

**“Honoring God with Kindness”**  
**Proverbs 14:31 and 1 John 3:14-20**  
**July 9, 2006**

I'd like to begin our time together today by inviting you to take the insert entitled, “How Much Do You Know about Poverty and Hunger?” from your bulletin. Please take a few moments to read the six questions and mark your answer to each one. We'll discuss the answers when you are finished. (Discuss answers)

Now that we have seen how many of those in the world are in need, we are ready to hear what God has to say about the poor, and our response to the poor, in the book of Proverbs. This is a very prominent topic in the book of Proverbs. Please listen as Ray and I take you on a tour of this important theme in the book of Proverbs. (Read passages)

There's no question after reading these passages that the poor and how we treat the poor are central themes in the book of Proverbs. But how about the rest of the Bible? Are these themes unique to the book of Proverbs? The overwhelming answer is no. Nearly every book in the Bible contains passages that are similar to those we find in the book of Proverbs. In fact, Christian writer Jim Wallis suggested in a recent book that he has found over 3,000 verses in the Bible that have to do with helping the poor.

The passages that we just read from Proverbs, along with passages from other books of the Bible, lead us to a few central conclusions.

- (1) God is concerned about all of his children, but God is especially concerned about the poor.
- (2) God wants us to be especially concerned about the poor.
- (3) God calls us to imitate him by being generous and kind to the poor.
- (4) We honor God when we are generous and kind to the poor.

This, to me, seems to be the plain meaning of the passages we just read. For the

remainder of our time, our task will be to discern what we should do about what we've just heard.

My good friend, Dr. Don Liebert, is a minister member of our presbytery. He retired not long ago from his position as Professor of Sociology at Whitworth College. Over the years Don has traveled extensively in Central America, leading study and service groups from Whitworth and from our presbytery. Recently, Don told me about how our Central American brothers and sisters approach Bible study. After reading the passage, they spend time trying to understand the plain meaning of the text. Then, they ask the question, "Y ahora que? Roughly translated, this means, "And now what?" And they proceed to spend a major portion of their time discussing how they should respond to the text. And now what should we do?

That's what I would like to do for the rest of our time together. To think deeply about what we are called to do as a result of what we have heard from the book of Proverbs this morning.

The place I believe we must begin in our consideration of what we are to do is Scripture. Let's look to God's Word once more to hear God's call to us. Let's hear God's Word from the New Testament this time. In Colossians 3:17, the Apostle Paul shares these challenging words, "And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father." (NLT) In essence, this is what Paul is saying: in your actions and words imitate Jesus. Do what he would do...and say what he would say as you interact with others. And I would add, especially in our interactions with the poor, we are to do what Jesus would do and say.

So, as we reflect on the example of Jesus and his interactions with the poor and needy, what are we called to do and say? First and foremost, we are called to action. When Jesus encountered hungry people, he fed them. When Jesus encountered needs, he met them. In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25, Jesus makes clear his expectations of his followers. When we encounter the hungry, they are to be fed. When we encounter the thirsty, they are to receive drink. When we encounter strangers, they are to be welcomed. When we encounter the naked, they are to be clothed. When we encounter those who are sick or in prison, they are to be visited.

There are two additional passages in the New Testament that emphasize that following and imitating Christ in relation to the poor and needy constitutes a call to action. The first passage is 1 John 3:16-18, which Ray read as a part of our first Scripture lesson for this morning. “We know love by this, that Jesus laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” A second passage that echoes this call to action is James 2:14-17. “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Is there any question? Our call to follow and imitate Jesus in relation to the poor and needy is clearly a call to action.

I have to say how encouraged I have been to see young people, including our own students, embrace this conviction that our call to follow and imitate Jesus in relation to

the poor and needy is a call to action. One example of this is the Souper Bowl of Caring. You may remember that each Super Bowl Sunday students from our church stand with soup kettles by the doors in the narthex after worship. Each year they hope to collect \$1.00 from each person as they exit worship. Money collected through this offering is invested in local hunger relief.

What you may not know is that the Souper Bowl of Caring is not just an offering taken by our church. This offering is taken by youth groups of many different denominations all over the United States. The Souper Bowl of Caring began in 1990 when the Spring Valley Presbyterian Church youth group in Columbia, South Carolina decided that they wanted to do something about hunger in the United States. This youth group simply challenged other youth groups across the country to take action. Over 11,000 youth groups across the country have responded to this challenge, raising more than 32 million dollars for food banks, soup kitchens and other hunger relief charities since 1990. (1)

You might imagine after reading the two New Testament passages from 1 John and James that we read a few moments ago that only our actions matter, not our words, as we seek to imitate Jesus in our relationships with the poor and needy. That's simply not true. Our actions and our words both matter. Our passage from Colossians stresses that in whatever we do or say we are to operate as representatives of the Lord Jesus.

I was reminded of the power of a kind word in relation to the poor and needy in an article I read recently. The article was entitled, "A Smile and a Kind Word." The article told the story of an actress who was playing a homeless bag lady and spent several weeks on location in the downtown region of a major city. One evening, as an exercise

in understanding her character, she remained in costume long after the day's shooting had been completed.

It did not take long for her to notice the rush hour passersby who looked in her direction and turned their heads. Children crossed to the other side of the street when their mothers bent to whisper in their ears. A bicyclist spat at her as he raced by.

As the street lights came on, she felt her spirit sink lower and lower, even though she knew she was only a five-minute walk from her luxury hotel. The darkness of the street began to claim her soul, even through the shield of a good education and a promising career. She wanted to shed her street costume and run down the sidewalk screaming, "This is not what it looks like!"

As she fought off the near-panic state, she nearly collided with a young man racing down the steps of a local church. "Good evening, ma'am," he said with a smile. "How are you tonight?"

Months later, the actress reflected on her experience with the young man that night. "It was as though the simple tone of his voice lifted my head and made me stand tall. I realized that he thought I was a street person, yet he called me 'ma'am' as though he believed I was a teacher or a lawyer or an actress. I will never forget that his words gave me courage. I can never again pass a street person without acknowledging his or her presence. I may not be able to give anything but dignity, but I will pass along that gift forever." (2)

Friends, through our kind actions and words extended to the poor and needy, we faithfully represent Jesus, and we give the gift of dignity to those we seek to serve.

Finally, as we reflect on what we are to do and say as representatives of Jesus in relation to the poor and needy, I believe that we are called to extend love and practical caring just as Jesus did, one person at a time. When you look at the world of need outside our door, it's definitely overwhelming. Where do you even begin to address the enormous need?

Jesus calls us to address need one person at a time. I am so pleased that the children of our church have really taken this call to heart. For nearly ten years, during Vacation Bible School our children have raised enough funds through recycling aluminum cans and donating pocket change to sponsor two children through Compassion International. What that means in practical terms is that our children make it possible for a little boy in Haiti and a little girl in Rwanda to go to school and have access to health care, nutrition, and healthy recreation, as well as to hear the Good News of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Friends, that's the way we change this world...one person at a time.

Helen Keller once made this provocative statement. "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. I will not refuse to do the something I can do." (3)

The Apostle Paul challenges us this morning with these words, "And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father." Friends, let us not lament what we cannot do, and get to work doing the something we can do in word and deed to honor God through our kindness to the poor. May it be so that all honor and glory may be given to the One who has been revealed to us as Maker, Redeemer and Friend. Amen.

Notes:

- (1) Presbyterian News Service, June 9, 2006.
- (2) Creative Sermon Starters. Loveland: Group Publishing Inc., 2000, 68-69.
- (3) From [www.quoteworld.org](http://www.quoteworld.org). Quote # 7553.