

Sunday, May 13, 2018
Luke 13:10-17

Lois Harder

Speaking up for moms

Happy Mother's Day! And Happy day-to-all-those-who-nurture! Whether you're a mother, or even a woman, those who nurture others are crucial in our development. Today is Mother's Day. Tomorrow begins a 40-day campaign of nonviolent direct actions in over 30 state capitals around the nation, by those who are participating in the Poor People's Campaign. Raise your hand if you've heard about the Poor People's Campaign. This morning, I'll bring an emphasis to Mother's Day (or those-who-nurture) along with telling you about the Poor People's Campaign.

"Just a year before his assassination... Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: I think it is necessary for us to realize that we have moved from the era of civil rights to the era of human rights... When we see that there must be a radical redistribution of economic and political power, then we see that for the last twelve years we have been in a reform movement... That after Selma and the Voting Rights Bill, we moved into a new era, which must be an era of revolution... In short, we have moved into an era where we are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society. (end quote) Later than year, in December 1967, Rev. Dr. King announced the plan to bring together poor people from across the country for a new march on Washington. This march was to demand better jobs, better homes, better education – better lives than the ones they were living... Dr. King saw that poverty was not just another issue and that poor people were not a special interest group. Throughout his many speeches in the last year of his life, he described the unjust economic conditions facing millions of people worldwide. He held up the potential of the poor to come together to transform the whole of society.

Dr. King identified a triple threat to society – poverty, racism and militarism. These became the three key issues of the Poor People's Campaign. The assassinations of Dr. King and Senator Robert Kennedy, a key proponent of the Campaign and Presidential candidate served to cripple the Campaign and greatly limit its impact." <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/history/>

I share with you now words from the current "Covenant of Nonviolence" written by those who have now picked up the Campaign 50 years later, where it left off. "The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival is launching a long-term, multi-year campaign to unite the poor and disenfranchised and to challenge the interconnected evils of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, and ecological devastation. We believe that a moral revival is necessary to save the heart and soul of our democracy. By lifting up the leadership of the people who are most directly impacted and by building power through state-based organizing, we seek to reclaim the moral narrative and agenda; transform our nation's political, economic, and social structures; and demand justice for all. The PPC is firmly rooted in nonviolence as a philosophy, practice, and, for some, spiritual discipline that aligns with the values of the campaign. We believe that nonviolent struggle is a way of life for courageous people – that it has power to eradicate structural violence and inequities and offers a path for personal and collective transformation."

This covenant is signed by each person who takes the training and commits to participating in the Campaign.

As I mentioned earlier, tomorrow begins the first phase of the Campaign – a 40-day period during which there will be nonviolent direct actions in Topeka and the capitals of 30+ other states. Each of the six weeks has a particular moral issue that will be addressed at the state and local levels. For this coming week it's "Children, Women, and People with Disabilities in Poverty".

Week two will be "Linking Systemic Racism and Poverty"

Week three, the focus will be, "The War Economy: Militarism and the Proliferation of Gun Violence"

Week four is, "The Right to Health and a Healthy Planet: Ecological Devastation and Health Care"

Week five is called "Everybody's Got the Right to Live: Education, Living Wage Jobs, Income, Housing"

Finally, week six uses Martin Luther King's language, "A New and Unsettling Force: Confronting the Distorted Moral Narrative."

June 23 – Global Day of Solidarity and a Sending Forth Call to Action Mass Rally in Wash D.C.

But who are these people who've "picked up" the Poor People's Campaign 50 years after its initial introduction? The Rev. Dr. William Barber, pastor of the Greenleaf Christian Church in Goldsboro, NC, and Rev. Liz Theoharis from the Kairos Center, at Union Theological Seminary in New York have worked together for the past three years. Barber, a Black male from the south and Theoharis, a white female from New York have come together to form a strong team to resurrect the PPC. They offer a powerful theological foundation and, together, are challenging the nation to re-examine and confront our moral compass. For a fascinating and thorough interview of Rev. Barber, look at the article in the most recent New Yorker. Many thanks to Allan Tanner for forwarding it to me.

The story that Rev. Barber and Rev. Theoharis suggested using for this week's theme, "Children, Women, and People with Disabilities in Poverty" is the story that Willard read for us from Luke about the woman who had been bent over for eighteen years.

Once again, we witness Jesus stirring up trouble with his miraculous healing. He heals a woman. A nameless woman. Clearly a "nobody". He heals her unbidden – she didn't ask to be healed. And he heals her on the sabbath, right there in the Synagogue in the face of the Synagogue leader. The text says the synagogue leader was indignant... and he kept saying, "There are six days on which work ought to be done, come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." That was the hitch, you see. Not only that this nameless woman had been healed. That was almost beside the point. SHE was beside the point. The point was, Jesus had messed with the rules and was setting a bad example. Come on Jesus. This woman has her place. It's where she's been for all these years; it's where she belongs! You can't just come in here and start making exceptions to the rules for the likes of her! If you do that, any old riff-raff will start thinking *they* can be healed on the sabbath! Healing *anybody* on the sabbath is strictly taboo, but especially healing this *nobody* on the sabbath – it's too far.

And Jesus, who is now referred to as the Lord, replies, “You hypocrites!” Never one to mince words, Jesus continues, “Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?” When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

In 2018 this story is just as relevant and biting as it was when Luke wrote it down. Women, children and those with disabilities who live in poverty are often still treated as second-class citizens, as “nobodies”. Often they are not even being treated with the dignity with which many of us treat our animals. “You hypocrites!” we can still hear Jesus exclaiming to those who’ve made the decisions to cut funds and remove cultural safety nets for the most vulnerable among us.

I encourage you to learn more and keep your eyes and ears open about the work of the Poor People’s Campaign. Think about ways you might support it. There are many important roles that people can fulfil in the Campaign. You certainly don’t have to be doing civil disobedience in Topeka to be a part of the movement, although I would encourage you to consider that! I’ve included a couple of web sites in the bulletin that you can go to, to learn more. I’m also very happy to share with anyone about what I’ve learned about it from the meetings and trainings I’ve attended. I guarantee you’ll be hearing more about it if you pay attention. And depending on which news outlets you listen to its work may be presented as anything from naïve to subversive. Sounds like Jesus work!

This weekend, as we offer our praise and appreciation to our mothers and those who’ve nurtured us, let us not forget, along with the writer of Psalm 71 whose words we spoke earlier, that God is our ultimate Mother and nurturer, our Rock and Fortress.

I chose number 69 in the Sing the Journey book as a song of response because in my experience, I have often received and felt the love and nurture of God powerfully from those I have perceived to be the poor, the suffering, the wounded. As the song says, we see God there. Feel free to sing in either English or Spanish. We’ll sing all 4 verses – verses 3 and 4 are on page 70.