

“Dear D.C. Councilmember,” the child carefully wrote on yellow lined paper. “I am 10 ½ years old. I live with my family at the shelter. When I grow up, I want to be a singer. I think you need to find more money to help families find housing because people is in danger without a home. So please, please find more money. SO STEP UP TO THE PLATE AND FIND MORE MONEY. Thank you for listening.”

“Nobody’s going to read that letter,” an older boy laughed. “Those rich people don’t care about us.”

“We don’t know unless we try,” the little girl responded, as she carefully signed her name.

It’s easy not to try, not to call for justice, not to proclaim the prophetic message—because we are discouraged, or criticized, or nervous, or think the climate is unfavorable. The verse from Luke reminds us that the real danger isn’t being criticized; the real danger is keeping silent on justice so we won’t be criticized. If a ten-year-old child living in a homeless shelter can speak up for justice, can’t we step up to the plate too?

Prayer

Lord, help me to persist although I want to give up. Lord, help me to keep trying although I can’t see what good it does. Lord, help me to keep praying although I’m not sure You hear me. Lord, help me to keep living in ways that seek to please You. (Excerpted from *Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditations on Loving and Working for Children* by Marian Wright Edelman. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005)

Act in Faith

Find at least one other person who will commit with you to speak out for justice and children on a regular basis. Support each other to persist when you are criticized or discouraged. Take action together and draw courage from each other. Reach out in concrete ways to support children and families who are homeless. Connect with others already working on their behalf. Donate necessities like clothing and food, kitchen utensils, diapers, books and toys. Create and distribute “homeless survival kits” that include cups, pots, pans, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, cosmetics and other items. During cold weather, organize drives for blankets, coats, hats, scarves, mittens, socks, and boots. Or donate your time. Volunteer at a shelter, play with or mentor homeless children and teens, build or fix up houses and shelters, or offer job or internship opportunities through your company, school, or church that can help prepare families for other employment. Bring policymakers to local shelters and other programs assisting children who are homeless – to help them see the benefit of their policies.

Blessed Are You...

Seven-Day Devotional Guide
for the 2010
National Observance of
Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration

“Blessed to Be a Blessing:
Lifting Up the Next Generation”

By Shannon Daley-Harris



Children’s Defense Fund

Monday

Scripture:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:20b)

Read Luke 4: 16-22 *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* (Luke 4:18-19)

Fast Fact for Faithful Action: 2009 saw the largest increase in child poverty in five decades – a larger increase than for any other group – with 15.5 million children now living in poverty. More than one in five children is poor. Nearly seven million of the 15.5 million poor children live in extreme poverty, which is at half of the poverty level (\$10,974 for a family of four) or below. Our youngest children are most at risk of being poor; one in four children under age five is poor. Black and Hispanic children are nearly three times as likely to be poor as White non-Hispanic children.

Reflection

Jesus began his public ministry declaring the fulfillment of Isaiah 61—that he came “to bring good news to the poor.” (Lk.4:18) In today’s verse from Luke 6, we hear again Jesus standing with and for those who are in poverty. Jesus is speaking to his disciples; he is speaking to us who would follow him. Jesus did not romanticize poverty, and he did not come to support its continuation. Instead, his was a liberating word of release for all those who are oppressed, a word of blessing for those who were looked down upon.

There is nothing romantic about the poverty in which more than 15 million children live in America. Growing up in poverty can rob a child of health, development, school achievement, and more. As grim as poverty can be, it’s not all bad news. Child poverty is not inevitable and it is not an act of God. We can change our nation’s child poverty rate if we summon the political will to make it so.

Jesus has made it clear that he stands with those living in poverty. Do we?

Prayer

Loving God, you came among us as a poor child. You ministered to us with special care for the last and the left out. Help me this day to see you in the faces of children living in poverty, and to be now your hands and heart that minister to families in difficult economic circumstances. Show me how to follow you. Amen.

Prayer

God of compassion, you knew the depths of human pain; you know the suffering of children and families without enough to meet their daily needs. Grant me, I pray, your heart of tenderness and strength, empathy and determination to minister to a hurting world. Amen.

Act in Faith

Help combat the academic losses poor children experience during the summer months and help restore their ability to read at grade level by supporting the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools® Program in your community. *CDF Freedom Schools* programs provide children ages 5-18 summer and after-school enrichment that helps them fall in love with reading, increase their self-esteem, and help them generate more positive attitudes toward learning. The Freedom Schools program works hard to ensure each child is equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in life and connects the needs of children and families to the resources of their communities. Learn more about *CDF Freedom Schools* programs at www.freedomschools.org.

Sunday

Scripture:

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26)

Read 2 Timothy 4:2-5 *“Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.”* (2 Tim. 4:2-5)

Fast Fact for Faithful Action: Every year, hundreds of thousands of American families become homeless, including more than 1.5 million children – one out of every 50. Families with children are among the fastest growing group of people experiencing homelessness. Nearly 40 percent of the homeless population is children, and 42 percent of homeless children are under the age of five.

Reflection

Jamila Larson, who founded the Homeless Children’s Playtime Project to serve, nurture, and advocate on behalf of children living in Washington, D.C.’s homeless shelters, shared the following exchange that she witnessed not long ago:

Saturday

Scripture:

“Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.” (Luke 6:25b)

Read Psalm 10 *“Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor—let them be caught in the schemes they have devised. For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart, those greedy for gain curse and renounce the Lord. In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, ‘God will not seek it out’; all their thoughts are ‘There is no God.’ Their ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high out of their sight; as for their foes, they scoff at them. They think in their heart, ‘We shall not be moved; throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity.’”* (Psalm 10: 1-6)

Fast Fact for Faithful Action: Poor children are at high risk of poor educational outcomes – they start school behind and stay behind. A majority of children in all racial and income groups cannot read or do math at grade level in 4th, 8th or 12th grade and over 80 percent of Black and Hispanic children, who with other minority children will constitute a majority of our population in 2023, are behind in reading and math in these grade levels – if they have not already dropped out of school.

Reflection

A school teacher shared her heartbreak: one of her young students had longed for a certain kind of rugged sandals that were popular with his classmates. His mother, barely scraping by financially, set aside a bit of money each week so that she could purchase a pair for her child. Each week the little boy reported to his teacher, with growing anticipation, how close he was to getting the sandals he wanted so badly. At last the day came. His mother had taken her carefully saved money and purchased the sandals the evening before, and the boy proudly wore them to school.

The teacher never got to see his beaming smile of joy, however; by the time he reached his classroom he was in tears. His classmates had seen him in the halls, and scoffed at the sandals—they were a less expensive imitation of the “cool” sandals and the children laughed at and teased him mercilessly.

The verse from the beatitudes isn’t warning against true joy and genuine laughter. It cautions, instead, against the thoughtless mirth that ignores the world’s pain. It recalls the psalmist’s anguish as the wicked and greedy scoff at those in trouble and believe they will always rule the roost. It invites the bully, the mocking, the derisive to replace callousness with compassion, scoffing with support.

Act in Faith

The Great Recession has thrust millions of children and families into poverty, jeopardizing the promise of a productive future for children and our nation. Unfortunately, millions more are likely to be impacted by the effects of the recession over the coming years unless and until we have the courage to act decisively and invest in the future of our children. There are many things you can ask your Members of Congress to do now that can help poor children and families. Ask your Representative and Senators to help parents get back to work and maintain the extra supports they are currently receiving until they are back on their feet again. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Fund has created more than 250,000 short-term jobs for low-income parents. It must be extended for another year when Congress returns after the elections. Unemployment benefits, which kept over three million people out of poverty, must also be extended. Improvements in the Child and Earned Income Tax Credits must be made permanent to help low and middle income families help their children survive and thrive. All of these investments will make a difference in the lives of millions of children and put us back on a path toward prosperity. This is where our tax dollars must go—not to help the wealthiest two percent of Americans who have seen their fortunes grow enormously while millions of our children and families fell backwards.

Tuesday

Scripture:

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.” (Luke 6:21a)

Read Luke 1:46-55 *“...Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name...He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty....”* (Luke 1:48b-49, 52-53)

Fast Fact for Faithful Action: Nearly one in four households with children struggled to afford the food they needed, according to data from a 2009 study recently released by the Food Research and Action Center. A record 49 million people are receiving food stamps under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Reflection

“Blessings in a Backpack.” That’s the name of one effort, like others in the U.S., which sends children home from school on Fridays with a backpack filled with nutritious and child-friendly food that will keep them well fed for the weekend. The lasting blessing, of course, will be when every child’s family has the income and other resources so that these stop-gap measures aren’t needed. We can bless children with a backpack full of food and we can bless them when we send an email, make a phone call, or even visit our members of Congress to tell them about hungry children in our communities and states and about the leadership we expect them to provide to solve the problem of childhood hunger.

God has done and will yet do great things for and even through us. Will this generation call us blessed for the great things we do in God’s name to fill those who are hungry with good things?

Prayer

Mighty One, you have done great things for me and holy is your name. Instill in me a hunger for justice, a thirst to do what is right. Remind me that your will is that people who are hungry will have what they need and that those who have more than they need will open hearts and hands. When I settle into the predictable and comfortable, shake me up and help me remember that you have turned the world’s priorities upside down, so that the youngest, poorest, and most vulnerable come first in your heart as they should in mine. Amen.

Act in Faith

Take action to help end childhood hunger! Many families who rely on SNAP benefits need extra help securing *healthy* food for their children. They often live in neighborhoods that do not have quality grocery stores that sell a good variety of food, including fresh produce and other healthy food options, at reasonable prices. Living in these “food deserts” makes it far harder, if not impossible, for a struggling family to fight off hunger and stay healthy. You can help these families fight childhood hunger by organizing food drives to bring healthy and fresh food options to families where they are. Provide information about childhood hunger and the problems families face in “food deserts” to your coworkers, neighbors, school districts, and others. There is also an important Child Nutrition bill that is stalled in Congress because it is currently paid for with cuts in food stamps. E-mail or call your Members of Congress and tell them you want to see improved nutrition for children but not by taking from one hand to give to another. Urge them to pass the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act (HR 5504) this year *without* making the \$2.2 million cut in food stamps currently in the bill.

Luke suggests that those whose concern has been acquisition and accumulation have gotten all that they will receive from the material goods...there is no future benefit, no heavenly reward. If having “stuff” is our priority, in the present experience of possessing it we have derived all the benefit there is to be had from possessions. If we do look ahead, those whose focus has been on sating their hunger now will feel an emptiness in the future. Rather than feasting on justice and righteousness, rather than filling our days with ensuring that all have enough, we who focus only on satisfying our immediate physical hunger will later feel an aching spiritual hunger.

The parable of Lazarus reminds us that we know all we need to know about right living, about justice, about compassion. After death, the rich man begs Abraham to warn his wealthy brothers so they change before it is too late, but Abraham replies “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” (Lk. 16:31) We know how God expects us to live. We have heard it from the prophets, we’ve seen it in the life of Jesus. There will be a time of “too late,” but not yet. All we have to do is act now.

Prayer

God of Justice, I pray today not for a new word from you, but the ears to hear what you have already said. I pray not for a new call, but the will to follow when you have already beckoned. I pray not for a new vision of our world as you intend, but the eyes to behold it and the commitment to work that it may be so. Amen.

Act in Faith

New Census data report that the gap between the rich and poor is the widest on record. It is incomprehensible and morally indefensible that while we are debating whether to extend an average tax cut of \$100,000 a year for individuals earning over a million dollars annually, 15.5 million poor children are living in families who struggle every day to survive on a fraction of that single tax cut. Contact your Members of Congress and urge them to support the President’s proposal to extend tax cuts to the 98 percent of Americans who need help and to reject tax cuts for the richest two percent of Americans.

Act in Faith

We must push together for an expansion of the Summer Feeding Program that currently serves over two million children across the country each summer.

Connect with child nutrition advocates in your community and contact your Senators to push in the 112th Congress for an expansion of the Summer Food Service Program – it will help feed children and provide job opportunities for workers in your community. Organize “children’s gardens” in communities to help make fresh food more accessible and to teach children about the importance of eating healthy while cultivating their interest in gardening and teaching responsibility as they care for their garden’s produce.

Friday

Scripture:

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.” (Luke 6:24a)

Read Luke 16:19-31 *“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table. . . . The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.”* (Luke 16:19-23)

Fast Fact for Faithful Action: The gap between rich and poor in the U.S. is the largest on record. The richest 10 percent of households with children received 38 percent of the nation’s income in 2006, the highest amount in three decades, while the bottom 20 percent received only five percent of the nation’s income. Poverty could be eliminated for *everyone* for less than \$140 billion, and *all families with children* for less than half that amount.

Reflection

Matthew’s version of the Beatitudes, written after Luke’s, are easier for the comfortably off to hear. Instead of “the poor” he writes of the “poor in spirit,” and he doesn’t voice any woes, only blessing. Prophetic ministry, it has been said, should “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Luke’s beatitudes do a pretty good job of that! But rather than turning away or tuning them out, let’s listen for what they have to say to us this day.

Wednesday

Scripture:

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” (Luke 6:21b)

Read Isaiah 61:1-11 *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. . . to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.”* (Isaiah 61:1-4)

Fast Fact for Faithful Action: Despite the fact that more than 5,000 children were separated from their families and listed as missing or displaced after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, a new report issued by Save the Children found that many Louisiana child care centers and public schools still don’t have adequate plans in place for evacuating students, notifying parents about their children’s location, caring for children with special needs or taking other precautions during an emergency. We must do better in taking lessons learned and planning for the future to protect all children.

Reflection

Both the beatitude and the passage from Isaiah acknowledge the reality of pain and sorrow. But that pain and sorrow doesn’t have the last word: God’s promise does. Children whose lives were uprooted by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 recently shared their continuing pain and persistent hope in the promise of rebuilding, in letters to President Obama. Listen to the voice of just one such child:

“Dear President Obama, My name is Donyell Haywood, I am an 8th grade student at McDonogh 42 School. The experience I had with Hurricane Katrina was not a good feeling. The impact of the devastation crushed my hopes, dreams and desire to come back home. I, as many other people was not prepared mentally or emotionally for this horrific devastation. Many lives were lost along with homes, schools, businesses and communities. Mr. President, what I would like to share most with you is my hopes and dreams that our city of New Orleans will gain strength and fame as it once had. Many people have come home but are struggling to survive. The high cost of living, price gouging and unfit streets to travel have become a [nuisance] for many. Help us to prepare for [restoring what] once was a healthy reviving and strong city. Mr. President, there are many more improvements that are needed here in New Orleans. Please come to our city to see what I and many more of my classmates are experiencing. Help

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us to bring back our devastated communities. Our lives are broken in so many ways. Thank you for reading my letter and understanding what we are all living through each day. Sincerely, Donyell Haywood”

Between the pain and the promise is the opportunity for us to act, to repair ruined cities and to end the intergenerational devastations of poverty and racism.

Prayer

Dear God, help me to have your heart of compassion, to weep with those who weep. Help me to hear your word of hope and to participate in the promise, to act in conviction that you yearn for those who sorrow to know joy, that your intention is to raise up all who are brought low. Use me as your builder, I pray. Amen.

Act in Faith

The *National Commission on Children and Disasters: 2010 Report to the President and the Congress*, just issued in October, notes that more than five years after Katrina only a handful of States require basic school evacuation and family reunification plans and just 25 percent of emergency medical services agencies and six percent of hospital emergency departments have the supplies and equipment to treat children. Children can't wait any longer. Write to President Obama (at whitehouse.gov) and urge him to develop a National Strategy for Children and Disasters and to give prompt attention to implementing the recommendations of the National Commission on Children and Disasters so our nation can respond appropriately to the needs of children of all ages, with multiple special needs, and in a variety of home and out of home settings when another disaster strikes. Develop a Disaster Plan for Children for your own place of worship and programs for children that you run. For resources see <http://www.childrenanddisasters.acf.hhs.gov/resources.html>.

Scripture:

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.” (Luke 5:22)

Read Isaiah 30:4-14 *“For they are a rebellious people, faithless children, children who will not hear the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, ‘Do not see’; and to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.’”* (Isaiah 30:9-11)

Fast Fact for Faithful Action: More than 30 million children participated in the National School Lunch Program in 2008, relying on healthy meals served at school to help them be ready to learn in the classroom. However, only one in nine low-income children who eats a free or reduced-priced lunch during the school year is reached by the Summer Food Service Program.

Reflection

Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador once observed, “When I fed the poor, they called me a saint. When I asked why the poor had no bread, they called me a Communist.” Archbishop Romero was soon assassinated, just as he lifted the wine and bread of communion, by those who sought to silence his call for justice and an end to violence. Prophetic calls for justice have never been popular, from the eighth-century BCE prophets to Archbishop Romero in the 1970s, to those who speak out with and for those in poverty today.

A good friend of Archbishop Romero, the Rev. Jorge Lara-Braud, commented on the meaning of beatitude in his native language of Spanish. “In Spanish the word is translated *bienaventuranza*, literally ‘good adventure to you.’ We all know that adventure means risk, the courage to defy the odds, the refusal to play it safe.”

Jesus chose the good adventure of following God's will even to the cross. Christ beckons to us to join him in the good adventure of speaking truth to power, of siding with the last, the least, the lost, and the left out.

Prayer

God who is known by many names, let me not fear what others call me. Let me simply know myself to be a child of God. You are Rock, Redeemer, Liberator, Lover of Justice, Love. Help me to be a reflection of who you are—in my life, in my actions, in my words, in my relationships with children. Grant me, I pray, courage to do what is right. Amen.