

# LIVING PURPLE



4TH WEEK IN LENT

SOUTHERN OHIO SYNOD

# LENT 4

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## *AUTHENTIC JUSTICE*

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### **READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE**

#### **Micah 6:8 (NRSV)**

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

#### **Luke 10: 38-42 (NRSV)**

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

### **FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY**

In 2021, a congregation was preparing to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their congregational food pantry. What a joyous opportunity to celebrate all the volunteers, donations, and stories of the very important congregational and community partnership. The pantry grew from serving 10-20 families a month to over 100 families a week! It is important to stop and celebrate ministry successes, right?

As the planning was underway, the organizers realized they are now serving the grandchildren of the families they originally set out to help, and a lot more people. Was the goal of the of this ministry to grow it? Or was the goal to address hunger? If the goal is to reduce hunger in their community, the congregation felt as if they had lost direction.

They didn't feel much like celebrating as hunger grew in their midst. They began to ask *have we made any difference at all?*

While the volunteers and pastor were busy every week cleaning, cooking, and stocking shelves they were consumed by what they could do to respond to the suffering of their neighbor. Like Martha busy in the kitchen, they were focused on what they could do to help their hungry neighbor and never had the opportunity to organize neighbors to identify the root causes of hunger and what the people of the community truly needed. They never responded to the loss of grocery stores and jobs, the budget cuts to parks and after school programs, and the loss of healthcare services.

Both mercy (feeding people today) and justice (ending hunger) ministries are needed, and they should complement one another. Martha too often gets a bad rap, because all the cooking and cleaning still has to get done. However, we can't do the tasks at the expense of the relationships. It is in authentic relationship where Justice work begins.

Mercy ministries place our focus on what we can do to serve our neighbor – this is important. Justice though, re-centers the question from, "*what will I do*" into what "*does my neighbor need in the face of the brokenness of our world?*"

While we have been busy in our food pantries, there are others in our world that profit from our neighbors experiencing hunger. When people are desperate for scraps, they will accept extremely low wages, refuse to report dangerous and illegal working conditions, and are forced to participate in exploitative economics such as payday lending and substandard housing.

As we continue to emerge from the pandemic, we are establishing what the new normal will be for our congregations and ministry. As we seek to *Do*

*Justice* as people of faith, we are called not only to ask what we are willing to give but first ask what does our neighbor need to truly thrive.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What emotions arise when you hear about the congregation's struggle with celebrating their food pantry's 50th anniversary? Have you ever felt similarly in your own ministry or service?
2. How do you understand the difference between mercy (meeting immediate needs) and justice (addressing systemic causes)? Why are both important?
3. The reflection suggests that justice work begins with authentic relationships. What might this look like in our own congregations and communities?
4. How can we shift from asking "What can we do to help?" to "What does our neighbor truly need?" How does this shift impact our ministry approach?
5. What are some root causes of hunger and poverty in your community? How might the church engage with these issues beyond direct service?
6. In what ways might our well-intended charity efforts unintentionally sustain systems of injustice? How can we work toward solutions that empower rather than perpetuate need?
7. As we shape a post-pandemic "new normal," how can we reimagine our ministries to focus not just on immediate relief but on long-term justice and systemic change?

## **PRAYER**

As we prepare to leave worship, filled with the love of God the father Son and Holy Spirit (+) We outreach our hands (palms up) to receive God's blessing and love. We lift our head and open our eyes to see God's presence in the world. We turn our head to the side ready to follow the Spirit in new

directions to love, serve, and accompany our neighbor toward a world of authentic justice and equity. Amen.

## **CONSIDER FOR USE IN WORSHIP OR CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITY**

### *Congregational Activity*

Do a book study on [Poverty by America](#) by Matthew Desmond to learn and discuss the root causes of hunger and poverty in our communities. Invite your ELCA State Advocacy Ministry ([Hunger Network in Ohio](#)) out to discuss pragmatic steps for your community to take.

### *Worship*

The dismissal from worship is not the bell ending class, but instead it is the beginning of *The Church* being sent into the world. Try this as part of your dismissal.

## **ACCESSIBILITY DEFINED IN ELCA CONSTITUTION**

1. Accessibility means designing, constructing, developing, and maintaining the church's physical infrastructure, information, communication technology, programs, and services so that all people can fully and independently use them. Accessibility encompasses:
  1. Providing accommodations and modifications to ensure equal access to employment, worship, and participation in church activities for people with disabilities.
  2. Reducing or eliminating physical and attitudinal barriers to equitable opportunities and participation.
  3. Committing to universal design principles that make spaces, activities, and electronic resources accessible to everyone, regardless of their abilities.
  4. Pursuing best practices to ensure that all church members can participate fully and independently in every aspect of church life. Ensuring that digital spaces, including online worship services, educational resources, and community activities, are accessible to individuals with disabilities and communities with limited internet access. This includes providing alternative means of access, such as downloadable content, offline resources, and outreach programs to bridge the digital divide.