
"JUSTICE, AND ONLY JUSTICE"



Daily devotions for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019



Anglican Church of Canada



ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

THE
Episcopal
CHURCH





Introduction

This collection continues the series of devotions which express the growing partnerships in ministry among the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and The Episcopal Church USA (TEC). Earlier series have been written in connection with a season of the Church year (Advent, Epiphany, or Lent). Again this year the devotions are written by the four presiding bishops of these churches, drawing this time on the Scriptures and themes suggested for the eight days of the global ecumenical initiative known as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The Week of Prayer 2019 invites Christians to reflect together on a biblical theme based on the words of the book of Deuteronomy: “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue.” Both the unity of God’s people and the call to seek justice are central ideas in the Scriptures, and indeed they are often linked closely to one another. These devotions are offered in the hope that they will be found useful by individuals and congregations within these four churches and beyond. May all who are drawn together in prayer in these days be also increasingly united in the love and service of others in the time to come.



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Friday, January 18 – “Let justice roll down like water”

“Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?” (Amos 5:22–25)

Worship is worthless... if it is not accompanied by earnest words and genuine acts of justice.

Worship is worthless... if we present our religious sacrifices week after week while allowing others around us to continue to be sacrificed on the altars of greed and power and prejudice.

Worship is worthless... if we close our eyes and ears and hearts to the poor, the oppressed, and the helpless.

This is what the prophet Amos was talking about when he shared God’s warning to the religious people of his time: “Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.”

This is what the writer of First John 4:20 was talking about when he challenged some of the earliest members of the Jesus Movement: “For those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen.”

This is what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was talking about when he proclaimed, “No, no, we are not satisfied, and will not be satisfied, until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

Worship – our worship – is only truly good, truly worthy, when we choose to do what Paul urged the Christians in Rome to do: “to present our bodies as a living sacrifice.” These hands we use to worship are heaven-sent. In the words attributed to Teresa of Avila: “Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours; yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.”

This is true religion. This is worship worthy of our loving, liberating, and life-giving God.

Let us pray: *O God of justice and compassion, by your Spirit help us who dare to follow Jesus to see you in the faces of all those we meet, and to respond faithfully. Through Jesus Christ our Savior, who came not to be served, but to serve. Amen.*

– Bishop Michael Curry

Saturday, January 19 – “Let your word be ‘yes, yes’ or ‘no, no’”

“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ But I say to you, ‘Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No;’ anything more than this comes from the evil one.” (Matthew 5:33–37)

When I was a girl, dinner table discussions in our family were lively and often required backing up one’s argument with facts. In that pre-Google time, the World Book Encyclopedia was often our source. Out came the dark blue volumes. One’s presentation could be critiqued, but not the facts – they were printed in the World Book Encyclopedia after all!

Those were simpler times, or at least I was more naive.

Now we live in the era of “truthiness” and “fake news” and “alternative facts.” One prominent U.S. attorney declared in an interview, “truth is not truth.” I was stunned when I heard that, but even more stunned when I realized he had a point. We have weaponized facts and forced truth into the service of spin. It is not enough to “let (our) word be ‘yes, yes’ or ‘no, no’.” Now we need to shade and embellish and selectively “factify” our position. And if that doesn’t work then shout or use ALL CAPS.

Jesus and Pilate have an interesting exchange about truth in the Gospel according to John. Jesus said, “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’” (John 18:37-38) A remarkable claim by Jesus and an interesting reply by Pilate. I wonder, was Pilate earnestly seeking for truth or was he cynically dismissing the existence of truth?

So how do we live as people of Truth in a time of spin? In baptism God has claimed us as beloved children joined to the death and resurrection of Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. We now belong to the Truth. That doesn't mean we have the Truth or even know everything about truth. The Truth doesn't belong to us. No, by God's gracious act we belong to the Truth. We don't make truth claims, Truth claims us.

How then do we live? In deep humility, profound gratitude, and real joy. We listen to Jesus' voice and hear that Jesus is God's “yes, yes” to life and “no, no” to death. This word is for everyone.

Let us pray: *There is a lot of noise in the world, O God; including our own that lays claim to truth. Bring us to a place of stillness where we can listen to you. Your truth has claimed us and set us free. As we listen, let our yes be your yes to life. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*

— Bishop Elizabeth Eaton

Sunday, January 20 – “The Lord is gracious and merciful to all”

“The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.” (Psalm 145:8–13)

I have always appreciated the lines of that Frederick William Faber hymn, “There's a Wideness in God's Mercy:”

*“There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea; there's
a kindness in God's justice which is
more than liberty*

*For the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.”*

Tucked in a corner of a bookshelf in my office is a wonderful photo of Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche around the world. These communities are renowned for their commitment to enable people with huge physical and emotional challenges to

enjoy their dignity as children of God and to live life to the fullest. Dressed in his blue windbreaker jacket, Vanier is beaming. His broad smile, indeed his entire countenance, reveals his faith and outlook on life. It is a lovely reflection of the great truth that “the first and foremost attitude of God toward the world is love.” (para. 58, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214)

In Psalm 145, the author describes the Lord as “gracious and merciful to all” (v. 8) and “loving to everyone” (v. 9). The Lord is “faithful in all his words” and “gracious in all his deeds” (v. 13). The Lord is “just in all his ways” (v. 18) and “kind in all his ways.” (v. 18) The Lord is “near to all who call upon him” (v 18) and “preserves all those who love him.” (v. 21) This is the psalmist’s joy in the Lord. Clearly, it is also the joy of Jean Vanier.

In the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, I often think of how Vanier points out that while in L’Arche they cannot break bread together, they can and do wash one another’s feet. That simple act has become a right of unity within their communities. I think too, of how often Vanier has said that the poor, the broken, and the marginalized are the ones who call us to unity. These “little ones,” these “precious ones” as he describes them, summon us to the works of compassion – feeding, clothing, and sheltering people. They summon us to their aid in defending their cause, in advocating for what is good, and right, and just for all members of society. They summon us to a unity of public witness to our faith worthy of the gospel of Jesus.

Let us pray: *We give thanks for the work of national and local church councils. Let us remember their care for the poor and their political engagement in upholding the values inherent in the reign of God. Pray that their witness be prospered and enhanced by their resolve to live by the ancient counsel "justice, and only justice, shall you pursue."*

— Archbishop Fred Hiltz

Monday, January 21 – “Be content with what you have”

“Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’”
(Hebrews 13:5)

If I was to think of a mantra that currently guides North American Christians, “Be content with what you have” would not be first on the list.

Why is that?

We are among the richest Christians in the world! The consumer culture around us teaches us the exact opposite: You can never have enough; you need to keep up with the Joneses; whoever dies with the most toys wins.

These messages of consumerism pull us away from our trust in God’s generosity. They feed our addiction to things. They increase our environmental footprint to the very peril of our planet.

What can we do to help each other claim the truth of God’s word and God’s way? How can we embrace a spirit of radical gratitude in all we say and do and give?

Let us pray: *Giver of all things good, help me to be content with all that I have. Thank you for the many gifts you continue to give me. Teach me to be generous with others. Amen.*

– Bishop Susan Johnson

Tuesday, January 22 – “To bring good news to the poor”

“When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘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 favour.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Luke 4:16–21)

After setting the stage and presenting the background, in the fourth chapter of Luke’s Gospel the curtain rises for Jesus of Nazareth’s public debut.

And what a debut it is!

There, the evangelist tells us, Jesus stood; there in his hometown synagogue, reading a passage from the prophet Isaiah. Perhaps it was familiar to many. Perhaps they guessed what comforting words he might share. But no one could have predicted what would come next.

He caught their attention with his enigmatic words, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” What did he mean, this carpenter’s son? Curiosity, however, quickly gave way to anger, and then to murderous rage, as the hometown boy said

some powerful things, provocative things. He challenged those who claimed to worship God to share God's concern for the poor, the needy, the hurting, the oppressed; and not simply "our" poor - people like us - but outsiders, even enemies.

These were powerful words, provocative words, words that almost got him killed there at the inauguration of his ministry, the kind of words that would indeed get him killed three years later. But he shared those powerful, provocative words, and challenged his followers to be equally bold, unafraid, willing to speak out on behalf of those who have no voice.

Some of his followers through the ages have taken that challenge seriously.

Oscar Romero, the recently canonized Archbishop of El Salvador, was one such follower. He once famously proclaimed, "A church that does not provoke any crisis, preach a gospel that does not unsettle, proclaim a word of God that does not get under anyone's skin or a word of God that does not touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed: What kind of gospel is that?"

Powerful words. Provocative words. The kind of words that eventually resulted in Romero making the ultimate sacrifice. Gunned down. In church. During worship.

We who dare to be part of the Jesus Movement should - no, must - take seriously the challenge of the One we follow. Do our words bring comfort to the oppressed and challenge to the oppressor? Do our actions reflect the justice and mercy of God

to those in greatest need, whether they are insiders, outsiders, or even those we consider enemies? Can the voiceless look to us to speak out on their behalf to the powers that be, or should they look for others to say and do what we will not?

Let us pray: *O God of justice and mercy, give to your followers your Spirit of boldness and compassion, that we may indeed share your love in word and deed, giving help to the helpless and hope to the hopeless; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.*

— Bishop Michael Curry

Wednesday, January 23 – “The Lord of Hosts is His name”

“It is [God] who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens. When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightnings for the rain, and he brings out the wind from his storehouses. Everyone is stupid and without knowledge; goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols; for their images are false, and there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish. Not like these is the LORD, the portion of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is his name.” (Jeremiah 10:12–16)

“God’s entire divine nature is wholly and entirely in all creatures, more deeply, more inwardly, more present than the creature is to itself.” – Martin Luther

I am formed by the Lutheran movement, so I tend to look for law and gospel, judgement and promise, in everything. This quote from Luther is no exception. It does speak a word of judgement and at the same time a word of promise that brings hope.

First the law. “God’s divine nature is... more present than the creature is to itself.” There is a tendency, especially in Western culture, for humans to see themselves as distinct from the creation. This positioning of human creatures as separate from the creation is harmful for creation. We become the actors

and creation is acted upon. The rest of creation becomes a commodity to be used as humankind sees fit. This has had dire consequences for our planet, the atmosphere surrounding it, even space which is now littered with our cast-off machinery.

But setting ourselves apart from the creation is also physically and spiritually deadly for humans. The burden of climate change falls disproportionately on the poor. Access to clean water and air, to sustainable living is often blocked in impoverished communities. Eventually income will not guarantee anyone an escape. But even now humankind suffers from alienation from creation that is actually alienation from God. If “God’s entire divine nature is wholly and entirely in all creatures, more deeply, more inwardly, more present than the creature is to itself,” then denying our creatureliness separates us from God. We miss the divine all around us and we deny the intimate presence of God within us. What a lonely way to live.

But here’s the gospel. Human beings are part of the creation. Human beings are connected with everything in the cosmos. Human beings are connected to God. We are not doomed to alienation. We don’t always know this or live this, but it is true. And that God is more present than we are to ourselves gives us a path to reconnect with God, each other, and all of creation.

The judgement is that we do not even perceive that the One who created all things is intimately present. The promise is that the One who created all things is intimately present. We – all created things – are family.

Let us pray: *Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, who in your self-emptying love gathered up and reconciled all creation to the Father. Innumerable galaxies of the heavens worship you. Creatures that grace the earth rejoice in you. All those in the deepest seas bow to you in adoration. As with them we give you praise, grant that we may cherish the earth, our home, and live in harmony with this good creation, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

— Bishop Elizabeth Eaton

Thursday, January 24 – “Woman, great is your faith”

“Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, ‘Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.’ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.’ He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ He answered, ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’ She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.” (Matthew 15:21-28)

We all know this story so well, don’t we? This woman’s perseverance for her daughter’s sake, her trust in the Lord and how her wisdom and wit moved him to say, “Woman great is your faith. Be it done for you as you desire.”

Here is a woman whose name we will never know, but surely she is numbered among the hundreds of those whose names we do know – women who trusting in the Lord’s mercy, compassion and justice have been lights in the world in their several generations. They have shone a light on uncomfortable truths and horrible realities that contradict the divine will. They have spoken up for the disenfranchised. They have defended the cause of the needy. They have fought for justice. They have rallied people to become powerful forces for change in their own countries and in the world at large. These ones come

quickly to mind: Clare of Assisi, Elizabeth of Hungary, Margaret of Scotland, Agnes of Rome, Catherine of Sienna, and Teresa of Calcutta. I think too, of Nellie McClung, Rosa Parks, Viola Desmond, Dorothy Day, Pauline Johnson, Agnes MacPhail and Malala Yousafzai. The lives of all these women are marked by the summons to action that accompanies the great spiritual admonition “justice, and only justice, you shall pursue.” (Deuteronomy 16:20)

Just five days ago, the worldwide Women’s March took place. In many cities, they will have marched to places where laws are made or abolished or reformed in accord with the principles of equal opportunity and justice for all.

This march is an important run up to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW), which takes place every year in New York. The theme for this year’s gathering, the 63rd, is “Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, Social Protection Systems, Access to Public Services, and Sustainable Infrastructures.”

The women who go to this international gathering are women who want to influence the course of human history. They take a strong stance on the dignity and rights of women. Like the woman in today’s gospel, many of them are women of great faith, great wisdom and great wit. Many are Christian. Many are Jewish. Many are Muslim. Many are adherents of other spiritual traditions. Let us uphold them in our prayers and eagerly await their word to the world!

Let us pray: *Lord God, almighty and most merciful, we give you thanks for women and for men of great faith who know you as the righteous defender of their cause. Hasten the day when all women everywhere will enjoy the rights and privileges of gender equality and opportunity. Bless all who labour hard to bend the arc of time toward the justice you will for all your children. We pray in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

– Archbishop Fred Hiltz

Friday, January 25 – “The Lord is my light and my salvation”

*“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When
evildoers assail me to devour my flesh – my adversaries and foes – they
shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart
shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.
One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the
house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the
LORD, and to inquire in his temple.” (Psalm 27:1–4)*

As soon as I saw this text, the song “this little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine,” jumped into my head. So easy to sing, so hard to do.

Well, maybe easy to sing with fellow believers in church, but how are we doing at living this out day to day?

There are many places of injustice in our world that need us to bring God’s light to focus attention and end oppression. The evil of human trafficking. The many circumstances including war, poverty and climate change that are increasing the number of refugees and migrants. The perfidious sin of racism. The list goes on and on.

How can we help God’s light of justice, love, peace and hope shine into all these areas of great need in our communities and our world?

Let us pray: *Light of the world, we give you thanks for your radiance. You are our beacon and our welcome. Empower us to bring your light into all places in need of justice in our world.*

– Bishop Susan Johnson
