



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Who Are the Poor? Part One

[Based upon a Presentation by Dr. Douglas Meeks, Professor of Wesleyan Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School]

*²⁰ Then he looked up at his disciples and said:
“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God. Luke 6:20 NRSV*

We often hear or speak about “the poor.” When “the poor” are mentioned it is usually in the context of the economic poor: i.e. those who do not have the financial means to care for themselves or their family. However, scripture describes at least five dimensions of poverty. Poverty used in this sense means being shut out of society, or marginalized, due to the lack of some resource held in abundance, or controlled by others. The five dimensions of poverty are Economic Poverty, Poverty of Health, Political Poverty, Cultural Poverty and Spiritual Poverty.

The easiest form of poverty for us to recognize is **Economic Poverty**; those who lack sufficient economic resources to care for themselves and their families. The people in this class are described many places in scripture. For instance, in Isaiah 58:7 Isaiah, speaking for God, declares that the worship that God desires is feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless and clothing the naked. It is likely this passage that Jesus had in mind when he described the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25:31-46:

³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

Scripture repeatedly calls on those who have been blessed with economic wealth to help those who are economically poor.

Poverty of Health is also represented in Scripture. One of the classic examples from the Old Testament is General Naaman of the Kingdom of Aram. 2 Kings 5. Naaman has economic, social and political wealth. Yet he is a leper and is thus still an outcaste in his nation. He and his King are willing to sacrifice great economic wealth to restore Naaman's health. The Gospels also offer repeated examples of those who are ill and can't care for themselves. Curing of the blind, the lepers and the lame was central to Jesus' ministry. One of the most poignant healing miracles was that of the bleeding woman. It appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke. (Matt 9:20-21; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48). Constant bleeding was not only life threatening but would have seriously marginalized this woman in society. Mark and Luke add that the woman had impoverished herself seeking medical care from physicians. She reaches out in a crowd and touches Jesus' cloak and is healed. Jesus proclaims that her faith was the source of her healing. Even in the first century, poverty of health pushed people to the margins of society.

Stories of **Political Poverty** as a concern of God abound in scripture. Political Poverty may be, but is not always, closely associated with economic poverty. For instance, the prophet Amos condemns the society of Samaria for the way in which the poor are victimized. Not only are they starving, but they are scorned by society and tormented by financial arrangements that further take what little they have:

... they sell the righteous for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals—
⁷ they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth,
and push the afflicted out of the way;

Amos 2:6-7. When the poor cannot pay trivial debts they are sold into slavery and are not even treated with respect in the streets. Moreover, the poor cannot obtain justice for their complaints because the rich buy the judges. Judging was done at the Gate to the city. Thus:

¹² For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate.

Amos 5:12. Dishonest judges are paid off to deny justice to the righteous. See also Proverbs 13:23:

²³ The field of the poor may yield much food,
but it is swept away through injustice.

The good things the poor have are taken away from them through dishonesty and injustice by the rich and politically powerful.

Political poverty need not always be related to economic poverty. In the Old Testament, for instance, the People of Israel had very little political power in their own nation because of the harsh rule of Solomon. It was Solomon's harsh rule that triggered the revolt leading to the divided Kingdom. When the People of Israel return from exile in Babylon, they were still suffering under the political rule of the Persians and later the Greeks. In the Gospels everyone suffers under the rule of Rome. Political poverty is a common theme in scripture.

Closely related to the concept of Political Poverty is **Cultural Poverty**. Cultural poverty exists where a people are discouraged from experiencing their cultural heritage or prevented from expressing their cultural

identity. The classic example in the Old Testament is found in the Book of Daniel. The exiles in Babylon are prohibited from following the Torah and punished when they protest. These stories in Daniel, in fact, mirrored the actual experience of the people of Israel during a portion of the Hellenistic rule of Palestine. Similar stories appear in the Book of Esther. Cultural poverty can also be self-imposed where a group seeks to separate itself from other cultures. Again, following the Babylonian Exile, the people of Israel sought to isolate themselves from the influences of other cultures. The Book of Jonah, in part, responds to this isolation by reminding that God created all people, not just the people of Israel.

Cultural poverty exists in the New Testament as well. The most prominent example is the separation of Jews and Samaritans. Both groups despised the other and a Jew would be culturally isolated in Samaria and a Samaritan would be culturally isolated in Judah or in Galilee. Also, just as Greek culture had dominated the region for centuries, so now Roman culture dominated. In Acts and the Epistles, the culture of Christianity comes into conflict with all the surrounding cultures and even within Christianity, there are divisions between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Cultural poverty exists wherever the distinctiveness of our cultural diversity cannot be celebrated and experienced by all.

Finally, there is **Spiritual Poverty**. When Spiritual Poverty is mentioned, most people probably think of the Beatitudes as contained in Matthew 5: 3:

³ *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

However, this passage does not describe a lack of spiritual connection. The Greek expression here might be translated as “Blessed are those who know that they need God.” This passage describes the humble person who understands that they need God in their lives.

Spiritual poverty can be thought of as **not knowing** that you need God. Spiritual poverty occurs whenever we place something other than God at the center of our lives. The most common illustration in scripture is placing money at the center of our lives. Thus, returning to Amos and his condemnation of Samaria, he chides those businessmen who attend special worship services or observe the Sabbath and then engage in dishonest business practices:

⁴ *Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
⁵ saying, “When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
⁶ buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.”*

Amos 8:4-6. These men want the days of religious observance over so they can use short measures and false balances to cheat their customers; to include the sweepings or refuse of the wheat with the good wheat. They aren't thinking about the duty they owe to God but about how to obtain wealth.

In the New Testament there are numerous examples and parables. One of the most amusing, but thought provoking, is the Rich Man and his barns.

“The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Luke 12:16-21. No doubt the crowd laughed at someone so foolish as to pull down good barns instead of building new barns, but the point Jesus makes is that the man’s focus on his wealth prevented him from thinking about God.

It is not only wealth, but ego, that causes us to supplant God and leads to spiritual poverty. Thus, Paul condemns those in the congregation at Corinth for placing the evangelists, Paul, Apollos or Peter at the center of their faith believing one to be superior to another. Paul reorients them:

¹³ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

First Corinthians 1:13. Later he chides those who claim superior spiritual gifts or spiritual understanding instead proclaiming that God has created the diversity of Gifts and that the Body of Christ needs them all. See 1 Corinthians 12-13. Anything that supplants God at the center of our lives can result in Spiritual Poverty.

Poverty exists in many forms other than economic poverty. One may be very wealthy and be culturally poor, politically poor, spiritually poor or poor in health. Part two of this article will consider how the five dimensions of poverty are expressed in our culture and how the Gospel calls upon us to respond.

Holy Week Services

The last week of Lent is called Holy Week. It began as we commemorated Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem when the crowds greeted Jesus by laying palm branches in his path.

On Thursday we will have a combined **Maundy Thursday and Tenebrae service**. Maundy Thursday gets its name from the Latin phrase *mandatum novum* meaning New Commandment. Jesus gave his Disciples a new commandment on that night as recorded in John 13:34-35:

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Maundy Thursday also marks the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

The Tenebrae Service is sometimes called a Service of Shadows. It is a meditation on the passion of Christ. Just before the service begins the church will be “stripped.” The symbols of the faith will be removed (the Cross on the altar, the altar cloth, etc). The sanctuary will be lit by candles and the passion story will then be read as the candles are extinguished.

On **Good Friday** at noon we will hold a short service recalling the crucifixion. Scripture tells us that the crucifixion took place between noon and 3 o'clock. The Scripture will be read from the lectern instead of the pulpit. The pulpit represents the proclaimed Word of God and Good Friday is the day that we sought to remove the Word of God from the world. The church will remain open until 3:00 PM for those who wish to stop, meditate and pray.

Easter Season Sermon Series

What's the Least I Can Believe and Still be Christian?

Several years ago Dr. Martin Thielen, a United Methodist Pastor here in the Tennessee Conference, wrote a book titled, "What is the Least I Can Believe and Still be a Christian?" The title is not really descriptive of the thrust of the book but comes from a question Dr. Thielen was asked by a parishioner contemplating a profession of faith. Dr. Thielen uses the question as a jumping off point to discuss things that are not central to Christian belief and things that he believes are central to Christian belief.

Beginning on April 12, the Sunday after Easter, I will begin a ten part sermon series loosely based on Dr. Thielen's book. The first five sermons will focus on propositions that you do not have to believe to be a Christian. The second five will focus on propositions that I believe are central to Christian Faith. The titles for these sermons are listed below:

- *You do not have to Believe that God Brings Catastrophes into Our Lives.*
- *You do not have to Believe that Women Cannot be Preachers or Leaders of the Church.*
- *You do not have to Believe that Christians Never Doubt.*
- *You do not have to Believe that "Bad" People Will be 'Left Behind' by God.*
- *You do not have to Believe that Everything in the Bible Should be Taken Literally.*

- *To be Christian, You Must Believe in Christ.*
- *To be Christian, You Must Believe in the Church, the Body of Christ.*
- *To Be Christian, You Must Believe in the Holy Spirit.*
- *To be Christian, You Must Believe in God's Love for the World.*
- *To be Christian, You Must Believe in the Resurrection.*

One reason I offer sermon series is to provide an opportunity for you to be able to invite people to our Church. It is sometimes easier to invite people to come and visit the Church when you can tell them what the sermon will be about. A sermon series offers people an opportunity to get to know us over a series of weeks and experience what it is like to participate in our ministries. I encourage you to take this opportunity to invite others to "Come and See" what Trinity United Methodist Church is like.

72+U The Mission and Ministry of the Tennessee Conference and Trinity UMC

After this the Lord appointed [seventy-two] others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Luke 10:1-2

The mission of the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences of the United Methodist Church is to Discover, Equip, Connect and Send lay and clergy leaders who shape congregations that offer Jesus Christ to a hurting world, one neighborhood at a time. The values underlying this mission are:

Unrelenting love for all people
Integrity
Excellence
Faithfulness and Fruitfulness
Innovation

Luke 10:1-2 describes the beginning of the first missionary effort of the Disciples of Jesus Christ. Some translations state that Jesus sent forth 70 disciples, others say that he sent forth 72. The Tennessee and Memphis Conferences, under the leadership of Bishop William McAlilly have adopted that scripture as a map for our own mission in our communities. The Bishop has invited us to view our communities as our mission fields, seeking to bring the Gospel to everyone in our communities.

In the coming months I will bring you more information about this mission initiative and how we might be a part of it.

Easter Egg Hunt

Last year's Easter Egg Hunt was a huge success. We would like to make this year's even better. The Easter Egg Hunt will be held on the day before Easter, Saturday, April 4th, at 10:00 AM. If you are able, please come by and help with the preparations and with the activities themselves. Also, be sure to invite your neighbors, grandchildren, nieces and nephews to be a part of the fun. If you would like to help, please contact Julia Moore or Jeanne Rybolt.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

*⁸You don't know how
to live in peace
or to be fair with others. Isaiah 59:8a CEV*

It is common to refer to the people in the United States today as the "me generation." We are intensely focused on our 'rights' and what benefits us at the expense of the rights of others and the benefit of others. I

believe Isaiah has something similar in mind when he condemns the people for failing to live in peace with their neighbors and even being ignorant in how to be fair to others.

God put our bodies together in such a way that even the parts that seem the least important are valuable. ²⁵ He did this to make all parts of the body work together smoothly, with each part caring about the others. ²⁶ If one part of our body hurts, we hurt all over. If one part of our body is honored, the whole body will be happy. 1 Corinthians 12:24b-26

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are not only individuals but also part of the Body of Christ. What hurts one part of the body, hurts all. What benefits one part of the body benefits all.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

April 5th: **Easter Sunday. Sermon: They Were Afraid.** Of all the resurrection texts, Mark 16:1-8 is the most curious. My texts are 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 and Mark 16:1-8.

April 12: "**What Do I Have to Believe? You Don't Have To Believe that God Brings Catastrophes.** I am always distressed when people say things that indicate that God must have a purpose for a tragedy in another's life when the context of the statement suggests that God has caused that tragedy. I believe that God works constantly with everything that happens to bring healing to all that happens, but I do not believe that God causes storms to hurt or kill someone or for a madman to go on a rampage in order to make a point. More importantly, you do not have to hold the belief that God brings catastrophes into our lives in order to be a Christian. My texts are Psalm 22 and Luke 13:1-5.

Worship Leader's Schedule

April 5

Dana Bauguess, **Liturgist**
Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**
Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

April 12

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**
Donnie & Renita Hartsock, **Greeters**
Rodger & Cherry Klein, **Ushers**

Announcements

The **Maundy Thursday/Tenebrae service** will take place **Thursday, April 2 at 7:00 PM.**

The **Good Friday service** will take place at noon **Friday, April 3.**

Easter Sunday is a first Sunday. However, we will not celebrate a First Sunday meal on Easter Sunday so that people can share the day with their families.

Everyone is encouraged to be at church **Sunday, April 12.** A photographer will be present to take a photograph of the congregation in front of the church. This photo is being done to commemorate the sesquicentennial celebration this year. Please plan to be present that day and for a brief time after church.

Quilt project: All of the outstanding quilt squares that have been sewed will need to be returned by **Sunday, April 12.** Please see that Judy Richardson receives these. There are more squares that need to be painted. The ones that have been done are beautiful. Currently, we have ten completed and we need 25. Please see Dana or Judy if you would be able to paint.

April Birthdays

Betty Whitefield, Mary Coleman, Jo Oliphant, Jason Aldred, Houston Hartsock

Happy Birthday to each of you!