak and the helpless and protects those in need. He cares when they suffer, and he saves them from cruel and violent deaths. (Psalm 72:11-14, Contemporary English Version).

This Scripture teaches us two things: (1) that the greatness of a nation depends on how it treats the poor, vulnerable and needy; and (2) that the government (here represented by the king as sovereign) has a God-given responsibility for the life, health and well-being of all who suffer and are in need. In a democratic society where the people are sovereign, it is now our responsibility to work together through our government to fulfill this sacred obligation for political leaders in all nations.

Just and merciful God, you are the Giver of all good things and the Judge of all nations. Have mercy on the nations of the world, including our own, bless us with good and wise and compassionate leaders, and help us always to remember that the greatest among nations is the one that does the most to lift up the least of its people, especially those who are poor and hungry. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston
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Hunger and Poverty

Advocates for the Poor

Proverbs 31:8-9

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all those who are destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the right of those who are poor and in need. (Proverbs 31:8-9).

As people of faith and conscience, we are called by God to be advocates for the poor and needy. This we must do among our friends and colleagues, within our families, within our congregations, within our communities, and within our democratic system of government.

Sovereign God, with great joy and hearts full of thanksgiving, we thank you for all your many blessings. Forgive us, we pray, for our selfishness and our blindness, open our eyes, ears, hearts and hands to our suffering and struggling sisters and brothers, and empower us humbly yet boldly to advocate for those whose voices go unheard and whose needs go unmet. This we pray in your Holy Name. Amen.

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Connectedness

Galatians 5:13-14

I always held a keen interest for geography, specifically the inter-relationship between places and people. The relationship between a given landscape and how its inhabitants interact with it continues to intrigue me. The first law of geography states that, “everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things” (Tobler, 1970). As a graduate student in geospatial sciences, I began to see beyond statistical relationships. I became increasingly aware of how we are connected to one another more than we realize. People are connected to each other because of their proximity to one another. Faith communities are connected to each other because of our willingness to listen deeply and compassionately to one another’s stories. Our relationship to one another is bridged as a result of connectedness. For many geographers, connectedness is difficult to quantify. Yet, somehow the depth of our connectedness is correlated to our proximity in distance we have with one another.

Connectedness can be experienced as we laugh, mourn, rejoice, worship and fellowship with each other.

Connectedness is found in appreciating diversity without expecting conformity or homogeneity.

Connectedness is never done instantaneously neither is it an easy passive task. While connectedness takes time to foster, connectedness isn’t weakened overnight. When we trivialize another human being’s experiences, we distance ourselves. When our social sphere has a price of admission or appears inclusive to individuals of similar culture, education, and socio-economics, we distance ourselves. When issues like poverty, marginalization and disenfranchisement are articulated as “THE poor,” “THE marginalized,” and “THE disenfranchised,” we distance ourselves. Little by little the distance causes disconnection. As a people of faith, we value connectedness. Where do we start? Perhaps a good way is to

prepare our hearts and have room for others. Let us go forth prayerfully and faithfully as we seek to establish connectedness and meaningful relationships. May we continue to seek the Holy Spirit help guide us into deeper fellowship with one another. In the process, let us awaken our senses to God's loving compassion for all humanity and creation. With Jesus our prime example of our faith, may we go forth!

Lynette Li: Seminarian at Phillips Theological, Oklahoma Region
Worked with General Youth Council on GA programming
Immigration and Refugees

Child Nutrition

Matthew 18:10

Babies! Whether it is mom, dad, grandparents, aunts or uncles, we get so excited about babies. When we hear the news of expectant parents we throw parties and buy gifts and start planning what the life of this child will look like. We think about bright eyes and chubby cheeks and smiling, happy faces.

I planned all of those for my first pregnancy, too. At 7 months I began to have problems with my health. In spite of the blizzard outside I was sent to the hospital for tests. A quick x-ray (before the day of sonograms) showed that there were, in fact, two babies. "Oh no! I need a second crib and a second car seat and twice as many clothes and bottles and diapers....." Well, at least I had two months to get all the plans made.

Regardless, the snow was still falling and we were told to double up in houses in case the grid couldn't handle the demand of heating everyone's home. Ten hours after my x-ray, in the midst of the blizzard, I went into labor. The doctor said not to delay...to get to the hospital immediately because they were coming too soon and we needed to be certain to be there before they were delivered. They arrived two hours later. They lost weight, had breathing problems, had to be fed intravenously. It was 16 days before I was permitted to hold them in my arms.

Scary? Challenging? Yes. But within a year they had gone from a weight of three pounds up to within normal development range. After those initial challenges they grew and developed normally and there were no residual difficulties.

How can preemie babies thrive so well? How is it that some babies go full term and still struggle? The truth is there are a whole host of reasons. One of those reasons can be addressed: nutrition for the child for the first 1,000 days from conception to her second birthday. I was blessed to have proper food, vitamins and medical care during my pregnancy. When this

unexpected challenge came along my daughters were healthy enough to be able to overcome those early difficulties. How different might the outcome have been without that safety net? If they survived, they might still have had emotional or learning challenges. Full term babies without the proper care face those same challenges.

As we face the challenge of child nutrition, may we recognize the hope that lies in the fact that WE CAN DO something about it.

Rev. Dr. Patricia Donahoo
Disciples Women
Indianapolis, IN
Women and Children

When Jesus Comes Back Let's Be Sure the Earth is Clean and Green!

Genesis 2:5-17

Way back in 1979 my wife Julie and I attended a lecture by a very popular Pentecostal preacher from Southern California. He was there to tell us exactly when Jesus was going to return to earth.

At that time in my life I was beginning to question the sort of theology that tried to predict the second coming. After all, Jesus himself says that “no one knows” when that will happen. If Jesus doesn't care about the date why should we?

What I really learned from that night was in the question and answer period after the lecture. The preacher had just predicted that Jesus was coming back, sometime in 1981. The first question was about the environment. “If Jesus is coming back then we don't have to worry about care for the earth, right?” Many similar questions and comments followed. I don't remember the preacher's answers but I have never forgotten how quickly the audience decided that the earth was no big deal.

Isn't that surprising? At the beginning of the Bible we have a marvelous image of humankind being placed in the middle of the garden where the humans are given the command to “till it and keep it.” Another way to translate that phrase is to “serve and protect.” Maybe you've seen that on the side of a police car. The Genesis author seems to be saying that we are the police force that oversees care for the Earth!

I thought about our experience in that lecture when I read NT Wright's, essay in *The Green Bible* titled, “Jesus is Coming — Plant a Tree.” As the title of his essay implies he believes that the idea of Jesus' return is a call to Christians to care even more deeply for the environment.

Wright gets this conclusion from the Bible. He quotes the Apostle Paul who wrote in Romans 8 that the creation will be “set free from the slavery that consists in corruption.” This is the promise that the creatures who bear God's image, that is you and me and every other human being, will one day

live in harmony with the garden in the way that God has always intended. This ancient idea seems to have been forgotten.

However, a basic reading of the Bible reveals that this teaching is central to the biblical story. The Bible teaches that Creation will be redeemed. All of creation, the Bible promises, is under the care and nurture of God and we are called to be God's coworkers in this work. The second chapter of Genesis is an intense theological presentation on creation and humanity's interaction with it. This story is a reflection on power and control, on anxiety and the way we respond to it.

When we lay this story over the top of our world today we see that these issues have not gone away. Power? Control? Anxiety? When it comes to the environment we have all too often eaten the forbidden fruit while failing to serve and protect the garden of the earth itself.

Perhaps what we need is a reminder of the simple fact that we have come from the dust and to the dust we will return. When our Genesis story teller relates this story of creation he uses a play on words. When humankind is created the word for human is adam. It can be translated as man or humankind. We think of it as the name of the first male, Adam, but it is not a proper name; it's just a regular word for humankind. The adam, humanity as it were, was created from the soil. The word in Hebrew for soil is adamah. Do you hear the word play at work here? Adam has come from adamah. Humans are soil. We are basically lumps of clay. This implies that our lives are interwoven with the life of the soil, of the dirt. The health of our bodies depends on the health of our soil.

Ellen Davis, a professor at Duke and a contributor to *The Green Bible*, has helped me remember all of this. Our health depends on the health of the food we receive from the soil. If the soil goes bad, the food goes bad, and, well, you can fill in the blanks can't you?

The first human sin is connected to eating. God sets a boundary and says, "Stay away from here." We don't know why. We don't know what is wrong about this forbidden fruit. All we know is that the boundaries are clear. "Do not cross this line. It will be bad for you." And like we so often want to do today Adam refuses to take the responsibility for his sin. Have you ever noticed this? Whenever I teach on this text I always ask the class, "Who does Adam blame for his sin?" They almost always say, with one voice, "Eve!" But, no. The story is clear. Adam is asked about his sin and he says,

“The woman that YOU gave me, caused me to sin.” He points his finger at God and says, “It’s your fault.”

We do the same thing don’t we? We see the city of New Orleans destroyed by a hurricane and we call it an act of God. Then, to make things worse we avoid the deeper issues at work in the city, things like racism and poverty and crime and unemployment and we turn it into a political football while all the time failing to face our sin, our weakness and our refusal to care for the environment and the people therein.

This reminds us that when we fail to care for the earth the first ones to experience the pain of the soil are the poorest of the poor. Check your political concerns at the door for a moment. We should, every one of us, fall on our knees in prayer asking for the forgiveness of our sins and the way we have abused the planet and its resources at the price of the poor.

The first result of sin in the Bible is the ruination of the ground. The soil is affected. The ground is cursed. It is filled with thorns and thistles. It will now be a labor to till and work. Professor Davis read this text with a group of farmers and asked them to interpret it. They said: “It is obvious. When humans are disconnected from God, the soil will be the first to suffer.”

They had not been to seminary but they helped her, and us, see something that any Hebrew would have already recognized: the degradation of the land is a sign that humans (the Adams) have turned away from God. When the land is flourishing it is sign that humans have returned to God. In other words, the single greatest indicator as to whether or not we are in good relationship with God is the condition of the land!

As Professor Wright proclaims, “Jesus is Coming — Plant a Tree”

Dr. R. Glen Miles: Senior Minister,
Country Club Christian Church, Kansas City, MO
Creation Care

Back to the Garden

Matthew 21:12-16

I'd prefer to be an Earth Mother-type, a loamy smell of earth clinging to my clothes...as people in my presence discover in themselves a desire to plant flowers...and I suggest we all sing Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock." (We do have to get ourselves back to the Garden.) I'd rather nurture the agents of culture change gently, patiently.

But Earth's climate has changed on us. It's happening fast, and it's accelerating. In the last year, the Atlantic Ocean made a bid for a midtown Manhattan address, the Arctic ice cap looked like an endangered habitat, and "heat wave" became too moderate a term for infernal weeks that cooked crops and killed the sick and elderly. The climate has gone mad. I'm mad and getting madder along with it. I hate feeling this way. But I'm angry at bumper-sticker arguments that say global warming is a hoax. (How can anyone believe that, over a dozen decades, thousands of observers in hundreds of thousands of locations conspired to fake millions of measurements?) I feel crazy when I'm told, "It's not us, it's sunspots." And I thought I would drop off the deep end when the House passed a bill which abrogates half a dozen laws in order to sell a trans-continental corridor for toxic oil sludge to foreign money changers.

What is this crazy culture I'm in? Who are these people I live among? How can they...how can we...be so blind to relationships? How can we have so forgotten the covenantal foundations of community? How can we ignore our children's future like this?

Jesus confronted his culture's craziness, and it made him crazy-mad. He took changing his culture hands-on. He opened the eyes of at least some of the blind. Then, by some standards, he lost. By others, however, the story's still unfolding.

I think if we don't change our culture, climate change will do it for us. That future horrifies, and its setting doesn't look like a garden at all. So I'm glad to be mad after all. Anger is energy at and for change.

Are you mad, too? Welcome ... there are millions of us, of every tribe. In our brother Jesus' footsteps, let's walk together. For all that God called good, let's work together.

Let's change the ending.

Douglas Job: Evergreen Christian Church (DOC)
Green Chalice Congregation, Athens GA
Creation Care

May the Words

Luke 13:10-16

Walking down a dusty road at camp, a young woman and I spoke about an incident from her life. While jogging, a worker in the neighborhood decided to whistle at her as she started her run and again when she was returning. The first whistle elicited a fierce glare. As her feet pounded the pavement, her heart rate and her anger increased. She wasn't just miffed or mildly perturbed; instead her anger reverberated within her. The second whistle unleashed the rage that had been building, and vehement words spilled out. The intensity of the response surprised her. As we walked on, we analyzed her reaction.

In a time when some legislators seek to redefine rape and make outrageous statements that disparage violence against women...in a time when girls and women are bought and sold as easily and sometimes with less thought than buying a cup of coffee...in a time when girls are emaciated by anorexia because their bodies do not match the bodies in the teen magazines...in a time when some girls are maimed for simply wanting to learn, smaller acts of unwanted comments and gestures toward women point toward even greater violations of selfhood. Words and images help shape how women perceive themselves and how women are valued in the world. Justice begins in how we describe those among us. Something as simple as how we describe an assertive woman versus an assertive man speaks to a continuing difference in valuing.

When Jesus healed a woman bent over for eighteen years, his actions and words spoke to her "bondage," challenging those who had defined her by her gender and her condition. He confronted the powers that protested her healing. He directed her and all present to see her fully as a beloved and valued part of the community: "*And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?*" (Luke 13:16)

And ought not all girls and women, beloved daughters of God, be set free from bondage...all forms...on each day?

Blessed and Gracious God, who bestows the name Beloved on each and all, transform the words of our mouths, the thoughts of our minds and the longings of our hearts into gifts of justice. Amen.

Rev. Mary Jacobs: President, IDWM
Interim Regional Minister Northern California/Nevada
Women and Children

Where is Your Treasure?

Matthew 6:21

What we treasure most in life is what we tend to place our focus on. As we strive to live in our fast-paced, ever changing world that places emphasis on what you have and who you are according to material standards, we often lose track of what is truly important. All too often, we seek to fill the void in our lives with temporary solutions, food, alcohol, shopping, even success, instead of turning to God and the relationships he has placed in our lives. The quality of life we live and our level of joy depend greatly on our ability to develop healthy relationships.

The key to a happy life and making it count every day is spending quality time with God and those we love. As a mother it can be easy to take this relationship piece for granted, especially with our children, inadvertently placing it on autopilot to tend to the “things we need to get done”. This is fueled by the hope and expectation that this relationship will still be intact when we are able and ready to give it time. As life seldom slows down, we can go weeks, months and even years not investing time in those we love the most. Learning where to place our priorities (treasure) can be somewhat concerning, as there is so much seeking our full attention. Placing the focus on intimacy with God will help establish this priority in life around developing and investing in these relationships with those we love most.

If what matters most in life is relationships with God and others, let us ask ourselves then, what are we doing to strengthen these closest relationships? Where is your heart? Are you enslaved by the human desire to store up treasure in this world?

Ask a child whether they would rather have a new toy or have a date with mom, more often than not, they will choose time with mom. If a mother's children are her treasure, where will her heart be?

Children were precious to Jesus when he was here on earth, as they should be to every mother as we seek to nurture relationships with God

and those we love. Look a child in the eyes today for within them is the foundation of a beautiful relationship from the heart.

Lori Tapia, Pastor

Iglesia Alas De Salvacion, Gilbert, AZ

Women and Children

Lessons on Hunger, Poverty in America's Bread Basket

Luke 11:11

I grew up on the outskirts of a little Oklahoma town. A barbed-wire fence separated two sides of our lawn from a wheat field. A Jersey cow stretched her heavy head through the fence on the third side, to reach our greener grass.

In short, we knew from whence came our food — the miracle that transformed dirt into diet.

I lived in cities most of the rest of my life, but engaged with celebration the urban gardening movement that converts asphalt parking lots into raised-bed gardens. These oases bring the wonder of homegrown food — and education about food, food security, and nutrition — into the heart of metro areas. Farm-to-table programs let children tend school gardens — then eat the produce in the cafeteria.

Thus, our children also learn from whence comes their food — the miracle that transformed dirt into diet.

Our family recently moved to rural Lebanon, IN — a county-seat town surrounded by crops like government-subsidized corn and soybeans. But where was fresh, healthy food for human consumption?

Oddly, I found Lebanon's fast food joints outnumber fresh food stands 13 to one. Ironically, the County Health Department pays close attention to the one, noting that unprocessed foods — like fresh lettuce or homegrown tomatoes — are suspect.

At Zionsville Farmers' Market, vendors label their fresh gazpacho soup as "not intended for human consumption," to sidestep "ridiculous regulations." Inspectors "don't know the difference between head lettuce and leaf lettuce," one vendor complained.

At the Boone County July 4 parade in Lebanon, dozens of children delighted in the display of everything from teen twirlers to rear-steering

tractors. Both could turn on a dime. Yet many of these children (to say nothing of the adults) were obese — many of them morbidly so.

Turns out, the only thing growing in some rural backyards is food insecurity.

According to Feeding America, about 3 million rural households — yes, those that share fences with farmland — in this nation are food insecure. And: “among all people in female-headed families with related children under 18 years, 50.7 percent were poor in rural areas compared to 35 percent in the suburbs.”

So, you go on, urban farmers. Help keep the gardening knowledge alive. Too many of our rural neighbors are up a row without a hoe.

Rev. Patricia R. Case, Boone County, IN
Works on young adult and mission renewal efforts for CC (DOC)
Hunger and Poverty

Equality and Need

2 Corinthians 8: 13-14

"We don't want others to have it easy at your expense. We want things to be equal. Right now you have plenty in order to take care of what they need. Then they will have plenty to take care of what you need. That will make things equal. "

I work in a middle class job and observe a lot of discussions in the church and in government about poverty. People talk about anecdotes and theories. A lot of proof texting is done with scripture and political ideology, both on the left and the right. Some of it inspires me, but more leaves me cold.

Poverty in the United States and across the globe often seems overwhelming and too big to do anything about. Then I go to church and there is an offering every Sunday, every Sunday of the year. Part of the offering will go to outreach — wells for drinking water in poor nations, disaster relief in developed and developing countries, urban food pantries, a variety of reconciliation ministries — and part necessarily goes to paying the church building's electric bill and the preacher's salary.

Occasionally around offering time my mind is drawn to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 8, to remember people who gave when they might have been on the poorer side of the middle class to encourage generosity. Paul realized that there are differences in resources among communities, yet he wanted those resources to move so that there would be equality. Need mattered. Resources should move from those who have to those in need and later resources would move from those who received to take care of the need of those who have given.

The goal is that kind of equality, an equality that flows from generosity, almost in a circle. Our lives are not static and we receive generous gifts in order to be generous, because we have been and will be in need. So we write checks and volunteer time and talent to keep the flow moving. We are part of the flow toward equality, even though often we are not as much a

part as we need to be. Love and justice are like that, because they move to meet a need and we are all part of their movement.

Prayer: O God, help me to be a part of making things equal, in the Name of Jesus, Your Gift to make things equal. Amen.

Jess Hale, Legislative Attorney with the Tennessee General Assembly
Hunger and Poverty

The Persistent Call to Justice

Luke 18:4-7

The picture of the young Hispanic boy sitting on a prison bed dressed in a uniform that was obviously too large made it impossible to fight back tears. The symbolism is most disturbing. Here in this photograph is an eight year old child remanded to life in prison without the possibility of parole — a life that he is not “big” enough to navigate emotionally or physically. It does not matter which side we fall on when it comes to crime and punishment, we are all diminished when we lose our concern for humanity and the human condition. Who will advocate on his behalf?

I saw this photograph at one of five sites I visited with an ecumenical group of participants on an immersion experience focusing on human and civil rights. Indeed it was painful. At the end we shared an unintended collective lament.

We cried because of the impact of brokenness and sin on our lives. We also cried because of the persistence of God’s love through Jesus Christ for us to be our gracious and merciful judge. Our scripture reminds us that God beckons us each day through prayer and action to advocate for justice on behalf of hurting members of the human family. Jesus is teaching the disciples through this parable the importance of prayer in action. We, too, are invited to “weary” God with our prayers for justice in our daily witness on behalf of Christ.

Rev. April G. Johnson, Minister of Reconciliation CC (DOC)
Women and Children