



CITIZENS *for* PUBLIC JUSTICE

## ***Living Justice and the Psalms***

Week 6: Addressing Poverty

*[Invite members to be silent before saying this or another **opening prayer**]:*

I wake to morning light and whether I am wondering or wandering, dreading, preparing, aching, paining, You know my name. I make the noon of day and where I am busily calculating or listlessly waiting, caring, harming, losing, planting, You know my name. I enter the evening rest and whether I am thankful or cursing, burdened, freed, exhausted, embraced, You know my name. Name above all names, Giver of Life tend to me. And as I am tended, teach me to honour and hold all You know and name. Use me to remember, restore, renew until Your reign comes and Your will is done. **Amen.**

*(“Dignity for All”, i, Living Justice: A Gospel Response to Poverty)*

*[Ask a member to **read this passage of Scripture** aloud]:*

**Psalms 118: 1-2, 19-29 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

<sup>2</sup>Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

<sup>19</sup>Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

<sup>20</sup>This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

<sup>21</sup>I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

<sup>22</sup>The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

<sup>23</sup>This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

<sup>24</sup>This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

<sup>25</sup>Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

<sup>26</sup>Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.

<sup>27</sup>The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

<sup>28</sup>You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

<sup>29</sup>O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

*[Allow each person a few moments to **respond to this question**]:*

What stands out to you about this passage?

*[Allow for some silence and then ask a member to **read the discussion aloud**]:*

Psalm 118 is an expression of rejoicing and gladness over God's salvation. The psalm talks about salvation in the far-reaching terms of God's, "steadfast love which endures forever" (v. 1, 2, 29). It talks about God saving individuals, the community, and creation. The psalmist tells us that God can save the most unlikely people, and that being rejected by society does not mean being rejected by God. In fact, God has a plan for each person and we are redeemed to do God's work in the world. Each of us is called to work to bring about God's kingdom, and to be agents of restoration for one another and the world.

Biblical scholar and commentator Robert Alter identifies several instances in Psalm 118 where alternate readings of the original Hebrew are possible. These alternatives are interesting because they offer a way to understand the psalm in light of justice issues. In verse 19 the NRSV reads: "Open to me the gates of righteousness." According to Alter, "righteousness" can also be translated "justice."<sup>1</sup> In other words: God's gates are ones of justice. Justice is part of God's plan for the relationships between human beings, creation, and God. In our society we know that there are people that are crying out for justice, and Psalm 118 tells us that they are heard by God and welcomed into God's kingdom through the gates of justice.

Salvation and justice are two gifts from the God who loves us. Part of living as a Christian means acknowledging the gifts that have already been freely extended. The gift of salvation is extended to all people, in all places, and all times. Knowing that we have been freely given salvation stirs up in us a willingness to serve others and creation. We are called as Christians to move from gratitude and thanksgiving to actively engage with the world for the betterment of others and creation.

Poverty is a symbol of the brokenness of human relationships. It is not a part of God's plan for us, so we are called to try to change the situations in which we encounter injustice. As Christians we should be actively engaged with, and for, others because we have the example of God's steadfast love to act as our example and guide. Our efforts to address and end poverty should endure for as long as God's love: forever.

*[Spend a few moments allowing everyone to **respond to the following discussion questions**]:*

1. What have you learned about yourself, and your relationship with poverty?
2. What do the Psalms have to say about poverty? About facing poverty?
3. How can you connect the experience of participating in the *Living Justice and the Psalms Bible Study* with your actions in the world?

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<sup>1</sup> Alter, Robert. *The Book of Psalms*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007. p 417.

[Have someone **read aloud from Living Justice: “Interfaith Declaration on Faith and Poverty: A Time for inspired Leadership and Action”** pg. 104-105.]

[Break into groups, read the **suggested activities** on pages 96-99 of *Living Justice*, and **respond to the following questions**]:

1. Which of these activities might be possible in your context?
2. Who would you invite to participate in activities like these?
3. What would you like to see result from the 6 weeks you have spent studying and thinking about *Living Justice and the Psalms*? What is a possible response? What is a realistic response?
4. What changes happen in us when we become more aware of poverty issues?

[**Close** with the *Franciscan Benediction* found on pg. 108 of *Living Justice*]

