**Solidarity with Sisters’ Communal Prayer**

**September 18, 2022 – 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time**

*“Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.” ~Cornel West*

**HELLOs** and then Betty mutes everyone.

**WELCOME (Lynn Bufka)**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* I am grateful to have prepared today’s communal prayer.
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in music and prayer today: Debra Street, Ann Jelen, George Urban, Terri Butel, Marilyn Voigt, Karen McCarthy, and Dan McCarthy.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please get in touch.

**SETTLING IN (Lynn Bufka)**

Let us have a few moments of silence to bring ourselves to this moment, this community, this time of prayer. [Pause.]

As we begin, let’s pause for a moment to gather into our hearts anyone who longs for justice …. [Pause.]

Let us open ourselves to hear the call for justice and be willing to call out injustice … [Pause.]

Let us breathe into this sacred communal space together, silently welcoming all gathered and those with us in spirit as we share a moment of quiet in the peace of Christ…. [Pause.]

Let’s join in with each other as we sing “For the Healing of the Nations” to lead us into our prayer today.

**OPENING SONG –** “For the Healing of the Nations”  **(Debra Street)**

For the healing of the nations,

Lord, we pray with one accord;

for a just and equal sharing

of the things that earth affords.

To a life of love in action

help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead your people into freedom,

from despair your world release,

that, redeemed from war and hatred,

all may come and go in peace.

Show us how, through care and goodness,

fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,

let it from the earth be banned:

pride of status, race or schooling,

dogmas that obscure your plan.

In our common quest for justice

may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator-God, have written

your great name on humankind;

for our growing in your likeness,

bring the life of Christ to mind;

that by our response and service

earth its destiny may find.

**CALL TO WORSHIP/ GATHERING PRAYER**  **(Karen McCarthy)**

God of yesterday, today and tomorrow,  
we call to mind your presence within us and around us.

Open our ears that we may hear your Word.  
Open our hearts that we may understand your Word.  
Open our mouths that we may speak your Word.

Inspire us with the Gospel message,  
that we may celebrate all that is life-giving,  
restore hope where it has been lost,  
and work to bring about change where it is needed.

May we live the Gospel with courage,  
constancy and love.  
May we be open to the challenge  
of your call to true freedom.  
May we be faithful to you in our daily choices and decisions.  
May we make your love known through our words and actions.

May the triune God reign in our hearts, now and forever. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Lynn Bufka)**

The scripture readings for this Sunday, both the gospel of Luke and the reading from Amos, which we are not reading this morning, call us to justice. As people called to bring God’s kin-dom to earth, we are called to act with justice because justice is God’s nature.

Let’s quietly ask ourselves a few questions. What is justice? (pause) Do our relationships embody justice? Do we act justly within unjust systems? Do we work to destroy unjust systems? And how can we, who may feel so small and insignificant in the face of injustice make any sort of difference? (pause)

We have to listen for the call, a call that might be unfamiliar to us. We may hear the call in a poem like the one we will listen to today by Maya Angelou. We may see it in the news. It may be unsettling or scary but as children of God, working to bring about this kin-dom, we are also asked to respond.

*[Slight pause]*

Now George Urban will read from the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Karen McCarthy will offer questions that will lead us into silence.

**READING 1**  **(George Urban)**

Jesus said to his disciples,  
"A rich man had a steward  
who was reported to him for squandering his property.  
He summoned him and said,  
'What is this I hear about you?  
Prepare a full account of your stewardship,  
because you can no longer be my steward.'  
The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do,  
now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me?  
I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg.  
I know what I shall do so that,  
when I am removed from the stewardship,  
others may welcome me into their homes.'  
He called in his master's debtors one by one.  
To the first he said,  
'How much do you owe my master?'  
He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.'  
He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note.  
Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.'  
Then to another the steward said, 'And you, how much do you owe?'  
He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.'  
The steward said to him, 'Here is your promissory note;  
write one for eighty.'  
And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently.

**QUESTIONS 1** *(Pause after each question.)* **(Karen McCarthy)**

We have heard this story many times. How do you feel about the steward’s actions?

When have you been called to task by someone in authority and how did you respond?

The steward is hoping to change his relationships. How does justice figure into your own relationships?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  *(Betty: Share slide, time 2:00, chime.)*

**(Lynn):** Marilyn Voigt will read an edited excerpt from Mary J. Novak’s preaching on today’s Gospel.

**READING 2**  **(Marilyn Voigt)**

In Luke’s Gospel, we have the steward who reportedly squandered the rich man’s property, and he responds by cutting the debt of the rich man’s debtors so they will welcome him in the future when he is homeless.  And the rich man praises him.

Doing justice, doing injustice?  How do we understand this one?  Biblical scholars have found various ways through this parable without condoning dishonesty.  For example, by reducing what the debtors owe, the steward might be ~~is~~ simply giving up some or all of his own commission in exchange for hospitality in the future.  An overlapping interpretation is that maybe the steward lent money at a very high rate of interest – usury – and he reversed that when the rich man discovered it because usury was prohibited by Jewish law. Could the steward’s actions be doing justice? Hard to say without more details about whether he acted in the midst of a just system or an unjust system.

How would this be different if this steward was enslaved, which is entirely possible given the language of master and servant in this passage of Luke?  If he was, then might the steward have been caught employing some survival practice to provide for his family or his enslaved community or even been falsely accused?  The clever steward then cuts the debts of those who owe his master and the debtors then praise the master’s generosity, making it hard for him to dismiss the steward.  Justice in the midst of an unjust system?

**QUESTIONS 2** *(Pause after each question.)* **(Karen McCarthy)**

This is a very different perspective on this familiar Gospel. How does that change your thoughts about the steward’s behavior or even your thoughts about some contemporary behavior? Is that behavior perhaps just, in the midst of injustice?

What is it you need to do today to **center** in your thinking and actions those who are made poor or disenfranchised by our systems and structures?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  *(Betty: Share slide, time 2:00, chime.)*

**(Lynn)**: Ann Jelen will read the poem, “Caged Bird” written by Maya Angelou.

**REFLECTION 3: (Ann Jelen)**

A free bird leaps on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream till the current ends  
and dips his wing in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through his bars of rage,  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill  
of things unknown but longed for still  
and his tune is heard on the distant hill  
for the caged bird sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams,  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream,  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill  
of things unknown but longed for still  
and his tune is heard on the distant hill  
for the caged bird sings of freedom.

**QUESTIONS 3** *(Pause after each question.)* **(Karen McCarthy)**

Ask yourself, “Do I hear the caged bird?” (pause) How have you contributed to those cages and what can you do to remove those cages?

Mary Novak challenges us: “The question almost daily is how are we to act with God’s justice in a world that for some of us, because of our privilege, is much more comfortable without God’s justice?”

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  *(Betty: Share slide, time 2:00, chime.)*

**(Lynn)** Terri Butel will lead our sharing of personal reflections.

**SHARING (Terri Butel)**

We know the wisdom of our community includes both words shared and silent listening. Now, if you’d like, we invite you to share the essence of what is emerging within you from our readings and silence. Let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. *[Longer pause]*

Who would like to start our sharing? Remember to unmute yourself to speak and mute yourself again afterwards.

[Sharing]

*[Long silences are common, and they can be fruitful. If there is extended silence after 15 minutes:]* Is there anyone else who would like to share?  *[Long pause]*

*[Stop by about 20 after the hour.]*

Thank you.  We can continue after the final song, as we often do.

Now Lynn Bufka will lead us in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY (Lynn Bufka)**

Let’s pause to notice the prayers that arise in us now. *[Pause]* Our response will be: **God of Justice, hear our prayer.**

In today’s reading, St. Timothy urges us to pray for all in authority, that they lead with devotion, dignity and peace. We thank especially for the leadership of women religious. **For this we pray.**

Let us hold in reverence those who pour themselves out in relationship, in prayer, and in service in order to bend the arc of history toward love and toward justice.

**For this we pray.**

We pray for spiritual freedom, so as to be indifferent to the trappings of this world and to be focused on that which is rich in the community we are building together. **For this we pray.**

For what else shall we pray? Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute yourself afterwards.

*[Shared prayers]*

**For this we pray.**

O You who know us, with gratitude, we welcome and return the gifts You have given us. We will do all that we can to put our prayers into action. We entrust all to you. Blessed Be!

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Dan McCarthy)**

As bread that was scattered on the hillside was gathered together and made one, so too, we, your grateful people, scattered throughout the world, are gathered together here and become one.

As grapes grown in the fields are gathered and pressed into wine, so too are we drawn together and pressed by our times, disappointments, and heartbreak ***yet*** transformed into your life-blood for all.

Make us nourishment for others, catalysts for justice, people who see with new eyes and hear with open hearts. Bless us and inspire us. Help us do our part to transform our communities into the Beloved Community.

May it be so!

[*Pause*.]

To extend our communion, Ann Jelen will lead us in the prayer of Jesus.

Blessed Be!

**THE PRAYER OF JESUS (Ann Jelen)**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands in harmony with our family throughout the world:

***All (muted):*** Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother, Holy and blessed is your true name. We pray for your reign of peace to come, We pray that your good will be done, Let heaven and earth become one. Give us this day the bread we need, Give it to those who have none. Let forgiveness flow like a river between us, From each one to each one. Lead us to holy innocence Beyond the evil of our days — Come swiftly Mother, Father, come. For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy: Forever your name is All in One. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING (Terri Butel)**

Let us extend our hands over each other as we pray for the blessing of courage with the words of Alan Paton:

O Lord, open our eyes that we may see the needs of others;  
Open our ears that we may hear their cries;  
Open our hearts so that they need not be without succor;  
Let us not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong,  
Nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich.  
Show us where love and hope and faith are needed,  
And use us to bring them to those places.  
And so open our eyes and our ears  
That we may this coming day be able to do some work of peace for thee.

May it be so.

**(Lynn)** Please join in singing “Send Down the Fire.”

**CLOSING SONG (Debra Street)**

Refrain:  
Send down the fire of your justice,  
Send down the rains of your love;  
Come, send down the Spirit, breathe life in your people,  
and we shall be people of God.

Call us to be your compassion,  
Teach us the song of your love;  
Give us hearts that sing,  
Give us deeds that ring,  
Make us ring with the song of your love. (Refrain)

Call us to learn of your mercy,  
Teach us the way of your peace;  
Give us hearts that feel,  
Give us hands that heal,  
Make us walk in the way of your peace. (Refrain)

Call us to witness your Kingdom,  
Give us the presence of Christ;  
May your holy light  
Keep us shining bright,  
Ever shine with the presence of Christ. (Refrain)

**Resources**:

The opening prayer is adapted from the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council <https://socialjusticeresourcecenter.org/prayers/justice/>

Catholic Women Preach, September 18, 2022, Mary J. Novak <https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/09182022>

Another question to consider: What does it mean for you to walk a path of justice in the midst of unjust systems?

Maya Angelou and many other poets have written about injustice: <https://hivelife.com/powerful-poems-injustice-racial-discrimination/>

The universal prayer of Jesus from Parker J. Palmer

<https://www.elkgroveumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Alternative-versions-of-the-Lord.pdf>

The final blessing is adapted from a prayer by Alan Paton found at <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/justice-prayers>

And this is a bonus hymn, especially for everyone with creative talents: “Moved by the Gospel, Let Us Move” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rcUBSXE--A> Here are its yrics:

The image of created love  
indwells each human heart.  
The Maker calls creation good,  
so let us now express  
with sound and colour, stone and wood,  
the shape of holiness.

Let weavers form from broken strands  
a tapestry of prayer.  
Let artists paint with skillful hands  
their joy, lament and care.  
Then mime the story; Christ has come.  
With reverence dance the word.  
With flute and organ, gong and drum  
God’s praise be ever heard.  
  
O Spirit, breathe among us here;  
inspire the work we do.  
May hands and voices, eye and ear  
attest to life made new.  
In worship and in daily strife  
create among us still.  
Great Artist, form our common life  
according to your will

**Images**

Reading 1



Reading 2



Reading 3



<https://pixabay.com/photos/spring-cherry-blossoms-bird-cage-6639524/>