



2019 Christian Worship Resources

Uniting Hearts and Voices to End Child Poverty Now

Call to Worship

We gather on this Children's Sabbath Sunday
to worship God who loves each and every child;
in the name of Christ who welcomed the children when others would keep them away;
moved by the Holy Spirit to seek justice and create community.
Come, let us worship God.

Prayer of Confession

O God, we confess that too often
our hearts are hardened to the struggles of others,
including children in poverty;
our hearts are narrowed in the circle of those we love,
excluding children not our "own"
our hearts are discouraged and too ready to give up on things that matter,
like ending poverty.

We confess that too often
our voices are silent in the face of injustice,
our voices are soft in the presence of the powerful,
our voices talk over those whom we want to help.

Forgive us, O God.
Soften our hearts to love as you do,
broaden our embrace to include others, and
instill in us hope so that we do not lose heart.

Stir us, we pray,
to call out injustice,
strengthen our voices to speak up for change, and
sensitize us to hear those unheard.

These things we pray in the name of Jesus
whose heart and voice revealed how you would have us live. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon and The Peace

Hear the good news! Jesus came so that we would know that there is nothing that can make God stop loving us. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you."
Knowing ourselves as loved and forgiven, let us share the peace of Christ with one another.

Alternative Call, Prayer of Confession, and Assurance of Pardon:

Call to Confession

Let us confess our sins first in the silence of our hearts and then aloud in one voice, trusting that God, who is merciful and just, will hear our prayers and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us pray.

Prayer of Confession

Ever-present God, you have heard our prayers in the silence of our hearts and you hear us now. We confess that we have dulled our ears to the cries of children who are hungry. We confess that we have hardened our hearts to the plight of millions of children living in poverty and millions of parents struggling to make ends meet. We confess that we have dimmed our hopes for a more just nation and world and our ability to make a difference.

Sharpen our ears, we pray, to hear the voices of children and your call to us. Soften our hearts to show compassion to families who are struggling. Raise our hopes for how we can help unite our hearts and voices to work for the justice you intend. These things we ask in the name of Jesus who blessed the children, sided with the poor, and reflected your intentions for the reign of God. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Listen! I have something to say! God sent God's own child Jesus that we might know ourselves to be loved and forgiven children of God.

Hear and believe the good news: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Prayer for Illumination

God of forever and right now,
By your spirit
open our ears to hear your word to us this day
in scripture, in sermon, in song.

Open our eyes to see your word to us
in children's faces, in troubling statistics, in our action together.

Open our hearts to feel your word to us
in the warmth of love, in the ache of sadness, in the energy of commitment.

Amen.

Sample Time with Children

[If possible, the week before invite children to bring in items to donate to families in poverty, such as canned food or necessary items such as packages of diapers. You could have extras on hand for children who didn't bring anything, and give the extras for the children to hold during the time with children. At the end of the time with children, collect the items in a big basket, box, or on the communion table.]

Good morning! When we pray together at church, sometimes we pray out loud, using our voices all together to say the same words. Sometimes one person prays out loud, while the rest of us hear the words and feel the prayer in our hearts. Other times, no one prays out loud, but instead everyone is quiet and thinks their prayers or feels it in their hearts.

Sometimes—and this is the surprising part—we pray not silently and not with our words, but the caring actions we do are like a prayer. So if we bring in food to give to someone who is hungry, that is like an action prayer that the person won't be hungry. If a group from our church works together to help fix up the house of a family that doesn't have enough money to fix it themselves, that is like an action prayer that families will have safe, warm places to live. If we call leaders who make big decisions about how much money workers should be paid or how to help families pay for child care, that is like an action prayer that parents will have enough money to take care of their families.

Today is part of a special weekend called Children's Sabbath. All weekend, churches and synagogues and other places where people go to pray, have been praying for children—especially children and families who don't have enough money for the things they need like houses, food, and doctor visits. People have been praying with their hearts, with their voices, and with their actions to make things better for children and families, to make things more fair so that every family will have enough money for the things they really need.

It's a big job to make this better and fair for all children, and it will take more than one weekend to change things so no one is poor anymore. Sometimes, people get discouraged when there is a big job or one that will take a long time and many people to do.

Jesus' followers got discouraged sometimes, too. Here is a story (called a parable) Jesus told his friends so they wouldn't give up.

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. Jesus said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"

And Jesus said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to [God's] chosen ones who cry to [God] day and night? Will [God] delay long in helping them? I tell you, [God] will quickly grant justice to them." (Luke 18:1-8)

God is not like a mean, unfair judge. *God is loving and fair.* What Jesus meant is if a mean, unfair judge does the right thing because someone keeps asking and asking, *just think how much more our loving, fair God wants to do the right thing.* And that can give us hope so we don't get discouraged, so we don't lose heart, so we don't give up. Jesus' story reminds us to keep praying with our hearts, our voices, and our actions to make things fair.

To end our time together this morning, instead of praying with our voices or silently with our hearts, we are going to pray with our actions. Let's put all of the good things you brought to help families who need them here [*you could use a big basket, box, or invite the children to put the items on the communion table.*] That is our prayer that God will help us keep working to make things fair for families and better for children. Amen!

Prayers of the People

Let us pray not only for our own needs but for all people, young and old, near and far, saying, "God, hear our cry, and help us not lose heart as we pray and work for justice."

For the holy Church of God, that we proclaim the message of your love for children and your call for justice, we pray God, hear our cry, and help us not lose heart as we pray and work for justice.

For all the peoples of the world, especially the more than one billion children and parents living in poverty, we pray

God, hear our cry, and help us not lose heart as we pray and work for justice.

For our nation and our leaders, that they swiftly grant justice for all children and heed the pleas of those who advocate on their behalf, we pray

God, hear our cry, and help us not lose heart as we pray and work for justice.

For ourselves and our community, that we support each other in the struggle to put children first and end child poverty, we pray

God, hear our cry, and help us not lose heart as we pray and work for justice.

For all the children, that they know their precious worth, we pray

God, hear our cry, and help us not lose heart as we pray and work for justice.

For all who have died, especially the children who have died from the effects of poverty, we pray

God hear our cry and help us not lose heart as we pray and work for justice.

O God, whom Jesus reminded us will grant justice to those who cry to you day and night, hear our prayers and grant what we ask of you in faith. Amen.

Benediction

Go into the world with hearts and voices united to end child poverty,
held in the love of God who made each and every child;
encouraged by Christ who reminded us not to lose heart; and
empowered by the Holy Spirit who moves in and among us as we work for justice. Amen.

Catholic Rubric:

Penitential Rite

Lord Jesus, you came into the world as a poor baby to reveal the fullness of God's love.

Lord have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you call us to ministry that brings good news to the poor.

Christ have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you remind us not to lose heart and promise that God will swiftly grant justice.

Lord have mercy.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia.

The word of God is living and active; it probes the thoughts and motives of our heart.

Alleluia.

General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)

Priest:

The love of God is manifest in the Word made flesh and revealed as God's own child. As brothers and sisters of Jesus, let us bring before God our prayer for all children, saying, "Lord, hear your children's prayer."

For the holy Church of God, that we follow ever more closely Christ Jesus who taught us that whoever would be first must be last of all and servant of all, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear your children's prayer.

For all the peoples of the world, especially the billion children and families who live on less than one dollar a day, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear your children's prayer.

For those who serve in elected office, that they may lead with courage and wisdom, reflecting the Church's teaching that the moral test of our society is how those who are most oppressed, impoverished, and vulnerable are faring, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear your children's prayer.

For those who are suffering from poverty and injustice, that our actions lead to change that helps them live in dignity, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear your children's prayer.

For ourselves and our community, that we recognize your image in every child, that we work to bless all children as Jesus welcomed them, and that your spirit unites our hearts and voices to work for justice, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear your children's prayer.

For all who have died, especially the children who died from poverty and other causes we could **have prevented or injustice we could have ended, we pray to the Lord:**

Lord, hear your children's prayer.

Priest:

God of love,
who shelters us like a mother hen
and welcomes us like a father,
hear the prayers of your Church
and grant us today
what we ask of you in faith.
We ask this through Christ our Brother. Amen.

Episcopal Rubric:

Collect of the Day: On the Children's Sabbath

Almighty God, you have proclaimed through the prophets your care for children and concern for those who are oppressed and impoverished. Unite the hearts and voices of your Church to seek justice for children and end poverty, through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

People Amen.

The Prayers of the People and Confession of Sin

Option 1:

Form II, Form IV, or Form VI from the Book of Common Prayer which follows:

In peace, we pray to you, Lord God.

Silence.

For all people in their daily life and work;

For our families, friends, and neighbors, and for those who are alone.

For this community, the nation and the world;

For all who work for justice, freedom, and peace.

For the just and proper use of our creation;

For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression.

For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble;

For those who minister to the sick, the friendless, and the needy.

For the peace and unity of the Church of God;

For all who proclaim the Gospel, and all who seek the Truth.

For [N. our presiding Bishop, and N. our Bishop(s); and for] all bishops and other ministers;

For all who serve God in his Church.

For the special needs and concerns of this congregation.

Silence.

The people may add their own petitions.

Hear us, Lord;
For your mercy is great.

We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this life.

Silence.

The people may add their own thanksgivings.

We will exalt you, O God our King;
And praise your Name for ever and ever.
We pray for all who have died, that they may have a place in your eternal kingdom.

Silence.

The people may add their own petitions.

Lord, let your loving-kindness be upon them; Who put their trust in you.
We pray to you also for the forgiveness of our sins.

Silence may be kept.

Leader and People

Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; in your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things done and left undone; And so uphold us by your Spirit that we may live and serve you in newness of life, to the honor and glory of your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Option 2

On this weekend celebrated as Children's Sabbath in congregations across the land, trusting that God hears both the prayers we offer in the silence of our hearts and those we voice together, let us pray for the Church and for the world. Jesus reminded us that God will swiftly grant justice to those who cry to God, so let us respond to the words, "As we pray and work for justice," with "God, hear our cry and help us not lose heart."

Grant, O God, that all who gather in Christ's name will throw wide our doors and our hearts and lift our hands and voices to proclaim your promise of love and will for justice, especially for those who are young, poor, vulnerable, and oppressed.

Silence

As we pray and work for justice,
God, hear our cry and help us not lose heart.

Guide our nation and its leaders, that they will champion justice for those who need it most and keep their promises to children and families.

Silence

As we pray and work for justice,
God, hear our cry and help us not lose heart.

Bless the families of our world, especially the billion who lack the income, clean water, health care, or education needed to live into the fullness of life.

Silence

As we pray and work for justice,
God, hear our cry and help us not lose heart.

Strengthen us to move forward with hope to end child poverty and create a nation and world of justice so that every child may live into the fullness of life.

Silence

As we pray and work for justice,
God, hear our cry and help us not lose heart.

Comfort all who suffer, especially those who are hungry, lack health care, or struggle without a job or enough income to meet their needs.

Silence

As we pray and work for justice,
God, hear our cry and help us not lose heart.

Gather to yourself all who have died, especially those who died from poverty and other causes we could have prevented.

Silence

As we pray and work for justice,
God, hear our cry and help us not lose heart.

Almighty God, hear these the prayers of your children and grant them for the sake of your beloved child Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath

Because you have blessed us with children and have given your own Child, Jesus Christ, to reveal the fullness of your love and mercy

Alternative Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath

Because you revealed yourself in Jesus born a poor baby, who grew to adulthood as one who stood with those on the margins

Eucharistic Prayer for Children's Sabbath

The Great Thanksgiving

Eucharistic Prayer C (BCP)

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath

Because you have blessed us with children and have given your own Child, the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, to reveal the fullness of your love and mercy.

Option 2: Eucharistic Prayer for the Children's Sabbath

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Celebrant: We give you thanks and praise, amazing God, who made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry; You watch over the strangers, uphold the children and most vulnerable parents, and have triumphed over sin and evil.
(from Psalm 146)

On this Children's Sabbath day, we give you thanks, O God, especially for children, for the blessing they are and the blessing we may be to them, as we unite our hearts and voices to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.

And so we join the saints and angels in proclaiming your glory, as we sing (say),

Celebrant and People: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

The Celebrant continues: We praise you, O God, for sending your beloved child Jesus born as a baby nurtured by his family, and protected by strangers, who grew as a child who was taught in his temple, surrounded by his community, and guided by his parents, who became an adult who loved and blessed the children, who cared for those who were sick, poor, and left out, who taught that God loves us like a parent, and who called us his friends. This one who was born a baby needing us died our Savior whom we all need, triumphant even over death, freeing us to live as your beloved children.

(At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing the wine to be consecrated.)

On the night before he died for us, Jesus was at the table with his friends. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, and said: "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. As you do this, remember me."



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As supper was ending, Jesus took the cup of wine. Again, he gave thanks, gave it to them, and said: "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, remember me."

Around your table, as your children, O God, we remember Jesus Christ,
Who came in love, lived in love, and died in love,
Who was and is and is to come.
We offer to you our gifts of bread and wine,
And we offer to you our lives.

Pour out your Spirit upon these gifts that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ, that they strengthen us to welcome the children, to show your love, to work for your justice, to bring your peace.

Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to you be honor, glory, and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal

Remembering especially all our children and the call to justice,
Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

Sermon Notes

The Episcopal, Lutheran, Revised Common, and Roman Catholic lectionaries designated for Sunday of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths weekend, October 20, 2019, all include texts which speak to the 2019 Children's Sabbath theme, "Uniting Hearts and Voices to End Child Poverty Now," especially the Gospel reading from Luke 18:1-8a. Even churches that don't follow a lectionary may wish to preach from these texts for the Children's Sabbath.

Lectionary Texts Designated for October 20, 2019

Jeremiah 31:27-34 (Revised Common Lectionary)

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 (Episcopal, Lutheran, Revised Common, and Roman Catholic Lectionaries)

Luke 18:1-8 (Episcopal, Lutheran, Revised Common, and Roman Catholic Lectionaries)

Jeremiah 31:27-34

Context of the Passage

The book of Jeremiah contains both warning and consolation. While there was still time to warn the people and urge them to change their ways, Jeremiah did so in strong, painful language. When it was "too late," and Israel was already suffering from the dislocation they saw as a result of their injustice and faithlessness, Jeremiah offered words of comfort. Jeremiah, like other prophetic literature in the Old Testament, reflects this transition from a period of judgment to the coming of renewal and restoration, and the need to offer an authoritative word of hope to sustain the people.

A Closer Look

The Sins of Others: In verse 30, our passage reads, "But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge." Notes one scholar, "The point of this saying was clearly not to express a doctrine or give a legal defense for the principle of shared family responsibility but rather to give voice to despair." While it does not immediately strike the listener today this way, for Jeremiah to move to a declaration that "they shall die for their own sins" was actually a word of hope: no longer would children suffer for the sins of their parents.

Covenant: In Jeremiah, the term "covenant" comes from the language of international relations, comparable to "treaty." Covenant represented a mutual commitment in which two parties had an agreement and responsibility, a relationship between God and Israel. However, Israel broke the covenant so egregiously and repeatedly that Israel essentially rendered the covenant null and void, so that it was no longer in force. In this passage, as elsewhere in Deuteronomistic use, law and covenant are used synonymously. Israel is promised not a new law, but a new way to understand and fulfill the original covenant revealed to Moses. Just as God promised and instructed "These words which I command you this day shall be upon your hearts" (Deut. 6:6), words Jews repeat even to this day, so too Jeremiah promises that God will write this law on the hearts of God's people. This fresh start is another chance to live in obedience from the inside out.

Note that instead of the term "nation," our passage uses the more general "house of Israel." Jeremiah acknowledged that Israel was no longer a "nation" as it had been but was now a diaspora, a scattered community. This people was now more loosely defined not only geographically but also genetically; to be of the house of Israel was less about who one's ancestors were and more about

how one was prepared to live one's life that day with a deep understanding in one's heart and a renewed commitment to live in relationship with God.

Preaching Themes

Covenant, from the least to the greatest

No more shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (31:34)

Imagine our communities, nation, and world if we all knew God, if God's law were written on our hearts and revealed in our lives. Would children still be the poorest Americans? Would 12.8 million children in our rich nation live in poverty, six million of them in extreme poverty?

If God's law were written on our hearts and revealed in our lives, would we, in our rich nation, instead ensure that children have the food, family income, health care, and other basic things they need to live out their lives with the health and wholeness God intends? Would ours be a world in which no child dies from preventable malnutrition and disease, in which no woman bears a child for calamity, in which every young person is guided on the path to a hopeful future full of promise? What would it look like if we really lived as God's people?

Sins of our parents...

Jeremiah heralds this "new day" with the oddly good news that now one will only die for their own "sins," not for the sins of others. How is this "good news"? We've seen all too often what it means for children to die for the sins of others. We see that every few seconds around the world, an innocent child dies of malnutrition and disease that could have been prevented. We see that every minute somewhere around the world a woman dies unnecessarily in childbirth. We've seen children here in the United States die because they didn't have health coverage and the access to a doctor that most of us take for granted. We've seen children die from guns we could have better regulated and from causes we could have prevented. We know all about children dying because of the sins of others—from injustice, inequality, indifference. It's time for that new day to dawn, when no child dies from what we failed to do or because of what we have done.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Context of the Passage

Unlike 1 Timothy, in which Paul is presented as a free apostle, 2 Timothy is written as though Paul is in prison and near death, abandoned by almost all of his friends; it has the tone of a "final testament," conveying a dying parent's exhortation, blessing, and warning to a "child." We don't know the author who assumed Paul's name in writing this letter which, with 1 Timothy and Titus, is commonly referred to as the Pastoral Epistles. We also don't know the precise date of composition, but it is believed to be in the early second century C.E.

The "Timothy" to whom the letter was supposedly addressed is one of Paul's closest co-workers, active in work with the churches of Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus. Timothy is held up as a model and ideal, contrasted sharply with false teachers. Lois and Eunice, mentioned in 2 Timothy 1:5, are Timothy's grandmother and mother, Christians before him who nurtured him in faith.

A Closer Look

Fred Craddock in *A New Testament Commentary* points out the “sacred writings” and “All Scripture” refer to the Old Testament, as Christian writings were not yet considered Scripture. Though at the time this epistle was written, some writings, such as Paul’s letters, were beginning to be highly revered, in the fictive setting represented here the Scriptures that “Timothy” would have known in his youth could only be the Jewish Scriptures.

Preaching Themes

Be Persistent

I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. (4:1b-2)

On this Children’s Sabbath weekend, the urging to proclaim the message and persist whether the time is favorable or unfavorable is a powerful message. The Rev. Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners and author of *God’s Politics*, jokes that you can recognize elected leaders in Washington because they are the ones walking around with their fingers in the air to see which way the wind is blowing. In our day, elected leaders do consult polls and focus groups and lead with an eye to campaign contributions and getting votes. This makes our steady witness as people of faith all the more important. We don’t decide what is right by what is popular, we aren’t called to speak up when it is convenient and bite our lips when it is not. Instead, we are called to proclaim God’s intention for justice, God’s demand that we stand with those who are impoverished and pushed to the margins and young and vulnerable first, whether it is popular or not, whether the political climate is favorable or unfavorable. This passage encourages us to persist whatever the political weather to proclaim what we believe is right.

Itchy Ears

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. (4:3-4)

Do you remember as a child, asking one parent for something, and if the answer was “no,” going to your other parent and asking the question, hoping to get the answer you wanted? Our passage from Timothy warns us of the danger of “itchy ears,” looking for those who will tell us what we want to hear, not the truth. As campaigns for the next elections get underway, it is particularly hard to find those who are willing to tell the truth and not to pander to “itchy ears.” Who wants to hear a candidate say that we need to invest more resources to provide for the needs of others? Who wants to hear that our lack of investment in children or failure to pass sensible gun safety measures has cost children their lives? Who wants to hear that we as parents, teachers, communities, and a nation have turned our backs on too many impoverished children and children of color, or, worse, that we have pushed them into the Cradle to Prison Pipeline instead of onto paths of promise? Who wants to hear that tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires have driven our nation deeper into debt and caused us to cut programs serving the families who struggle the most to make ends meet? Wouldn’t we rather hear the smooth words of a slogan, the easy words of a false promise, the comforting words of simple assurance? Wouldn’t we rather hear candidates sling mud at each other than tell the truth about the quicksand on which our nation now stands, sinking in a culture of power, greed, violence, and superficial distraction? Wouldn’t we rather hear that we can’t afford to provide for the needs of our nation’s children than that we have simply chosen not to make it our priority?

We must decide if we will indulge our itchy ears and pursue leaders who will suit our own desires, or if we will attune our ears to hear the truth—difficult as it may be to hear. If we will seek silence to listen to our hearts and the call of our God to do justice for the least, the last, and the left out. If we will listen with careful discernment that sees through the rhetoric, sound bite, and slogan to discover who is willing to tell the hard truth about what our nation needs to do to live out God's intention for justice and compassion.

Luke 18:1-8

Context of the Passage

Luke, writing toward the end of the first century C.E., was addressing a community that was several generations removed from Jesus. His readers were enduring abuse and persecution and hard times because of their faith.

Our passage is situated in the midst of Jesus' teachings on his final journey to Jerusalem. The preceding passage, like our passage, is unique to Luke's gospel. Both address the longing of the disciples for the advent of the kingdom and their final vindication, both speak to the question of "when" and "how long." The preceding passage addresses the longing of the disciples for the coming of the Son of man and their deliverance from the suffering they endure. Our parable assures the disciples that God will not long delay, but leaves them with the challenging question: Will they have persisted faithfully until that time? The parable that follows our passage cautions the listeners against self-righteousness and complacency and is then followed by the beloved story of Jesus blessing the children.

A Closer Look

The main characters in our parable represent two extremes. First, there is the judge. A judge, then as now, was a symbol of power, one with responsibility to exercise fairness in settling disputes, to restore justice. A good and impartial judge was the best hope of weaker and powerless members of the community who were dependent on him to help secure justice for them. Our judge, who neither feared nor had respect for people, was unjust. (Note that in the parable, we are "hearing" his inner thoughts, what he is saying to himself, so we know they are his true sentiments.)

At the other end of the power spectrum stands the widow. Fred Craddock in *The People's New Testament Commentary* elaborates, "Widows in Israelite tradition were extremely vulnerable—they could not inherit their husband's property, there was no organized social welfare program, and for the most part no opportunity for independent employment for them. They were often dependent on the judge for protection and fairness, since they were easily victimized. In this story the judge is the widow's only hope for justice, and he is a bad judge." (p. 249)

In our passage, the phrase translated "wear me out" literally means "hit me in the eye." It may be meant literally or metaphorically—that she might "beat him up" in the view of the public.

So what does the bad judge do? Astoundingly, he grants the widow justice. This big, bad judge, who isn't afraid of God or people, grants the poor and vulnerable widow justice.

Note that the judge does the right thing for the wrong reason. In our advocacy on behalf of children, we can look for the best intentions of our elected leaders, can appeal to their deepest desires to do the right thing. However, there may also be times that we simply need to exert enough pressure, persistently enough, that even those who aren't inclined to do the right thing for our children will, simply because we successfully pressure them to.

Note also that the widow, who was presented as an impoverished and vulnerable figure, was not powerless. Often, advocates speak of “empowering” those who are poor or vulnerable. But no one gave the widow her power—she discovered and exercised it herself. Part of our work for justice isn’t about “empowering” others but is about getting out of their way as they tap and exercise their own inherent power, lift their own voices to express their own best understanding of their need and the justice they demand.

Will not God grant justice? This is one of the “how much more” parables that makes its point by moving from the lesser to the greater. That is, the unjust judge certainly isn’t the stand-in, equivalent figure for God in this parable. The point is that if an unjust judge grants justice, how much more quickly will a just and loving God, who is so much greater than the miserable unjust judge, grant justice. Be careful that listeners, especially children and young people, understand this point.

What are we to make of the word “quickly”? Luke was addressing believers who, several generations after Jesus’ time, were enduring long years of persecution and hard times. The preceding passage (Luke 17:20-37) acknowledges their earnest, eager longing for the end time of vindication. Now we have this parable promising that God will “quickly” grant justice to God’s chosen ones. Craddock points out that in this instance “quickly” is not about calendar or clock time, but means instead that God won’t hesitate (unlike the judge) to bring vindication and justice. We don’t need to wait for God to come around to our side because God is already there. It is the difference between *chronos*, calendar time, and *kairos*, God’s time. This is an important, and challenging, distinction to raise for listeners—especially those who are enduring suffering themselves, for whom help seems slow to come, for those who have spent long years advocating for justice, for whom a better world for our children seems slow to arrive. We can’t promise the date or the time by which God’s healing will be experienced in our lives, the date or time by which justice will be realized in our world.

What we can promise is that we don’t have to persuade God to yearn for our wholeness, don’t have to change God’s mind to make God intend us to live in a world of justice. God already does.

Craddock notes that Luke’s phrase “When the Son of Man comes” links our parable to the preceding passage that sought to discourage speculation that the end will come soon. The question was phrased in a way that the expected response is “no.” Rather than suggesting that there will not be any faithful ones at that time, Luke was reminding his readers that this journey of faith will be a marathon and not a sprint, and the greatest danger is complacency and self-righteousness, a point underscored by the parable that follows in 18:9-14.

Preaching Themes

Widow and the Judge: Persistence of those outside power structures standing up to the systems of power

The parable effectively evokes the experience of one who is outside the power structures standing up to those with institutional power, of determination when one who is supposed to protect you and your interests fails to do so, and of the persistence of those with less formal power to demand justice from those in formalized positions of power. Millions of parents today know that feeling of being on the outside of power structures and the frustration when they are seeking basics—like food, housing, heat, and health care—that their family needs to survive, when the systems and providers and bureaucracy seem to be no respecters of persons. We know what it feels like

to see Congress pass legislation that grants enormous tax breaks to the most wealthy in our nation while families who struggle to make ends meet see nutrition, health, and other necessities threatened with cuts and repeal. Millions know what it feels like to be dismissed by those in power, disrespected by those with position and by the public at large. Julia Dinsmore, author of *My Name is Child of God...Not "Those People": A First-Hand Look at Poverty* gives voice to the pain, persistence, and real power:

My name is not "Those People".
I am a loving woman, a mother in pain,
giving birth to the future, where my babies
have the same chance to thrive as anyone.

My name is not "Inadequate".
I did not make my husband leave us -
he chose to, and chooses not to pay child support.
Truth is though; there isn't a job base
for all fathers to support their families.
While society turns its head, my children pay the price.

My name is not "Problem and Case to Be Managed".
I am a capable human being and citizen, not just a client.
The social service system can never replace
the compassion and concern of loving grandparents, aunts,
uncles, fathers, cousins, community -
all the bonded people who need to be
but are not present to bring children forward to their potential.

My name is not "Lazy, Dependent Welfare Mother".
If the unwaged work of parenting,
homemaking and community building was factored
into the gross domestic product,
my work would have untold value. And why is it that mothers whose
husbands support them to stay home and raise children
are glorified? And why they don't get called lazy or dependent?

My name is not "Ignorant, Dumb or Uneducated".
I got my PhD from the university of life, school of hard everything,
I live with an income of \$621 with \$169 in food stamps for three kids.
Rent is \$585...That leaves \$36 a month to live on.
I am such a genius at surviving,
I could balance the state budget in an hour.
Never mind that there's a lack of living-wage jobs.
Never mind that it's impossible to be the sole emotional, social,
spiritual, and economic support to a family.
Never mind that parents are losing their children
to gangs, drugs, stealing, prostitution, the poverty industry,
social workers, kidnapping, the streets, the predator.

Forget about putting money into schools...
just build more prisons!

My name is not "Lay Down and Die Quietly".
My love is powerful, and the urge to keep my children alive will never stop.
All children need homes and people who love them.
All children need safety
and the chance to be the people they were born to be.

The wind will stop before I allow my sons to become a statistic.
Before you give in to the urge to blame me,
the blame that lets us go blind and unknowing
into the isolation that disconnects
your humanity from mine,
Take another look. Don't go away.
For I am not the problem, but the solution.
And...my name is not "Those People".

Prayer

The parable of the widow and the judge, Luke tells us, is about the need to pray always and not to lose heart. It invites us to consider what it means to pray always, how many different ways we can pray throughout our day.

There are the silent prayers of our hearts, to be sure. Fervent prayers for the health of our child, for a teen to make it safely and successfully through school, for a family member to find employment.

There are the spoken prayers of our lips. Prayers we murmur into the downy hair of a baby, giving thanks for their health or a plea for their healing. There are the prayers some sing around the dinner table: "For health and strength and daily food, we give you thanks O God."

There are the prayers of our hands and our feet, our voices and our action for justice. Rabbi Abraham Heschel once said, about participating in a civil rights march with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "I felt as though my feet were praying." How might our hands and feet pray this day? Will they pray as you write a letter to an elected official calling for adequate safety nets for children in poverty, for just policies that give every child a fair start? Will your hands pray as you stock an emergency food pantry, or hold the hand of a child you are mentoring, or hammer a nail to repair a low-income family's home? Will your hands pray as you write to your members of Congress to support nine policy improvements that would cut child poverty by more than half? Will your feet pray as you walk into a meeting with a legislator to urge them to advance proven policies to lift millions of children out of poverty?

A Prayer to a Listening God

O God, we labor in the heat of the day,
and so often the labor feels hopeless, unproductive, useless...
And yet, you hear our silent cries.

You give us one another

to speak that which we in our pain cannot speak.

You give us your Word

that utters those things we cannot find the words to say.

And not only do you give us the words to speak,

but you also turn your ear to us and hear us,

even when all we have strength to whisper is, “Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.”

For you have promised to hear us.

You have promised to turn your face to shine upon us.

You have promised to be our shade

when the heat of the day saps our strength

and the well of hope runs dry.

And you have promised,

even in the silence,

to give us the sweet sound of peace.

—John McCullough Bade

From “A Prayer to a Listening God,” in *Will I Sing Again? Listening for the Melody of Grace in the Silence of Illness and Loss* by John McCullough Bade (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003, p. 46)