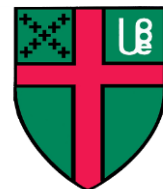


# Reflections on Social Justice for the Lenten Season (Year A)



## The Episcopal Networks Collaborative

### Contact

Episcopal Network for  
Economic Justice  
Dianne Aid, President  
(206) 280-9453  
wolfogubbio1@gmail.com

### Contact

Union of Black Episcopalians  
Annette Buchanan, President  
(202) 248-3941  
abuchanan@theube.org

### Contact

Episcopal Ecological Network  
Chuck Morello, Communications  
chuck@cmorello.net  
(218) 290-4548

## About this project...

The Lenten readings provide rich material for reflecting on social justice topics. Lent is a most suitable time for Christians to use for reflecting on such personal and societal concerns.

The following questions may be useful in your sermon preparation:

- 1) What does our religious teaching say to us about the selected issue?
- 2) What does the secular culture teach and tell us about the selected issue?
- 3) What is our personal experience with the selected issue?
- 4) Compare 1, 2 and 3. Where are there tensions? Similarities?
- 5) What are we called to do?
- 6) First steps?

### Committee Members

Dianne Aid, TSSF

ENEJ

Diocese of Olympia

The Rev. Betsy Bennett

EpEN

Annette Buchanan

UBE

The Rev. Richard Burnett

Trinity Columbus

ENEJ

The Rev. Frank Edmands

Diocese of Southern Ohio

John Harris

UBE

The Rev. Stephanie Johnson

EpEN

The Ven. Michael S. Kendall

ENEJ

Diocese of New York

The Rev. Marjorie Menaul

Diocese of Southern Ohio

Chuck Morello

EpEN

Abraham Ndungu

Ashland Seminary

Alice Speers

EpEN

Br. Joseph Wallace-Williams

Novice

The Order of The Holy Cross station at  
Holy Cross Monastery in West Park,  
New York

Mike Maloney

Staff, Episcopal Networks Collaborative

## Additional Resources

### *Episcopal Networks Collaborative Issue Papers*

<http://enej.org/assets/pdfs/Economic%20and%20Social%20Justice%20Issue%20Papers%202015.pdf>

### Issue Papers: Table of Contents

Racial Oppression in America – Tiffany King  
Incarceration in the USA – The Rev. Dr. Paula M. Jackson  
The Widening of the Wealth Gap – Laura Russell  
Taxes and Economic Justice – John Mark Summers and Laura Russell  
The Making of a Segregated Neighborhood – Laura Russell  
The U.S. Housing Crisis and Political Repression – The Rev. Sarah Monroe  
Trade Agreements -- The Rev. Dr. Christopher Johnson  
Immigration, Hope and Desperation – Dianne Aid, TSSF  
Predatory Lending -- Verna Fausey and Laura Russell  
Human Trafficking -- Sarah Leech and Laura Russell  
Community Investing – Sue Lloyd and Verna Fausey  
Resolutions Relating to Concerns of the Episcopal Networks Collaborative  
    Addition to Baptismal Covenant – EpEN  
    Facilitate Dialogue on Climate Change and Divestment Strategy -- EpEN  
    Living Wage Principles - The Rev. Dick Gillett

*These issue papers are intended to help the reader with material on suggested sermon topics for Lent.*

## Table of Contents

*About this project*

*Forward: Lenten or Easter Study on our economy*

*Lent 1*

*Lent 2*

*Lent 3*

*Lent 4*

*Lent 5*

## Lenten or Easter study on our economy

The Episcopal Network for Economic Justice provides these suggestions as a way to promote congregational study and practice in our changing economy. Rana Foroohar in her recent book Makers and Takers: The Rise of Finance and the Fall of American Business provides us a valuable synopsis of our economic system over the last eight decades. This is a very readable work that provides basic insights into our changing economic system. She argues that we have entered into a new period of Capitalism and that the rules and practices are changing rapidly.

Walter Brueggemann in his new work God, Neighbor, Empire: The Excess of Divine Fidelity and the Command of Common Good presents again the case for neighborly practices to be the essential economic practice of the biblical narrative promoting the Kingdom of God. We are recommending these two books as a focus for congregations to learn about where we as a society are in our economic practices and to explore what is the biblical ethic and how do we practice this ethic in our current situation.

In his opening preface, Brueggemann points out how the basis of biblical practice is relationality but in our current society we have reduced relationality to commodity and technique. The book focuses on the integration of justice, grace and law in the mission of God. These he argues should all be practiced to further the common good. Dr. Brueggemann is asking us, as ENEJ leaders in our church, to ask the following questions.

1. God of justice relentlessly pursues the well-being of those "below." Does your congregation know those who are the "below?" Do you have a relationship with them. How are you enhancing their participation in the common good?
2. Walter Brueggemann points out that biblical fidelity is found in relational activity which he calls "othering." How are you as a congregation participating in looking after the good of the other?  
Our society is fixed on "selfing."
3. The biblical narrative expects us to expand our social relationship with neighbors, strangers and enemies. As Brueggemann points out, neighborliness leads to tangible practices of lending generously, conducting all affairs justly, and distributing freely to those in need -- and possibly especially -- to strangers, outcasts, and enemies. Perhaps your congregation could conduct an audit to identify how you are now or could be practicing neighborliness.

The Episcopal Network for Economic Justice held our conference last spring in Cincinnati where we interacted with both Walter Brueggemann and Peter Block on the practice of economic justice in these changing and challenging times. These two books together provide both a framework of how our economic system has changed since World War II and what influenced these changes as well as our need to bring the biblical narrative to bear on the practice of economic justice.

Along with these two books we have identified five passages that might be used as a contemporary reading in the Sunday morning liturgy. These contemporary readings provide a current framework in which to incorporate your Gospel preaching toward the biblical practice of neighborliness. I also highly recommend the current issue of Anglican Theological Review which has reprinted The Social Teachings of the Church Year by Vida Dutton Scudder. She presented these lectures at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge in 1918.

The Episcopal Network for Economic Justice is here to support you in your efforts to practice biblical ethics in your community and to raise these same concerns before the larger Episcopal Church. Have a blessed Lent and may people see and know the Risen Lord in your practices within your community.

*The Rev. Geoffrey Curtiss  
St. James Episcopal Church  
Bradley Beach, New Jersey*

## Lent 1

The collect of the day ...we are assaulted by temptations and you know our weakness.

Where do some of temptations come from...our inner struggle for identity?

Genesis continues with this theme that we will be like God knowing good and evil.

The Psalm says do not be like the horse or mule which have no understanding.

### Contemporary Reading:

The clash is within each of us.

"The real 'clash of civilizations' is not 'out there' between admirable Westerners and Muslim zealots. It is here, within each person, as we oscillate uneasily between selfprotective aggression and the ability to live in the world with others."

And of course we may see that same clash within the (biblical) text, where the struggle for the other and against the other is pervasive. There may be ground against the other, but it will not be found in the radical teaching of fidelity that draws the other into the orbit of fidelity. It is evident in every case -- with God, with Israel, with the Church -- that the reach to the other, the ultimate fidelity, is a reach that redefines the reacher. So God, in a reach beyond self to creation, to Israel, to the poor, becomes a different God. So Israel, in its reach toward widows, orphans, and immigrants, becomes a different kind of chosen people. So the church, in its Spirit-led reach to Gentiles, becomes a different kind of community. It is not, "To thine own self be true." It is rather, "To the farthest reach of the other, be true." (God, Neighbor, Empire by Walter Brueggemann. Pages 55-56)

One way of exploring the Gospel text is Jesus' inner struggle for identity. Is identity based on fulfilling commands or is it based on something else? What does it mean to be Spirit-led?

What is the farthest reach of the other in your community?

## Lent 2

The collect of the day encourages us to "be gracious to all who have gone astray." Who are the ones in your community who have been driven astray?

YHWH says "I will bless you that you will be a blessing." If we consider this a plural you, how are you as a congregation being a blessing to your community?

### Contemporary Reading:

And so, the divide between the markets and the real economy, between Wall Street and Main Street, grows. All of these distortions have given a scary boost

to the risks inherent in our financial system. With so much money and power concentrated in the hands of so few, ours is a top without a bottom. Rising inequality, falling productivity, and distorted incentives have created a world in which virtual enterprises prosper while real ones, with real workers, struggle. (Makers and Takers by Rana Foroohar. Page 24) Nicodemus seeks to understand this Spirit of God, where the wind blows where it chooses, you hear the sound of it, you know not where it comes or where it goes. We who are born of the Spirit...where are we being blown by the Spirit particularly in this changing economic reality?

## Lent 3

The collect of the day...we have no power to help ourselves that we may be defended from all assaults and adversities. Do you accept you have no power?

When we face economic and political questions do we ask...

Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Is the Lord not among us?

Are we tempted; do our hearts harden?

When we are driven out to the wilderness away from our culture of self-sufficiency do we find our hearts harden or do we seek the Lord who is among us?

The Gospel finds Jesus at the well in Sychar. Where is the food we seek to do the will of the One who sent Jesus. It is in our communities and we are called to complete that work. Where is the Living Water?

Do we listen to the cries of the people in our community? What do we hear? How can we participate with God in completing the work of justice?

### Contemporary Reading:

Listening...involves an active willingness to construct relationships of attention...without moving ourselves toward the background, we cannot hear at all...Political listening cannot be grounded in passivity or an absence of self, for politics itself requires precisely the opposite...It is the interaction of our efforts that results in a decision, a joint action....There must of course be an equality in terms of the role one plays. All must engage in shifting back and forth between perspectives, speaking and listening in turn. (A quote from Susan Bickford in God, Neighbor, Empire by Walter Brueggemann. Pg. 141.)

## Lent 4

The collect of the day declares that God came down to be the true bread that lives in us. How is this true bread living in us? What are we being as the true bread for the larger community?



In the Samuel/David narrative God looks into the heart. Do we come peaceably or to inflict violence and disruption? This is a basic question to the practice of our economics.

The Psalm invites us to overcome our fears for a table is being spread before me among those who trouble me. Are you among those who trouble you?

The Gospel invites us to consider how we perceive the world and what prejudices we have in our perceiving. Do we see only as a result of the parents and the household we were raised in?

Do we see only as a result of the environment we live in? Or do we see so that God's works might be revealed? Do we see and yet we are blind? The contemporary reading invites us to remove our blind spots from desiring self-sufficiency rather than the practice of neighborliness.

#### Contemporary Reading:

In our own time, I judge that role of totalism is played in our society by corporate capitalism, propelled by market ideology, inured to individualism, sustained by a strong military, and legitimated by the entitlements of patriotic exceptionalism...a mouthful indeed! That ideology is indeed totalizing; it claims that there is and can be no alternative.

With only a little imagination, we can see Pharaonic impulses being reformed, because the ones with the most are the ones who worry about running out for lack of bricks, and that in turn propels accumulation, wherein a few have nearly acquired a monopoly, with violence against all others carefully disguised. This is perhaps a good faith enterprise, as was Pharaoh's -- the practitioners really believe it. Or perhaps a not good-faith enterprise, but the mantras of "freedom and faith" are knowing covers that function to hide the work of government as the transfer of wealth. Whether good faith or simply convenient cover, this is the old, old story of injustice become the new, new song of self-sufficiency functioning in a way that denies and defeats the common good.

***(God, Neighbor, Empire by Walter Brueggemann. Pages 55-56)***

## Lent 5

The collect invites us to accept the swift and varied changes of the world. This season of Lent we have provided material to understand these changes and to apply the biblical narrative to help discern the changes we are living through.

Like Ezekiel looking over the plain, where is the economic carnage in your community and/or state?

How is God inviting your congregation to speak prophetically?

Where is God noting what is done amiss?

**Contemporary Reading:**

The rise of the money culture in the 1980's and the deregulation policies of that era led to a credit boom, wrapping more and more of the American middle class in a cloak of debt that made it increasingly hard for politicians to stand up to the banking industry. Is it any wonder then the debt, deregulation, finance, and money politics have grown hand in hand? In this sense, the subprime crisis of 2008-9 and the ways in which it was aided and abetted by Washington's failure to properly clean up the system afterward--is only the latest sequence in a dysfunctional dance between finance and politics that has been going on for hundreds of years. ***(Makers and Takers by Rana Foroohar pages 298-299)***

Is the Gospel inviting us to open the graves of our friends and neighbors? If we are resurrection people who in our community needs to be called out from their tomb and given the opportunity for life? Do you know where they have laid them in your communities? Again, how can we participate with God in completing the work of the Kingdom?