Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7&11

Dr. Emmanuel McCall
Racial Justice and Leadership Initiative

Lenten Devotional 2025

Table of Contents

Lenten Devotional 2025

1 | Introduction — MCCALL LENTEN DEVOTIONAL INTRODUCTION | *Kasey Jones*
2 | About — WHAT IS LENT?
3 | March 5 — SEEKING JUSTICE BEYOND FAIRY TALES | *Ossie X. McKinney*
5 | March 6 — BE A HEALER, AN ADVOCATE, A BALM | *Elket Rodríguez*
6 | March 7 — LITTLE LIBRARY, 'LOTTA WORK | *Joy Yee*
7 | March 8 — SATURDAY REFLECTION: *A SPACE FOR GROWTH AND HOPE*
8 | March 8 — TAKE ACTION RESOURCES

9 | March 9 — SUNDAY REFLECTIONS: *VOICES FROM THE NARRATIVE OF AMERICA PROJECT*
10 | March 10 — HOPE IN A CYNICAL WORLD | *Jon Eng*
12 | March 11 — MISSION OF REPAIR | *D. Anthony Everett*
14 | March 12 — THE PRESSING NEEDS OF HUMANITY: A CALL TO JUSTICE AND MERCY | *DeVontae Powell*
16 | March 13 — STRENGTH AND COURAGE | *Sharon Felton*
17 | March 14 — EMBODIED FAITH | *Lisa Jacob*
18 | March 15 — SATURDAY REFLECTION: *BLOOM WHERE YOU'RE PLANTED*
19 | March 15 — TAKE ACTION RESOURCES

20 | March 16 — SUNDAY REFLECTION: *A SPACE FOR LEARNING AND COMMON GROUND*
21 | March 17 — GOD DOES | *Kevin Pranoto*
22 | March 18 — DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE | *Jennifer Hawks*
23 | March 19 — THE MIRROR OF THE CROSS | *Brittney Watkins*
24 | March 20 — SANCTUARY EVERYWHERE | *Daniel Sostaita*
25 | March 21 — GOD WILL REMEMBER YOU | *Leah Jackson*
26 | March 22 — SATURDAY REFLECTION: *A SPACE FOR JUSTICE AND CREATION*
27 | March 22 — TAKE ACTION RESOURCES

28 | March 23 — SUNDAY REFLECTION: *THRIVING TOGETHER*
29 | March 24 — HOPE AND JUSTICE AT THE BORDER | *Juan L. García*
31 | March 25 — INCALCULABLE WORTH | *Brian Harrington*
32 | March 26 — HAUGHTINESS, HARMONY AND HOPE | *David Cassady*
33 | March 27 — LEARNING TO LOVE, NOT LIE | *Benji Suprice*
34 | March 28 — PERSISTENCE AS A WAY TO JUSTICE | *Heather Mustain*
35 | March 29 — SATURDAY REFLECTION: *A SPACE FOR RENEWAL AND HOPE*
36 | March 29 — TAKE ACTION RESOURCES

37 | March 30 SUNDAY REFLECTION: *BUILDING A NEW TABLE*
38 | March 31 BALANCING JUSTICE WITH MERCY | *Harold Dean Trulear*
39 | April 1 HOPE FOR THE GOATS | *Lisa Davis Brownlee*
40 | April 2 RECLAIMING LOVE AS A NORTH STAR OF HOPE | *Andrew Wilkes*
41 | April 3 RECLAIMING LOVE AS A PATH TO RACIAL JUSTICE | *Andrew Wilkes*
42 | April 4 HOPE THROUGH HUMILITY: RACIAL JUSTICE AS A REFLECTION OF CHRIST'S LOVE | *Carrie Tuning*
43 | April 5 LOVE WITHOUT LIMITS | *Zoe Moser*
44 | April 5 TAKE ACTION RESOURCES

45 | April 6 SUNDAY REFLECTION: *ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES*
46 | April 7 OLD WALLS AND NEW HOPE | *Sean Roberds*
48 | April 8 BEING OPEN TO GOD'S TRANSFORMATIVE WORK | *Anyra Cano*
49 | April 9 INDEED, NOT I, LORD? | *Sejana Yoo*
50 | April 10 "THEY" NOT LIKE US | *Lynn Brinkley*
51 | April 11 THE BEING AND DOING OF FAITH | *Elizabeth Nance-Coker*
52 | April 12 SATURDAY REFLECTION: *A SPACE TO BEAR BURDENS AND HOPE*
53 | April 12 TAKE ACTION RESOURCES

54 | April 13 SUNDAY REFLECTION: *BUILDING BRIDGES OF JUSTICE*
55 | April 14 RAISED UP TO BE A PROPHET? | *Paul A. Baxley*
56 | April 15 TAKE US TO THE WATER | *Starlette Thomas*
57 | April 16 THE LORD EXPECTS WHAT IS GOOD AND DOES GOOD | *Harold Segura*
58 | April 17 GOLDEN RULE | *Naya Welcher*
59 | April 18 HOPE AND DEFIANT JOY | *Amy Jacober*

Contributors

Devotional Committee: Kasey Jones, Lynn Brinkley, Sharon Felton, Ossie X. McKinney, Antonio Vargas

Production Team: Aaron Weaver, Amy Cook, Lauren Lamb, Jeff Langford, Xiomara Reboyas

Introduction

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship family and friends have prepared the 2025 Emmanuel McCall Lenten Devotional series you are preparing to read.

It is a project of love designed to be read during the season of Lent, which begins March 5, 2025.

Welcome to the 2025 Emmanuel McCall Lenten Devotional series, a collaborative effort of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) family and friends. This year's devotional series, themed "Hope, Justice & Relationships," invites us to reflect deeply on God's Word through the lens of Jeremiah 29:7 & 11 (NLT), which calls us to seek the peace and prosperity of our communities while trusting in God's good plans for our future. Together, we journey through the Lenten season—beginning on Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2025—with reflections, prayers, thought-provoking questions, space for journaling and justice notes to equip us for the work of racial justice and reconciliation.

The resource also includes Sunday reflections inspired by the transformative conversations on racial justice and reconciliation held during the 2024 CBF General Assembly. These voices remind us that hope, justice and transformative relationships are not just ideals, but actions that shape our collective journey toward God's kingdom.

This project honors the legacy of Dr. Emmanuel McCall, whose life and ministry exemplify the values of this devotional. A preacher, pastor, educator and steadfast advocate for racial justice and reconciliation, Dr. McCall reflects on the experiences and relationships that shaped his ministry over 74 years:

"I thank God for dedicated parents, nurturing environments, and for people who discerned what God was doing and helped me along the way. My childhood memories pointed me toward racial reconciliation. Where I was raised, the influences around me, and my friendships across different places were preparatory for my future. I rejoice for my 88 years and give thanks to God for allowing me to join you on the Lord's journey."

May the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship continue to be a nurturing environment for what God is doing in the world—a community committed to fostering friendships and advancing the work of racial justice and reconciliation.

Acknowledgments:
Many thanks to all the contributors to the 2025 Emmanuel McCall Lenten Devotional. Your voices have enriched this project. A special thank you to Ossie McKinney, Sharon Felton, Lynn Brinkley and Antonio Vargas for their dedication and leadership in making this devotional possible.

Kasey Jones
CBF Coordinator for Outreach & Growth

SCAN THE QR CODE *to listen to the Lenten 2025 playlist.*

Hope
Justice &
Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

What Is Lent?

Lent is the period of 40 days, beginning Ash Wednesday and ending the Saturday before Easter. Sundays are not counted because Sunday always celebrates Jesus' victory over sin and death.

It is a season of preparation for the celebration of Easter. The word "Lent" comes from the Anglo-Saxon *lencten*, which means "spring," the time of the lengthening of days. The 40 days of Lent are a time for a probing consideration of our human condition, including sin and its deadly consequences for both individuals and society. It is also a time for an equally intense consideration of the new possibilities Jesus Christ offers us and their implications for practical living.

The process is intended to engage individuals at varying stages of commitment. Historically, Lent developed as a time of final preparation for baptism among converts. For those already baptized and actively participating in the life of the church, Lent serves as an opportunity for reassessment and renewal. This period helps guard against the diminishing of a vibrant faith, whether through a return to old patterns or the stagnation caused by routine and unimaginative practices.

Finally, for those who have departed from the faith, or "backslidden," the 40 days can be a time for restitution and restoration.

Sources:
Floyd, Pat. *The Special Days and Seasons of the Christian Year: How They Came About and How They Are Observed by Christians Today.*
Stookey, Laurence H. Calendar: *Christ's Time for the Church.*

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

– Jeremiah 29:7, NRSVUE

Seeking Justice Beyond Fairy Tales

We grew up hearing, or have at least encountered, the story of Cinderella—the stepdaughter who is mistreated and denied the privileges of her stepsisters. As children, we may have wondered: "Why is the stepmother so cruel? What has Cinderella done to deserve this treatment?" Although Cinderella works hard, doing her best, her efforts are ignored. Outside the house, others would never suspect this cruelty. Life appears sweet for the stepmother and stepsisters, who disregard Cinderella's reality. And so, Cinderella's life story remains unheard.

This fairy tale, surprisingly, reflects the experience of many marginalized people in America today. Those who experience exclusion and injustice—much like Cinderella—often have their narratives dismissed. When they speak of barriers or inequities, society responds as if they're imagining things, saying, "You have the same opportunities as everyone else." But while invitations to participate may be extended in name, the resources to fully engage—a ride, clothing, support—are withheld. Like Cinderella, marginalized communities are sometimes left with mere fragments of opportunity, hoping for a "fairy godmother" to make what should already be possible a reality.

But unlike in fairy tales, change doesn't come through magic alone. There is no fairy godmother who will simply fix it. Prayers and hopes are valuable, but God calls us to go beyond wishful thinking. In Jeremiah 29:7, we are told, *"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."* We are called to actively work for justice, not just hope for it.

Reflection: Where are we allowing inequality to persist, content to let others struggle in silence? How can we be more intentional in seeking justice, not waiting for a miracle, but choosing to be part of the solution? Let us seek the welfare of all in our communities, ensuring everyone has what they need to thrive.

Prayer: God of justice, open our eyes to the disparities around us. Let us not wait for miracles, but use us as instruments of change. Help us work toward a world where everyone has an equal chance to live in dignity and opportunity. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

Ossie X. McKinney
Director of Research and Administration, Outreach and Growth Consultant, CBF
Decatur, Georgia

Continue to the following page for today's Justice Note.

Justice Note

Justice Note

Exploring Shared Language for Justice

As we strive to seek the welfare of all, it is vital to establish a shared language and understanding around racial equity and inclusion. To aid this effort, we are excited to include a resource developed by Kimberly Freeman Brown, a highly regarded racial justice, equity, and inclusion consultant. Her glossary, Conversation Starter Concepts, offers foundational concepts designed to inspire organizations to create their own shared language and deeper understanding of equity and justice. This live document provides definitions, encourages self-reflection, and fosters meaningful dialogue. You can access it here: Conversation Starter Concepts

About Kimberly Freeman Brown

Kimberly Freeman Brown brings a decade of experience as a consultant and senior advisor on racial justice, equity and inclusion to nonprofit organizations, faith-based communities and local governments. Her expertise has been sought in areas ranging from racial and gender equity initiatives to crisis management and organizational transformation. Kimberly has also partnered with faith communities, including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, to explore ways of amplifying prophetic voices on racial reconciliation and integrating equity and inclusion into their cultures.

We are honored to feature Kimberly's work in this devotional resource, as her glossary represents an invaluable resource for fostering understanding and promoting justice. As you reflect on the themes of Jeremiah 29:7, 11, and the devotional above, we invite you to explore this resource as a way to actively participate in creating a more equitable world.

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?"

–Jeremiah 8:22, NIV

Be a Healer, an Advocate, a Balm

"Is there no balm in Gilead?" Jeremiah's lament echoes through the ages, resonating with our modern struggles for justice and healing. How often do we, like ancient Judah, deceive ourselves into thinking our well-being is separate from that of our neighbors?

In today's world of stark inequalities and systemic injustices, this verse challenges us to recognize our interconnectedness. The absence of healing for one becomes the wound of many. Just as Judah's leaders had the means to practice justice but chose not to, we, too, have the resources and knowledge to address injustice. Yet, how often do we turn a blind eye?

The balm of Gilead symbolizes more than just physical healing. It represents the spiritual and social restoration that comes through repentance, justice and a return to God's ways. In our communities, this balm might look like advocating for criminal justice reform or immigration reform, standing against racial discrimination, supporting equitable education or pushing for fair housing policies.

Jeremiah's words remind us that true healing begins with acknowledging our part in perpetuating injustice and actively working to dismantle oppressive systems. It's about changing our mindsets and recognizing that the welfare of all is intrinsically tied to our own.

As we journey through Lent, let's reflect on how we can be agents of healing in our communities. Let's remember that just as Christ rose after three days, there is always hope for resurrection and renewal in our pursuit of justice.

In seeking the welfare of our neighbors, we align ourselves with God's character and God's promise of a future filled with hope. May we be bold in our pursuit of justice, knowing that in healing others, we find our own healing, too.

Question: In what unique ways has God equipped you to be a healer, an advocate and a balm in your community? How can you use these gifts and talents to address the injustices you see around you?

Elket Rodríguez
Global Migration Advocate, Global Missions, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Harlingen, Texas

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all and especially for those of the family of faith."

– Galatians 6:9-10, NRSV

Little Library, 'Lotta Work

Our church gave up on its Little Library. Installed near our front door, right by the sidewalk, this small nook of free books served our neighbors, providing access to knowledge and joy in our shared space. But over time, it became a target for vandalism. After several rounds of repairs—repainting, replacing parts, removing graffiti and fixing broken glass—the repeated damage wore us down. Eventually, we gave up, surrendering to the frustrations and focusing more on the people causing the damage than on those who found value in the library.

Yet maybe the key to not growing weary in doing good is to keep our focus on the people we're trying to love and serve, especially those who benefit most from our care. Access to books and shared resources can be a lifeline for a community, a small step toward bridging gaps in opportunity and inclusion. The Little Library, though small, reflects a commitment to justice, access and unity in our neighborhood.

In a world where many face obstacles just to access basic resources, maintaining this library can be our act of resilience and an invitation to all—even those who vandalized it—to engage in something good. Perhaps it's time to take that neglected Little Library out of the backroom and set it up again, as a symbol of steadfast care and hope, a small but powerful stand for justice, access and reconciliation in our community.

Reflection: What do you need to refresh your soul and renew your commitment to doing what is right and good for all?

Prayer: Loving God, may your tireless grace and provision sustain us as we seek to do what is right, to work for justice and to serve our communities with love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Joy Yee
Pastor, 19th Ave. Baptist Church
San Francisco, California

SATURDAY Reflection

Each week during Lent, Saturdays will provide a space to reflect, journal and challenge yourself to see your community and the world in a new light: a space to create and a space for justice work.

– A Space for Growth and Hope –

The Hill We Climb

Excerpt from The Hill We Climb *and Other Poems © Amanda Gorman. All rights reserved and used with permission.*

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew.
That even as we hurt, we hoped.
That even as we tired, we tried.
That we'll forever be tied together.
Victorious,
Not because we will never again know defeat,
But because we will never again sow division.

Journaling Prompts

Take a moment to consider:

- How has grief shaped your growth?
- Where have you found hope amid hurt?
- In what ways can you commit to trying, even when you are tired?
- Write a prayer to God about your concerns.

SCAN THE QR CODE *to listen to the Lenten 2025 playlist.*

Take Action Resources

Books, Articles & Podcasts

Books on Race and Reconciliation

African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities (PDF)

Resources

Conversation Starter Concepts

"How Can We Solve the Black Maternal Health Crisis?" (John Hopkins)

Podcasts on Race and Reconciliation (PDF)

Visual Resources on Race (PDF)

More Links

Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice and Leadership Initiative

CBF Latino Network: Familia

Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy – Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Racial Justice Pilgrimages

Application for McCall Racial Justice Pilgrimage Seed Grant

Get Involved

Vote Riders

Center for Common Ground

Sojourners

BJC Center for Faith and Justice and Reconciliation

Fellowship Southwest

Together for Hope

Racial Equity Institute

Equal Justice Initiative

SUNDAY Reflection

Voices from the Narrative of America Project

The Sunday reflections in this resource are inspired by quotes captured during the Narrative of America Project, held at the 2024 Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) General Assembly. This transformative event was designed to foster meaningful conversations on racial justice, reconciliation and envisioning a more inclusive and equitable future for America.

Participants engaged deeply, sharing personal, communal and national narratives, drawing on biblical reflection and lived experiences to imagine and co-create a future rooted in justice and hope. The project highlighted the profound power of storytelling and dialogue as tools for healing, bridging divides and sparking collective action toward racial justice and equity.

The accompanying word art represents key themes and words shared during these conversations—words such as "reconciliation," "remember," "repair" and "community." These words capture the essence of the collective vision and struggles shared by the participants.

Journaling Prompt

– As you reflect on these themes, pause and imagine what a just and equitable America could look like. How might your actions and voice contribute to this vision?

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

– Joshua 1:9, NIV

Hope in a Cynical World

In a world filled with cynicism and uncertainty, hope can feel scarce and justice a distant dream. We ache alongside a groaning world, where forces of nature and systems of injustice seem relentless. Over the past year, we have seen storms devastate communities, global conflicts persist, stealing life, robbing peace and impeding justice. Many of us carry personal burdens of loss and grief as well—stories that mirror those around us, such as a mother who recently lost her son to violence, or a son grieving his father's passing. This world, beautiful as it is, often extracts the very life it sustains.

Yet, the God of all creation has not abandoned us. Where there is chaos, God leans in, hearing our cries and responding with creative love and justice. When the Israelites were crushed under the yoke of slavery, God intervened, and hope was born in unlikely places. A nearly orphaned boy, floated down the Nile in a basket, was watched over by a sister who dared to hope against hope. That boy grew into Moses, who led his people out of captivity. When Moses could go no further, Joshua stepped into his place. At the threshold of promise, with the giants of oppression looming large, God's command to Joshua was clear: "Be strong and courageous…for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Today, God calls us to go into the places where justice is most needed and to bring courage and hope with us. Facing the giants of racism, inequity and despair, we are called to act as ambassadors of God's vision for a just world. God's Spirit is with us, renewing all things and equipping us for the work of justice, reconciliation and healing. Where is God calling you to stand strong? Drink deeply from the well of God's hope and know that, in every step toward justice, God is by your side.

Reflection: Where is God calling you to bring courage and hope into the broken places of this world? How can you be part of God's work of justice and renewal?

Prayer: God of hope, grant us the courage to go where you lead, even into difficult and painful places. May we be filled with your Spirit, emboldened to bring your justice and healing to a world in need. Amen.

Jon Eng
Pastor, Union Church
Pflugerville, Texas

Continue to the following page for today's Justice Note.

Justice Note

Justice Note

Justice work can often leave us feeling weary and in need of renewal. For 2025, Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes has graciously offered access to her Sacred Self-Care Inventory, a resource designed to help you assess and reflect on your current self-care practices. Adapted from her book, *Sacred Self-Care: Daily Practices for Nurturing Our Whole Selves,* and used with permission, this tool provides a thoughtful way to prioritize personal well-being while engaging in the work of justice.

When you complete the inventory electronically, you will receive your results immediately, along with a downloadable PDF of the full inventory for your personal use. This ensures you can revisit and reflect on your self-care journey whenever needed.

We are deeply grateful for Dr. Walker-Barnes' groundbreaking contributions and generosity in sharing this resource as part of the 2025 McCall Racial Justice Lenten Resource. To delve deeper into her insights, we encourage you to read *Sacred Self-Care: Daily Practices for Nurturing Our Whole Selves*.

You can access Dr. Walker-Barnes' Sacred Self-Care Inventory here.

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; [the Lord] has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners."

– Isaiah 61:1, NRSV

Mission of Repair

In October 2025, Reverend Dr. Kymberley Clemons-Jones (KC) and I led a pilgrimage to Ghana, visiting KC's mission, *The W.A.N.T.E.D. Project–Ghana*. This ministry brings hope and transformation to youth imprisoned in the Senior Correctional Facility in Accra. KC's calling to begin this mission arose from a moment of personal pain: Her son was violently attacked outside their church, a reminder of the struggles facing many youth in their community. From this painful experience, KC responded not with retaliation, but with a vision for healing, launching *The W.A.N.T.E.D. Project* to uplift youth in Valley Stream, NY, and now, Ghana. The acronym *W.A.N.T.E.D.* stands for Worthy, Accountable, Named, Thankful, Empowered and Determined—reminding youth that they are deeply valued and wanted for good, not for harm.

Empowered by the Spirit of the Lord, KC's ministry embodies a mission of repair and racial justice, turning moments of suffering into pathways of restoration. Through *The W.A.N.T.E.D. Project*, young people are offered hope beyond their circumstances, healing for their brokenness, and liberation from the cycles of violence and oppression. As they are released, they carry with them a new vision for life, empowered to share the spirit of transformation and renewal with others in their communities.

Reflection: How does your calling manifest as a mission of repair—especially in the context of racial justice? Where might God be inviting you to bring hope and healing to others?

Prayer: Spirit of the living God, anoint us with your power to carry out your mission of repair. Let your Spirit go before us, guiding us to be vessels of healing and justice in a world that needs your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

D. Anthony Everett
Teaching Professor, BSK Theological Seminary
Lexington, Kentucky

Continue to the following page for today's Justice Note.

Justice Note

Justice Note

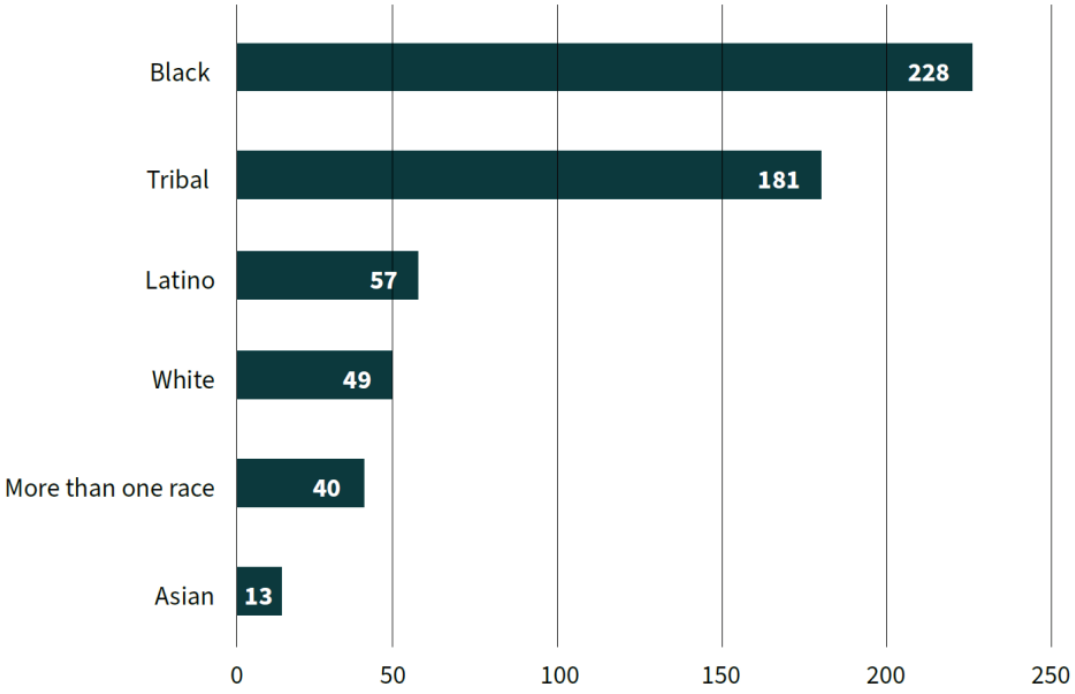
Youth Incarceration in the United States

In the United States, youth incarceration rates have significantly declined over the past few decades. Between 2000 and 2022, there was a 75 percent decrease in youth incarceration. However, racial and ethnic disparities persist. In 2021, Black youth were incarcerated at a rate of 228 per 100,000, which is 4.7 times higher than the rate for white youth (49 per 100,000).

For more detailed information, refer to the Sentencing Project's report on youth justice statistics.

Youth Placement Rates by Race and Ethnicity, 2021

Rate per 100,000 Youth



Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive."

– Titus 3:14, NRSV

The Pressing Needs of Humanity: *A Call to Justice and Mercy*

A life devoted to God is a life devoted to justice, mercy and meeting the urgent needs of our neighbors. In Titus 3:14, the Apostle Paul urges believers to be "productive in a holy way"—not just by doing good, but by addressing the real, pressing needs that surround us. This holy productivity means being the hands and feet of God, guided by the Holy Spirit to respond in ways that are relevant, effective and rooted in justice.

In our world, many of these needs stem from the burdens of racial injustice and systemic oppression. Holy productivity sometimes calls us to be "holy disrupters," to confront and dismantle structures that perpetuate inequality. As followers of Christ, who ministered among those on the margins, we are called to boldly respond to the needs of those marginalized by society. Our good works are meaningful when they bring lasting change and dignity, uplifting those who suffer under the weight of unjust systems.

Reflection: To what urgent needs in our world is the Holy Spirit calling you to respond? How might you step forward to address these needs with justice and compassion?

Prayer: Lord, from salvation to daily provision, we thank you for meeting our needs. Now, use me to meet the needs of others. Spirit, keep my heart and mind open to your guidance, and let my vision remain focused on justice for my immediate and global community. May my actions reflect your peace, healing, justice, mercy and love.

Ashé and Amen.

DeVontae Powell
Senior Pastor, Vermont Christian Church Disciples of Christ
Flint, Michigan

Continue to the following page for today's Justice Note.

Justice Note

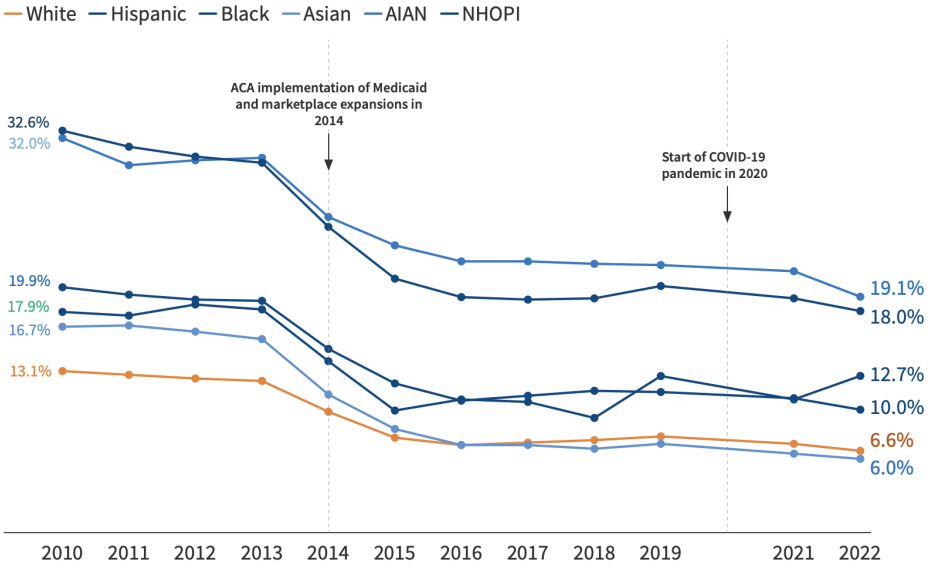
Justice Note

Health Access Disparities

In the United States, significant disparities in health care access persist across racial and ethnic groups. For instance, in 2022, 19 percent of Hispanic adults and 10 percent of Black adults were uninsured, compared to six percent of White adults. These disparities contribute to differences in health outcomes and highlight the need for targeted interventions to ensure equitable access to health care services.

Learn more: KFF Health Coverage by Race and Ethnicity, 2010-2022

Uninsured Rate Among the Nonelderly Population by Race and Ethnicity, 2010-2022



Note: Differences between Black, Hispanic, AIAN, and NHOPI people compared to White people as of 2022 were statistically significant at the $p<0.05$ level. Includes individuals ages 0 to 64. AIAN refers to American Indian or Alaska Native. NHOPI refers to Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race but are categorized as Hispanic for this analysis; other groups are non-Hispanic. 2020 data was excluded because the American Community Survey did not release the one-year estimates for 2020 due to significant disruptions to data collection brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

Source: KFF analysis of the 2010-2022 American Community Survey.

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded."

– 2 Chronicles 15:7, NRSV

Strength and Courage

Do not let your hands be weak; do not let your hands be idle. Find strength and courage to do the work of racial justice, for we all have work to do in this regard. In the scripture leading up to verse 7, Azariah tells Asa that the people were broken into pieces, nation against nation and city against city. We remain a world broken into pieces, and much of this brokenness stems from racial divides. Issues like poverty, food insecurity, war, immigration, indigenous suffering, homelessness, hatred, mass incarceration and lack of healthcare often find their roots in racism. We are broken because we fail to see God in our brothers and sisters worldwide. We are shattered because we allow voices of fear—fear of the unknown, difference and scarcity—to drive us further apart. We have placed our loyalty and dependence on temporary human ideas and promises when our true hope and strength should come only from God.

God, who created each of us in God's image, calls us to love and serve one another and to treat others as we wish to be treated. The God who loves us all desires justice for us and gives us hope through Christ.

Through Azariah and Asa, God reminds us that we can find our courage, strength and calling in God. We can work to piece this world back together—not to make everyone the same, but to cherish our differences. We can learn from each other, celebrate what makes each of us unique, and see how God weaves us into a beautiful tapestry, each piece valued and necessary. When we see, understand and value our differences, we begin to work for the best interests of all. We love our neighbors as ourselves and find hope in the work of justice for all our brothers and sisters. Paul reminds us in Galatians 6:9, "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time if we do not give up."

But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.

Prayer: God, who calls us to work, give us the courage and the strength to do our part to end division and dismantle structural racism which causes so much pain and hopelessness for our neighbors. Give us strong hands and hearts to love and work for justice for everyone in our communities and around the world. Amen.

Sharon Felton
Congregational Advocacy Manager, CBF
Frankfort, Kentucky

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

– Amos 5:24, NIV

Embodied Faith

Amos spoke these words to the people of God during a time of prosperity and growth when religious practices and rituals were enthusiastically observed. Yet, just prior to this verse, Amos calls their worship services and sacrifices meaningless. He redirects them to justice and righteousness—living and active forces that should flow through them like rivers and streams.

This analogy is powerful. Rivers and streams bring life, renewal and growth to all they touch, extending their influence beyond their immediate banks. In contrast, stagnant waters breed toxicity and death within an ecosystem. A life-giving river is one that moves, stretches and brings abundance. Amos is inviting God's people to be like these rivers, embodying justice and right living in a continuous, dynamic way.

In a world rife with racial injustice and inequality, this call becomes even more urgent. Amos' words challenge us to reject complacency and comfort in mere rituals and instead flow with a justice that actively seeks to uplift the oppressed. Justice and righteousness are not occasional acts; they are a way of life, constantly moving to break down barriers, confront inequality and create life-giving change in our communities.

So then, what is the role of our sacred practices—our singing hymns, praying, studying the Bible and preaching? This passage challenges us to see that these practices have no role if separated from justice and righteousness. But when they walk hand-in-hand, they turn our hearts to the Giver of Hope, who sustains the work of justice within us.

Prayer: God of justice and hope, forgive us for confining our faith to ritual while neglecting the call to justice. Forgive us for relegating righteousness to fleeting moments rather than a way of life. And forgive us when we abandon sacred practices that nourish our hope. Instead, turn our hearts toward You. May justice and righteousness roll through our lives like ever-flowing rivers, transforming our communities and our world. Amen.

Lisa Jacob
North Texas Organizer, Christians Against Christian Nationalism
Dallas, Texas

SATURDAY Reflection

Each week during Lent, Saturdays will provide a space to reflect, journal and challenge yourself to see your community and the world in a new light: a space to create and a space for justice work.

– Bloom Where You're Planted –

"Bloom where you are planted. Act locally. Think globally."

Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us to trust God's plans, even in uncertain circumstances, and to work for good wherever we are placed. Even in the most challenging seasons, God's plans for you include growth, purpose and the ability to bring light into the lives of others. This verse challenges us to find purpose and make an impact in our immediate surroundings while keeping a broader vision of God's kingdom.

Reflection: Where has God planted you right now? How can you actively respond to the needs around you while considering the global impact of your actions?

Trust that God is working through you to bring hope and transformation wherever you may be.

Journaling Prompts

- What has stood out to you so far during your devotional time?
- Write a prayer to God about your concerns.

SCAN THE QR CODE *to listen to the Lenten 2025 playlist.*

Take Action Resources

Books, Articles & Podcasts

Books on Race and Reconciliation

African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities (PDF)

Resources

Conversation Starter Concepts

"How Can We Solve the Black Maternal Health Crisis?" (John Hopkins)

Podcasts on Race and Reconciliation (PDF)

Visual Resources on Race (PDF)

More Links

Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice and Leadership Initiative

CBF Latino Network: Familia

Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy – Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Racial Justice Pilgrimages

Application for McCall Racial Justice Pilgrimage Seed Grant

Get Involved

Vote Riders

Center for Common Ground

Sojourners

BJC Center for Faith and Justice and Reconciliation

Fellowship Southwest

Together for Hope

Racial Equity Institute

Equal Justice Initiative

SUNDAY Reflection

A Space for Learning and Common Ground

"What is the common ground by which we can connect our different experiences?" This question from the Narrative of America Project invites us to reflect on the concept of our collective story as an experiment. One participant added: *"Not everyone consented to this experiment or participated on equal footing."*

As we consider our shared history, we must ask: *What have we learned, and what do we still need to learn? How do we work together to conduct a good experiment? Most importantly, what important questions aren't yet being asked?* These questions remind us that for the experiment to move forward, we must grapple with the unequal footing on which many have been placed.

Our shared history holds both triumph and tragedy. Building a just future requires acknowledging silenced voices, overlooked truths and ignored injustices. The experiment of our collective story is ongoing and God invites us to keep learning, asking and working together. We create a community where all can thrive by seeking common ground and embracing diverse perspectives.

Journaling Prompts

– Reflect on a time when you had the opportunity to learn from someone whose experience differed from your own. What did it teach you?

- How can you work to ensure that the "experiment" includes everyone on equal footing?

- What important questions must we ask as we work toward common ground?

– Write a prayer asking God for the wisdom to listen deeply, the courage to ask difficult questions and the strength to build a better future for all.

This Sunday, let hope guide your reflection and inspire your actions toward a more inclusive and equitable future.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, 'Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life'."

– Acts 5:17-20, NRSVUE

God Does

Today, we don't even need to turn on cable news to feel the weight of hopelessness. A quick scroll through social media reveals a world overwhelmed by problems. In America alone, we face mass shootings, economic instability, extreme polarization and natural disasters. On a global scale, we encounter wars, epidemics, genocides, climate crises, hunger and much more. How do we escape this sense of entrapment?

This passage in Acts 5 challenges me to reorient my perspective. Instead of asking, "What do I do?" I am invited to first ask, "What is God doing?" In this story, the apostles are passive agents. They didn't request freedom or even pray for deliverance; God took the initiative. God sent an angel to open the prison doors so they could continue sharing "the whole message about this life" through the lens of Jesus' teachings.

This story reminds me that the work of justice and hope does not begin with me. No matter how strong my convictions, how active I am in my community or how loud my voice may be, the work of justice and hope begins with God. This realization holds a sacred mystery because it requires me to pause and pay attention to what God is doing around me.

We are invited to participate in God's ongoing work by sharing the message of cosmic redemption and living it out daily. In the work of justice and hope, we do not act alone. The good news is that God is with us, initiating and sustaining the work before we are even aware of it. God is doing something, and we can trust that God will carry it through until all is made right.

Prayer: God, who opens prison doors, we are so focused on trying to make things right that we often forget true freedom comes from You. Help us pay attention to Your Holy Spirit's work in this world so that we may align ourselves with what You have begun and continue to do. Through Jesus, we place our trust and hope in the coming redemption of a groaning world. Amen.

Kevin Pranoto
Associate Pastor of Social Work, Second Baptist Church
Little Rock, Arkansas

Justice Note

Housing

In 2023, the Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) revealed that thousands of Americans, including chronically homeless individuals, veterans and children, remain without stable housing—a stark reminder of the urgent need for equitable housing solutions. Click here to access the data.

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Be joyful with those who are joyful. Be sad with those who are sad."

– Romans 12:15, NIRV

Deceptively Simple

The Hundred Acre Wood taught me that friends multiply our joys and divide our sorrows. Winnie the Pooh was the first fictional character whose circle of friends covered the full range of human emotions, from the hyper-enthusiastic Tigger to the perpetually downcast Eeyore. Together, they celebrated triumphs and consistently showed up for Eeyore in his sadness. The Hundred Acre Wood was the first place I saw today's verse come to life.

The command in today's verse sounds simple: Show up for your community in good times and bad. But life, unfortunately, isn't always that straightforward. Sometimes, we're so absorbed in our own joy or grief that we struggle to make space to rejoice or mourn with others. Celebrating a friend's promotion can feel challenging when you're desperately searching for a new job. Other times, we may choose to keep our joys or sorrows to ourselves, grieving in isolation to avoid dampening others' happiness. And for many, tears bring discomfort; we may feel uncertain about how to respond to raw emotion that needs presence, not fixing; so we avoid potentially tearful encounters.

Each of these responses, however, weakens the bonds of community. God created us to be in relationship with others, inviting us to share in each other's highs and lows. By being present in times of rejoicing and mourning, we strengthen our relationships and deepen our ability to support the wellbeing of our communities.

Reflection: Who in your life shows up for moments of rejoicing and mourning? For whom do you show up for both happy and sad occasions?

Prayer: Today, may I be present in my relationships and able to rejoice with those who are rejoicing and mourn with those who are mourning. May our relationships deepen through celebrating life's ups and downs together. May the aspirational goal that no one needs to celebrate or commiserate alone become reality. Amen.

Jennifer Hawks
Director of Advocacy, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
McLean, Virginia

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"This is God's Message: Attend to matters of justice. Set things right between people. Rescue victims from their exploiters. Don't take advantage of the homeless, the orphans, the widows. Stop the murdering!"

— Jeremiah 22:3, MSG

The Mirror of the Cross

We often view Jesus' crucifixion as a gruesome and unfathomable tragedy. Yet, in many ways, the cross holds a mirror up to our society, reflecting the injustices we allow to continue. Jesus, an innocent man, was executed by the state, with public approval. Why did no one stand up to stop his death? Why did the crowd look on in silence?

In 2024 alone, 19 people have been executed in the United States, and more executions are scheduled in the years ahead, some despite significant doubts about their guilt. Labels like "innocent" and "guilty" take on political weight, masking the humanity of each individual. When one life is taken, all our lives are touched by that loss. Meanwhile, thousands of unhoused people perished on our streets in 2023, a silent crisis that reflects another kind of societal neglect. In both cases, lives are lost and we, as a society, are implicated.

Jesus' crucifixion stands as a call to confront such violence. By tolerating systems that harm, neglect or devalue lives, we mirror the indifference of the crowd that watched Jesus suffer. The cross calls us to choose a different path—one of forgiveness, compassion and justice. This path challenges us to turn away from a culture of punishment and instead build communities where every person's needs are met, justice is restorative and relationships are repaired.

As we look into the mirror of the cross, may we examine our own complicity in upholding systems that oppress. May we seek to embody a faith that advocates for justice, hope and healing for all.

Prayer: God of the oppressed, forgive us for our role in sustaining systems that harm and exclude. Open our eyes to our part in this work of justice. Lead us to let go of our desire to punish and help us engage in true reconciliation. Let us walk with those on the margins, just as Jesus reconciled us through the cross. Amen.

Brittney Watkins
Member, Central Baptist Church
St. Louis, Missouri

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"What can we say about all this? If God is on our side, can anyone be against us? God did not keep back God's own Son, but God gave him for us. If God did this, won't God freely give us everything else?"

– Romans 8:31-32, CEV

Sanctuary Everywhere

In North Carolina, legislation like HB-10 gives sheriffs the authority to contact ICE if they detain an undocumented person. For immigrants, this law only adds to a climate of fear and uncertainty. Such policies often reinforce harmful stereotypes, painting immigrants as threats rather than recognizing their humanity and worth.

In this context, Romans 8:31-32 speaks to us with profound assurance: "If God is on our side, can anyone be against us?" No earthly power can separate us from the love of Christ. This promise offers hope and strength to persevere, even amid oppressive systems.

Dr. Barbara A. Sostaita's work, *Sanctuary Everywhere,* reminds us of the need to create spaces of emotional, physical and spiritual refuge in a world marked by racism, marginalization and rejection. My daughter, Barbara, describes sanctuary not as a single location, but as a fugitive practice—a commitment to care that crosses boundaries. This challenges us to follow Christ's example of building sanctuaries, not walls, creating places where love, justice and community flourish.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to embody sanctuary for one another, especially for those whom society marginalizes. By embracing hope, practicing justice and fostering relationships, we can create inclusive communities that reflect God's love.

Prayer: God of refuge, empower us to be builders of sanctuary in a world that often excludes and rejects. Help us embody Your love, justice and compassion, offering hope to all who seek refuge in You. Amen.

Daniel Sostaita
Senior pastor, Iglesia Cristiana sin Fronteras
Winston-Salem, N.C.

Justice Note

This devotional is deeply connected to the transformative work of sanctuary and justice. Daniel Sostaita's daughter, Barbara Sostaita, expands on this theme in her book *Sanctuary Everywhere*. In this work, Barbara examines how people on the move practice sanctuary in the Sonoran Desert through profound and sacred acts of resistance and care. She explores moments where land resists policies of deterrence, where touch becomes an act of defiance inside detention centers, where healing transcends borders, and where the migrant dead demand justice and remembrance.

Barbara reimagines sanctuary as a sacred practice that exceeds institutions and defies conventions, offering a vision of hope and resilience for those seeking refuge.

To learn more, we encourage you to read *Sanctuary Everywhere* by Barbara Sostaita, available on Amazon.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"God is not unjust; God will not forget your work and the love you have shown God as you have helped God's people and continue to help them."

– Hebrews 6:10, NIV

God Will Remember You

I love the song "Precious Jesus" by Thomas Whitfield. You can often find me with my hands lifted in praise when I hear the refrain, "I am persuaded, Lord, to love you." The nature and acts of God have persuaded me, even though I didn't need much convincing; the completed work of Jesus was more than enough. However, because I love God, I am committed to trying to obey God and keep God's commandments.

Jesus said in Matthew 25:45, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Because I love God, I am persuaded to advocate for justice, equity and inclusion of the least, the lost and the left out. Jesus said that whatever act of kindness, intercession or care that we take on behalf of those who are excluded, discriminated against, or forgotten because of their race, class, age, nationality or gender would be done unto God.

The work of justice is often hard; change is often slow and systems are often resistant to change. There are times when our efforts seem fruitless and a waste of time. But Hebrews 6:10 gives us hope: God will remember our efforts and reward us. God will not forget those who work for justice. God will remember our sacrifices and our efforts. God will not forget how we demonstrate our love by helping God's children. God's promises are God's commitment to us. God's just character requires God to keep them. My sister, my brother, you will be rewarded. Your labor is not in vain. Keep fighting for justice and equity; it matters.

Prayer: May God's promise to remember and reward you sustain you during your most difficult and discouraging times. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Leah Jackson
Grant Coordinator, Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology
Atlanta, Georgia

SATURDAY Reflection

Each week during Lent, Saturdays will provide a space to reflect, journal and challenge yourself to see your community and the world in a new light: a space to create and a space for justice work.

– A Space for Justice and Creation –

A Brave and Startling Truth

Excerpt from Maya Angelou's "A Brave and Startling Truth."
All rights reserved and used with permission.

"When we release our fingers
From fists of hostility
And allow the pure air to cool our palms...
We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
Without crippling fear
When we come to it"

Journaling Prompts

- What emotions or attitudes do you need to release to create peace within yourself and your relationships?
- Imagine a world where everyone feels safe and free. What role can you play in helping to create it?
- Write a prayer asking God to guide you in being a peacemaker in your community. Let this act be a seed of hope and transformation.

SCAN THE QR CODE *to listen to the Lenten 2025 playlist.*

Take Action Resources

Books, Articles & Podcasts

Books on Race and Reconciliation

African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities (PDF)

Resources

Conversation Starter Concepts

"How Can We Solve the Black Maternal Health Crisis?" (John Hopkins)

Podcasts on Race and Reconciliation (PDF)

Visual Resources on Race (PDF)

More Links

Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice and Leadership Initiative

CBF Latino Network: Familia

Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy – Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Racial Justice Pilgrimages

Application for McCall Racial Justice Pilgrimage Seed Grant

Get Involved

Vote Riders

Center for Common Ground

Sojourners

BJC Center for Faith and Justice and Reconciliation

Fellowship Southwest

Together for Hope

Racial Equity Institute

Equal Justice Initiative

SUNDAY Reflection

Thriving Together

"What does it mean to thrive as an individual, a family, a community, a society?" This question invites us to reflect deeply on what it means to flourish in our lives and the world around us. In response, one participant in the Narrative of America Project posed this thought-provoking challenge: "*Who defines thrive? Who will say what thriving really is, or if we are thriving?*"

Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us that God's plans for us are for hope and a future. Yet, God's vision of thriving often asks us to reconsider our definitions of success and flourishing. True thriving is not just about individual achievements, but about shared well-being rooted in love, justice and purpose for all.

Journaling Prompts

- Reflect on how you can support others on their journeys toward God's vision of thriving.
- How do you define thriving for yourself and your community?
- Who in your life or community might have a different perspective on thriving and how can you learn from their vision?
- How can you partner with others to create spaces where everyone can experience God's vision of thriving?
- Write a prayer asking God to reveal what thriving means for you and those around you.

This week, let hope guide your steps as you seek ways to help others thrive alongside you.

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Evil brings death to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned."

– Psalm 34:21-22, NRSV

Hope and Justice at the Border

As we journey through this Lenten season, we are invited to reflect on themes of hope and justice, especially as we confront the challenges faced by our neighbors. In Psalm 34:21-22, we are reminded that while evil may sometimes seem to prevail, it is ultimately the Lord who rescues and protects those who seek refuge in God. God often chooses to carry out this work through God's church.

Recently, I had the profound opportunity to witness the compassionate work of *Iglesia Bautista de West Brownsville*, a Hispanic congregation that stands as a beacon of hope along the Texas-Mexico border. Through their Golan Ministry, they welcome and care for hundreds of migrants entering the United States through the port of entry. The families I encountered were not mere statistics; they were individuals—men, women, parents and children—longing for safety, stability and dignity. Each story reflected the immense challenges they endured, filled with fear, trauma and an undeniable hope for a better life. This church is at the forefront of providing food, shelter and emotional support, demonstrating that justice is not just an abstract ideal but a practical response to suffering and an essential part of the Gospel. They are living out the promise of Psalm 34, embodying God's refuge for those in distress.

As we reflect on our own lives during Lent, we are called to examine how we too can be agents of hope and justice. In what ways can we support those who are marginalized? How can we create spaces where the weary can find solace? No matter how small, each act of kindness contributes to the hope and justice we are called to embody. May we follow the example of *Iglesia Bautista de West Brownsville*, reaching out with compassion to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, and uplift the brokenhearted.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for being our refuge and strength. Help us extend that refuge to others, particularly those who face injustice and hardship. May we be vessels of Your hope and instruments of Your justice. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Juan L. García
CBF Moderator

Continue to the following page for today's Justice Note.

Justice Note

Justice Note

Advocacy Resources for Immigrant and Refugee Communities

For over 30 years, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) has shared the love of Christ with immigrant and refugee communities. Global migration is one of the three key contexts guiding the work of CBF Global Missions. This commitment to loving our neighbors inspires our advocacy both alongside and on behalf of immigrants and refugees.

Attached is the CBF Immigration Advocacy Values and Principles document, which outlines our core values and priorities to guide our advocacy efforts, along with a list of organizations actively engaged in this vital work.

You can access the document here: CBF Immigration Advocacy Values and Principles

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven."

– Matthew 18:10, NRSV

Incalculable Worth

Jesus' parable of the lost sheep, which immediately follows this verse, tells the story of a shepherd who leaves behind 99 sheep to find one that has wandered away. While the shepherd's risk may seem foolish, the parable describes an abundant love whose math only makes sense in the commonwealth of God, where this one sheep is worth as much to its caretaker as the other 99 put together.

The prelude to the parable reinforces this point: No one, whether represented as a "little one" or a lost sheep, deserves to be despised. To the shepherd, each sheep has infinite value and, to God, every person has incalculable worth.

Tragically, our world continues to operate as if the lives of some people are more valuable than those of others, based on how they are racialized, their gender, or whom they love. But Jesus shows us that despising or devaluing anyone is nonsensical because, in truth, every person is a beloved child of God.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to a deep awareness—to look within ourselves and our systems, identifying ways we despise people today, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in our speech and silence, through action and inaction. Then, we must repent of what we have done, repair the harm we have caused, and commit to never despising anyone again, choosing instead to call everyone beloved!

Reflection: Whom do you despise, even in the smallest, most seemingly harmless way? How can you change your actions to honor the full humanity and celebrate the beloved-ness of those you sometimes overlook or oppress?

Brian Harrington
Founder and Director, Faithful Justice
Georgetown, Kentucky

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

– Romans 12: 16-21, NRSV

Haughtiness, Harmony and Hope

Sometimes, while waiting in a busy airport, I find myself watching people in the terminal. Our culture teaches us to notice visual cues: the clothing worn, a person's posture, their hairstyle or body markings and even their gender or race. It takes an intentional effort to resist using these visual cues and instead wonder, "Is this person an artist or a caregiver? Is this person loved and by whom? What special gift does this person bring to their family and community?" As soon as we ask these questions, we see people differently.

In a world often divided by differences, the apostle urges us to "live in harmony with one another," reminding us that true harmony isn't about erasing our differences, but about seeing one another as treasured creations of God. The transformative love of Christ offers hope to a fractured, violent world by overcoming the artificial categories and labels that can lead us to devalue others.

Paul then addresses the root of much discord: haughtiness (a judgmental pride). By encouraging us to "associate with the lowly," he dismantles the unjust hierarchies we often construct. This is a call for social justice – to see the worth in every individual, regardless of their race, gender, orientation, economic status or background.

Finally, Paul exhorts us to "live peaceably with all" as far as it depends on us. This isn't a passive peace but an active commitment to real listening and the change in us it requires. It's a recognition that true justice calls us to the hard work of restoring relationships and building a community characterized by mutual respect.

Prayer: Oh God, inspire us to see the wonder and value in others. May we join your work in creating communities shaped by Christ's radical hope and peace-making.

David Cassady
President, BSK Theological Seminary
Georgetown, Kentucky

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister."

– 1 John 4:20-21, NIV

Learning to Love, Not Lie

If John were to observe the context of Christians in the U.S.—both historically and presently—I believe he would consider some among us to be liars. From the era of chattel slavery and Jim Crow to the use of the death penalty, the dehumanization of immigrants and the blatant acts of racism we are witnessing today, John's words offer a sharp critique. If we say we love God but fail to love our neighbors, especially those oppressed by unjust systems, then the message is clear: We are liars.

John reminds us that when our faith is confined to "me and my relationship with God," we fail to see God in our houseless neighbor, the immigrant and the many faces around us. This challenges the individualism rampant in our churches. Embracing the communal nature of our faith helps us recognize others as siblings, reminding us that true love calls for action that strengthens our bonds and bridges the gaps that separate us.

In Fall 2024, I started my study for a Master of Divinity at Yale Divinity School. One of my favorite professors, Bishop William Barber, once said, "Whether you vote Republican or Democrat, notice how no one mentions the poor; they account for 143 million people in the nation, but are voiceless." What does love look like in this context? Perhaps it begins with noticing the poor in our own communities. It means confronting the systems that dehumanize them by categorizing them as deserving or undeserving. It means rejecting apathy and choosing both prayer and action. If our churches provide food pantries for those in need, truly loving others means going beyond charity to foster a sense of community, where their dignity and well-being are prioritized and upheld.

Prayer: Lord, if 1 Corinthians 13 is correct, teach us to be patient and kind, to seek truth, to protect, trust, hope and persevere alongside our brothers and sisters. Forgive us for our envy, boastfulness, pride, dishonoring of others, and holding anger toward those we are called to love. We want to love you, God; help us to love your children. Amen.

Benji Suprice
Campus Minister
Yale Divinity School MDiv Candidate
New London, Connecticut

Justice Note

As of 2023, the poverty rates in the United States varied significantly across different racial and ethnic groups:

Black Americans: 17.9%

American Indian and Alaska Natives: 18.9%

Hispanic Americans: 16.6%

White Americans: 7.7%

These disparities highlight the ongoing economic inequalities faced by minority communities. To learn more, see Statista.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

– Luke 18:7-8, NRSV

Persistence as a Way to Justice

In the parable leading to these verses, Jesus tells of a widow who encounters a corrupt judicial system. This widow faces a judge who, despite his power, "neither fears God nor respects people." With little social or economic status, she is easily dismissed, yet persistently demands justice from her adversary. Much like other widows in Scripture, her tenacity ultimately wins her the justice she deserves. While her persistence is commendable, it's troubling that it was required at all. Too often, our systems are set up so that the poor and vulnerable must struggle tirelessly just to be seen, heard or believed. The burden of persistence weighs disproportionately on those already suffering from injustice.

Jesus' final comments remind us that God is the opposite of this corrupt judge. God's justice and mercy are swift; God does not delay in answering those who cry out. When we approach God with a faith as persistent as the widow's, we are met with compassion and justice. Yet, we are left with a challenge: How can we become advocates of a justice that does not delay? Do we hear and act swiftly for those crying out day and night, or do we maintain systems that require the persistence of the vulnerable as their only hope for justice?

Reflection: How can we, as followers of Christ, work to dismantle systems that demand unjust persistence from those already suffering? Where can we act swiftly to bring about God's justice?

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, in this sacred Lenten season, examine our hearts and guide our actions. Help us to respond to Your call without hesitation. Open our eyes to see the struggles of the marginalized and our ears to hear their cries. May we be moved with compassion and courage to act as Your agents of justice and love without delay. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Rev. Heather Mustain
Associate Pastor, Wilshire Baptist Church
Dallas, Texas

Justice Note

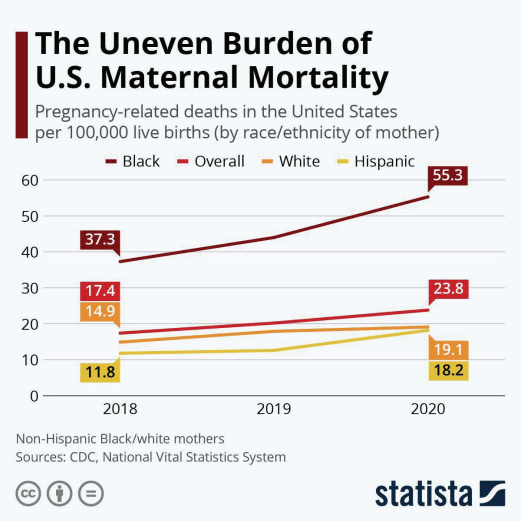
Health Care Disparities

Black maternal mortality rates are three times higher than those for White women, reflecting disparities in healthcare access and treatment (CDC, 2023).

As we pray for healing, let us also advocate for equitable healthcare access for all.

Learn more: Pew Research Report

Source: "Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2021" by the CDC.



SATURDAY Reflection

Each week during Lent, Saturdays will provide a space to reflect, journal and challenge yourself to see your community and the world in a new light: a space to create and a space for justice work.

– A Space for Renewal and Hope –

Take Time to Renew

Let this be a time to renew your spirit and refocus on God's calling. As you reflect on the week, consider how God is working in and through you to bring hope and healing to the world. Pause, breathe and open your heart to God's presence.

Journaling Prompts

- What has inspired or encouraged you during your devotional time this week?
- Where have you seen glimpses of hope or justice in your life or community?
- Write a prayer asking God to guide you as you strive to bring hope to others.

In the stillness of this day, find renewal in knowing that God's love is at work in every corner of your life. Trust that even small acts of faith and justice are seeds of transformation in the world.

SCAN THE QR CODE *to listen to the Lenten 2025 playlist.*

Take Action Resources

Books, Articles & Podcasts

Books on Race and Reconciliation

African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities (PDF)

Resources

Conversation Starter Concepts

"How Can We Solve the Black Maternal Health Crisis?" (John Hopkins)

Podcasts on Race and Reconciliation (PDF)

Visual Resources on Race (PDF)

More Links

Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice and Leadership Initiative

CBF Latino Network: Familia

Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy – Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Racial Justice Pilgrimages

Application for McCall Racial Justice Pilgrimage Seed Grant

Get Involved

Vote Riders

Center for Common Ground

Sojourners

BJC Center for Faith and Justice and Reconciliation

Fellowship Southwest

Together for Hope

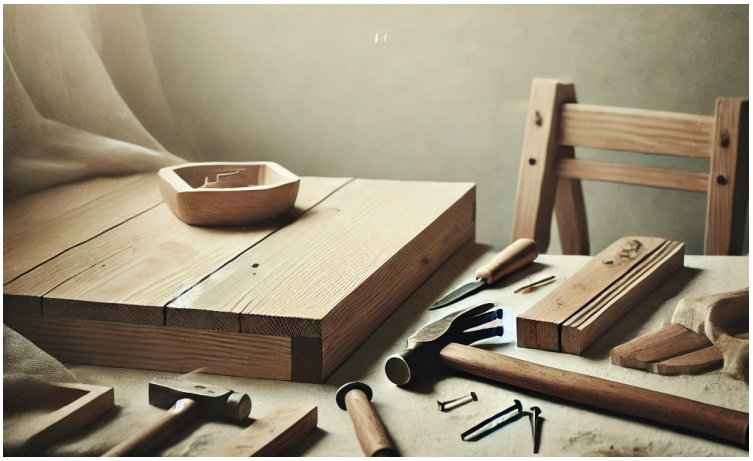
Racial Equity Institute

Equal Justice Initiative

SUNDAY Reflection

Building a New Table

"Welcoming everyone to the table isn't enough. We need to tear down and build something new—systems that serve everyone, not just those who are comfortable."



Journaling Prompts

- What has stood out to you so far during your devotional time?
- In what ways can you help rebuild systems that honor all people?
- In what ways can you ensure that everyone at the table feels not just welcome, but valued and empowered? Think of one tangible step you can take to create a more inclusive space in your community or workplace.
- Write a prayer to God about your concerns.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times."

– Psalm 106:3, NRSV

Balancing Justice with Mercy

"We will bring those responsible to justice!"

We often hear this declaration from government officials, law enforcement and military leaders. However, this form of "justice" typically refers to retributive justice, focused on punishment. Yet, justice in God's kingdom is also restorative, aiming to hold wrongdoers accountable while fostering healing and reconciliation that restores community. The God of Psalm 106 embodies this restorative justice. The psalmist records God's acts of justice as expressions of faithfulness that seek to bring God's people back into relationship, balancing accountability with mercy, underscoring Israel's need for transformation alongside God's enduring commitment to restoration.

"Save us, O LORD our God," the psalmist cries in verse 47, a plea for a nation needing God's restoring justice. "Gather us … to give thanks to Your holy name, to triumph in Your praise" (NKJV). This justice is not about revenge; it is about restoring right relationship between God and God's people. As we seek justice in our world—especially racial justice—do our cries echo this divine vision? Are we committed to mending broken relationships, or do we fall into the trap of vengeance and division? Are we working to become agents of mercy, seeking justice that builds community and restores dignity to all?

In the struggle for racial justice, we must remember that reconciliation requires a desire for change. But just as God continually offers mercy, we too can take the first step. Let our pursuit of justice be grounded in God's steadfast love and mercy, as the psalmist reminds us: "Oh, give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." May our justice work embody this enduring mercy, calling us to a justice that heals, restores and reflects God's love for all creation.

Harold Dean Trulear
Associate Professor and Director, Black Congregations Resource Center
Howard University School of Divinity
Washington, D.C.

Justice Note

Restorative justice is a transformative approach to addressing harm that emphasizes repairing the damage caused by wrongdoing through inclusive, dialogic processes. Unlike traditional punitive systems, restorative justice centers on the needs of those most directly impacted—victims, offenders and their communities—working collaboratively to foster accountability, healing and reconciliation. This approach prioritizes understanding and making amends over punishment.

Several organizations are actively advancing restorative justice principles and practices:

- **The National Center on Restorative Justice** (NCORJ): https://ncorj.org
- **The Center for Justice Innovation**: Learn more: www.innovatingjustice.org
- **Restorative Justice International**: Learn more: www.restorativejusticeinternational.com

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me'."

– Matthew 25:44-45, NRSVUE

Hope for the Goats

In this passage, Jesus describes the final judgment—not based on believing the "right" things or knowing church history, but on how we have treated our neighbors and strangers. The sheep pass this test because they respond to the needs of others, while the goats are sent away because they have not acted "for the least of these," and therefore have not acted for Jesus. The poor goats might cry, "But Lord, if we had known it was you…we might have done things differently!"

Am I a sheep or a goat? Honestly, I'm both.

One of my favorite hymns, "The Servant Song," says, "Will you let me be your servant? Let me be as Christ to you…." Here, we strive to embody Jesus's compassion, serving others in the ways he demonstrated. But in Matthew 25, Jesus challenges us to see those we serve as Jesus himself. Not only are we called to be Christ in service to others, but we are also to treat those we serve as Christ. How might this change our response to the needs around us?

Thankfully, there is hope for the goats! God's grace and forgiveness abound. And we still have opportunities to respond to the pain and needs of neighbors and strangers all around us. This means that Jesus is everywhere, awaiting our responses of justice and mercy.

Prayer: God of Grace, forgive our "goatness." God of Hope, grant us new sight so that we may see you in the pleading eyes of others. God of Justice, fill us with courage as we work to challenge the systems that create pain and injustice in our communities. Amen.

Lisa Davis Brownlee
President, Leader's Imago LLC
Irmo, South Carolina

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

– John 3:16-17 NRSV

Reclaiming Love as a North Star of Hope

God becomes flesh in Jesus to supply abundant life for human beings. According to our passage, which begins with "For God so loved the world…," love is the motivating force for the incarnation (God becoming human) and the *kenosis* (the pouring out of one's gifts) of Jesus. Love, as used here, means God wants to make everything humans have done wrong in the world right. Love also means that where hatred and mutual suspicion between neighbors abound, God intervenes to reinstate hope and mutual trust between neighbors. Such a trust can prevent us from perishing and causing the church to plummet into the abyss of anti-blackness and frustrating false choices between racial justice and other forms of equity.

I believe that a sacred determination to be a great caregiver inspires—and explains—the Holy One's decision to enter into creation as a human being. Think of it: the Maker who mercifully molds us into being, joins us in the messiness of history, saving us as one among us rather than as one remote from us. Ever in pursuit of humanity, God bridges the distance between heaven and earth in Christ, assuring our worry-prone hearts that we are not alone, never without eternal assistance.

Reflection: As we consider the gift of Christ's incarnation, we are called to recognize the value God places on all people and to challenge the systems that perpetuate racial injustice and division. Just as God intervenes in human history to bridge divisions, we are invited to embody that same love by working to dismantle the walls of prejudice, mistrust and inequality that keep us from one another. Let us strive for a world where love reigns and justice flows freely as a reflection of God's enduring hope for humanity.

Prayer: God of eternal love and justice, inspire us to receive the gift of Christ's incarnation as a call to heal divisions and restore hope where racial injustice and hatred have taken root. Help us see Christ in every neighbor, especially those who are marginalized and oppressed, and empower us to pursue the equity, love and mutual trust that you desire for all people. May your love transform our hearts and communities so that we might reflect your kingdom on earth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Andrew Wilkes
Co-pastor, Double Love Experience
Brooklyn, NY

Justice Note

For a deeper exploration of how love and justice intersect with economic equity, consider reading *Plenty Good Room: Co-creating an Economy of Enough for All* by Rev. Dr. Andrew Wilkes. This thought-provoking book challenges us to envision a world where resources are shared equitably, reflecting God's abundant love and desire for justice.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

– John 3:16-17 NRSV

Reclaiming Love as a Path to Racial Justice

But that's not all. The Word, according to John's Gospel, conducts acts of service and justice, as well as ministry that heals the sick and defends the vulnerable, so that "everyone who believes in him" might enjoy eternal life—a life that begins now, in this hard-pressed, yet beautiful, historical moment.

Believing in the Christ, as noted in our passage, transcends holding a set of opinions about Jesus. Instead, such believing means that we enter into the union of God as Caregiver and Christ by conducting the "greater works" of justice-minded, love-driven ministry. The goal of such ministry, in part, is to confront America's apartheid-like policy legacy of racial injustice, a legacy which comes only "to steal, kill, and destroy" God's people.

As we take up our cross this Lenten season, may we affirm in practice and in preaching that God's desire to love us—and not a hidden desire to condemn us—best summarizes the Gospel's continuing relevance. The work of racial justice is not a side project of discipleship. It is, instead, a primary agenda item of following the Christ. This Christ commands us in John's Gospel to "love one another" as Jesus has loved us. This love is the Church's best North Star for ensuring that its direction is heading towards liberation and that its devotion reflects the beauty, grace and dogged moral goodness of her Savior. Love, that often maligned, set aside, neglected, yet nevertheless recurring theological ideal, is our purpose for existence as a church. Let us follow our bright Morning Star in embodying the love that seeks to help and heal in our careers, congregations, communities and our countries.

Prayer: God of eternal, abundant life, inspire us to glorify you by working for racial justice and undoing regimes of white supremacy, restoring neighbor love as the principal social witness of the church, and receiving the Christ whose incarnation is to save and satisfy our souls and our society. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Andrew Wilkes
Co-pastor, Double Love Experience
Brooklyn, NY

Justice Note

Racial justice is central to our discipleship as Jesus commands us to "love one another" in ways that heal, liberate and reconcile. Love is the Church's guiding purpose, compelling us to confront systems of oppression and embody the Gospel's power to restore neighborly love.

For further reflection on justice and liberation, explore *Psalms for Black Lives: Reflections for the Work of Liberation* by co-authors Rev. Dr. Gabby Cudjoe-Wilkes and Rev. Dr. Andrew Wilkes.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

– Philippians 2:3-4, NIV

Reclaiming Love as a Hope Through Humility:

Racial Justice as a Reflection of Christ's Love and a Path to Racial Justice

The pursuit of racial justice is deeply rooted in our call to love one another as Christ loves us. In Philippians 2:3-4, Paul urges us to reject selfish ambition and vanity, replacing them with humility and a deep concern for the well-being of others. This passage is a powerful reminder that genuine unity is built upon the foundation of valuing others above ourselves—a principle that directly challenges racial inequality and prejudice and points us toward *hope*.

Paul's call to "look to the interests of others" is a radical call to action. It reminds us that seeking racial justice is not just an optional good deed, but a fundamental expression of our faith. When we advocate for those who have been silenced or oppressed, we embody the love of Christ, who always placed the needs of others before His own.

Humility and justice go hand in hand, and both lead to reconciliation. As we walk in the footsteps of Jesus, working for racial equity, we carry the *hope* that one day all people will be seen and treated with the dignity and worth that God has given them. Our efforts, however small, contribute to the larger vision of God's kingdom.

Prayer: Lord, give us the humility to value others above ourselves and the courage to seek justice for those who are oppressed. Fill us with hope that Your love can heal the divisions in our world. May we be agents of reconciliation, always seeking the good of others and embodying Your love for all people. Amen.

Carrie Tuning
Pastor, Hope Christian Fellowship Baptist Church
Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina

Justice Note

The Racial Wealth Gap

The racial wealth gap remains stark: White families hold eight times more wealth than Black families on average (Federal Reserve, 2023). *Consider how financial inequities limit opportunities and what we can do to support systemic economic justice.*
Learn more: Pew Research Report

Get Involved: Organizations like the NAACP and the National Urban League are actively working to address economic disparities and promote racial justice. Consider supporting or volunteering with these organizations to contribute to meaningful change.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

– Matthew 22:34-40, NIV

Love Without Limits

When I read this passage, I think of the man who asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan, where a Samaritan aids a Jew despite the bitter divide between their communities. Jesus illustrates a love that transcends prejudice and stands against the boundaries society has built.

This past summer, I served with a ministry at the U.S.-Mexico border, working with migrants. Before leaving, I worried about the backlash I might face because of whom and where I was serving. Although I knew migrants were my neighbors, deserving of Christ's love, I found myself wanting to explain my work to others to avoid controversy.

But Jesus' words challenge this mindset. Jesus doesn't give qualifications for who counts as a neighbor. In fact, he redefines "neighbor" to include those whom society marginalizes and stigmatizes, much like the Samaritan helping the Jew. Christ's love knows no boundaries; it embraces people of every background, particularly those marginalized by the injustices of the world. Limiting our love based on what others might think only inhibits the kind of transformative love Christ calls us to embody. This passage reminds me that to truly follow Jesus, we must extend a limitless, courageous love to all our neighbors, especially those who face racial and social injustices.

Prayer: God of love, sometimes I find it difficult to love as you do and get caught up in how others will view me. Grant me the courage to set aside these concerns and embrace your unconditional love for all people. Empower me to reach out to those on the margins and to love boldly, as you have loved us. Amen.

Zoe Moser
Member, Harrisonburg Baptist Church
Harrisonburg, Virginia

Justice Note

By understanding the challenges faced by vulnerable communities, we take a meaningful step toward equity and justice for all. Explore how your community is represented. Learn more: Access the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) here.

Take Action Resources

Books, Articles & Podcasts

Books on Race and Reconciliation

African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities (PDF)

Resources

Conversation Starter Concepts

"How Can We Solve the Black Maternal Health Crisis?" (John Hopkins)

Podcasts on Race and Reconciliation (PDF)

Visual Resources on Race (PDF)

More Links

Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice and Leadership Initiative

CBF Latino Network: Familia

Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy – Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Racial Justice Pilgrimages

Application for McCall Racial Justice Pilgrimage Seed Grant

Get Involved

Vote Riders

Center for Common Ground

Sojourners

BJC Center for Faith and Justice and Reconciliation

Fellowship Southwest

Together for Hope

Racial Equity Institute

Equal Justice Initiative

SUNDAY Reflection

Addressing Root Causes

The Narrative of America Project reminds us:

"Justice means actively addressing the root causes of an issue, not just fixing the surface."

True justice requires looking deeper—seeking not just quick fixes, but meaningful, lasting change. Jeremiah 29:7 calls us to work for the peace and well-being of the places we live, reminding us that flourishing is collective. Through God's guidance, even the most entrenched problems can be transformed into opportunities for hope and restoration.

Suggested Action:
This week, identify one issue in your community and research its root causes. Whether it's systemic inequality, food insecurity or educational disparities, take one small step toward addressing the deeper problem. Trust that God will use your efforts to bring hope and transformation.

Journaling Prompts

- What has stood out to you so far during your devotional time?
- What injustices in your community do you feel called to address more deeply?
- How can you move beyond surface-level solutions to confront the underlying causes of inequality?
- With whom can you collaborate to create lasting change in your community?
- Write a prayer to God about your concerns.

Hope
Justice &
Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

– 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, NRSVUE

Old Walls and New Hope

"Look, new things have come into being!" Paul writes to the Corinthians. Pay attention, Paul commands. New things are breaking forth from old structures, and you don't want to miss it.

Not far from where I live, you can still see the remains of an old segregation wall in Arlington, Virginia—a wall built to divide the community, to keep Black people from white people. I went to see it one day and, to my surprise, it didn't look as old as I thought it would. I guess our ugly past isn't as distant as we would like to believe. The wall is old because its purpose belongs in the past. The old structures and sinful ways in which we try to order our lives are passing away, and something new is breaking forth!

A few years ago, a storm washed a large section of the wall away. (I guess it was built on sinking sand.) All walls of injustice are built on fleeting foundations! They will fall and something new will break forth.

I know the past is painful and much closer than we like to admit; but there is something new at work—even now! Our hope is not in forgetting the past, but in seeing through the past to the new creation God is forging out of the rubble of old structures. New communities are being formed where old walls once separated. More churches are speaking up about the racial injustices they see, even within themselves. Last year, the Lenten devotional was one of the most downloaded resources in CBF's history. Look! New things have come into being.

Where do you see God's newness forming out of yesterday's broken systems? How might God be calling you to be an ambassador of Christ who makes all things new?

Sean Roberds
Executive Coordinator, Mid-Atlantic CBF
Herndon, Virginia

Continue to the following page for today's Justice Note.

Justice Note

Justice Note

The Arlington Segregation Wall stands as a stark reminder of America's not-so-distant past, where racial division was intentionally built into communities. Structures like this, both physical and systemic, represent the legacy of racial injustice that continues to affect society today. As we confront these remnants of segregation, we are called to work for a new reality—one rooted in justice, equality and reconciliation. May these images serve as a visual testimony to the persistence of injustice and inspire us to be part of the transformation toward a more inclusive and equitable future.

Learn more:
www.arlingtonmagazine.com/once-there-was-a-segregation-wall-in-arlington/
www.stayarlington.com/directory/halls-hill-segregation-wall/

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

– Romans 12:2, RSV

Being Open to God's Transformative Work

In early 2024, I experienced an unexpected accident when a cherished "Talavera" plate, inscribed with the words *"Dios bendiga este hogar"* (God bless this home), was accidentally broken. At first, this incident seemed like a minor, unfortunate mishap, as the plate was lovingly chosen and represented a treasured connection to Mexican culture. Yet, as it was pieced back together, my family faced an even deeper crisis that nearly fractured our unity, drawing us to rely on God with a renewed and humbled faith.

In times of crisis, God often uses brokenness as a path toward transformation. Just as my family felt the weight of life's struggles, many communities today bear the weight of systemic injustice and racial inequity, crying out for justice and wholeness. Sometimes, we are called to pause, listen and seek God's will with humility, even as we desire to speak out and act. Transformation and justice work are not separate journeys; they require a heart open to God's refining process, a heart willing to surrender and to be remade.

The broken plate, once a symbol of loss, became a symbol of God's faithfulness—a reminder that even in brokenness, God is at work to create something new and whole. During this Lenten season, may we be open to God's transforming work, allowing ourselves to be humbled and renewed. As we confront the brokenness in our world, especially in the pursuit of racial justice, may we find the strength to trust God's process and the courage to become agents of healing and restoration.

Prayer: Lord, help us to humbly allow your transforming power to work within us, guiding us toward deeper empathy, stronger community and unwavering commitment to justice. Remind us that even in the broken places, your faithfulness endures. Amen.

Anyra Cano
Director of Programs and Outreach, Fellowship Southwest
Fort Worth, Texas

Justice Note

Fellowship Southwest

Fellowship Southwest is a multicultural network of faith communities dedicated to improving lives and sharing God's love with those often overlooked. Their mission encompasses compassion, justice and connection, particularly along the U.S.-Mexico border. Through initiatives like organizing border trips, they provide opportunities for individuals and groups to engage directly with migrant ministries, fostering understanding and support for migrants' lived experiences.

To learn more about their compassionate work and how you can get involved, visit their website: https://fellowshipsouthwest.org/about.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness."

– Romans 1:18, NLT

Indeed, Not I, Lord?

Who are these "wicked" people mentioned in Romans? Indeed, not I, Lord?

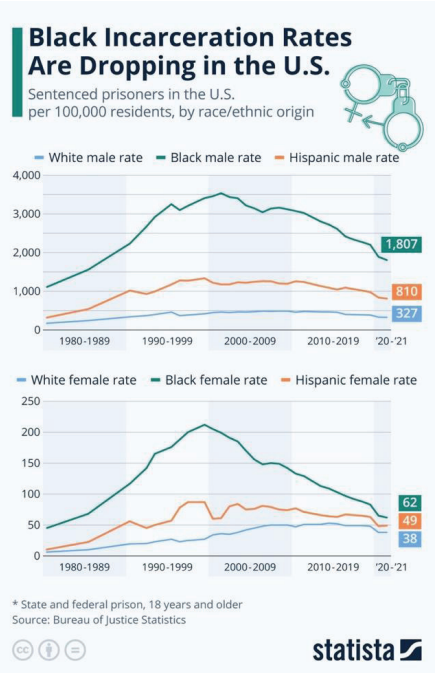
I don't usually see myself as "wicked" or as someone who "suppresses the truth." Yet, I live in a society deeply affected by sin, where systems and structures around us often obscure truth, perpetuate inequality and allow racial injustice to thrive. If Romans 3:23 is true that all have sinned, then sin is present in all of us, affecting not just individuals, but the communities and systems we inhabit. Can I trust that I, too, am not suppressing the truth—especially about the injustices that surround us? How can I regularly assess how I might unknowingly uphold these systems and remain vigilant in uncovering and challenging hidden biases?

A churchgoing couple once shared how they felt encouraged by my presence in their lives. While affirming them, I realized how easy it is to fall into traditional power dynamics without noticing, even within the church. Their openness about their struggles with mental health inspired me to be more vulnerable and honest. Through this mutual exchange, I saw how easily good intentions can unintentionally reinforce the same hierarchies and divisions that God calls us to dismantle. True community requires us to see each other's worth, to be honest about the ways sin and injustice shape our lives and to actively work together toward healing and truth.

Reflection: How might we be "suppressing the truth" individually and collectively, especially in the context of racial injustice? Who around us bears the wisdom and courage we need to examine our lives, confront uncomfortable truths, and transform our churches into true communities of justice and love?

Prayer: Lord, forgive me if I have suppressed the truth, knowingly or unknowingly. Open my eyes, and help me to overcome hidden biases and strive for justice. Amen.

Sejana Yoo
Chaplain, Baylor Scott and White Medical Center
Temple, Texas



Source: "Chart: Black Incarceration Rates Are Dropping in the U.S." by Statista.

Justice Note

Inequities in the Justice System

Black Americans are incarcerated at nearly five times the rate of White Americans, fueling mistrust in the justice system (Sentencing Project, 2023).[1] Learn more: Pew Research Report

Educate yourself on the historical roots of these inequities, from redlining to mass incarceration. Let this serve as a reminder to reflect on how justice is applied in our communities.

[1] Katharina Buchholz, Statista, "Black Incarceration Rates Are Dropping in the U.S.," www.statista.com/chart/18376/us-incarceration-rates-by-sex-and-race-ethnic-origin/

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their ways. Their roads they have made crooked; no one who walks in them knows peace."

– Isaiah 59:8, NRSVUE

"They" Not Like Us

The fact that you subscribed to this devotional resource indicates that you are committed to the work of racial justice. You desire, like "us," to live in a fair and equitable world. I approach this text from the perspective of a Black woman—not merely a "woman or person of color," but a "woman/person of the global majority." This language resonates with me, giving me an identity rooted in respect and accuracy. My ancestors did not have the option to reclaim their identity. "They"—colonizers, enslavers and nationalists—oppressed them and had no regard for community welfare. "But they not like us" (a nod to Kendrick Lamar).

In Isaiah 59:8,
"They" (the Israelites) were separated from God because of sin.
"They" did not respect their neighbors.
"They" oppressed the poor and had no concern for justice.
"They" did not walk in peace.
Thankfully, "they are not like us" or are they?

God told the prophet Isaiah to tell them "they" got it twisted. It was not through fasting rituals or sanctimonious attitudes that would draw them closer to God, but through "knowing glances." But you can't "know" your neighbors if you don't look at them. We, too, are called to examine our own paths. Are they straight or crooked? Do they lead to peace or perpetuate injustice? If we wish to be different from "they," we must continually reflect, repent and realign ourselves with God's call to justice.

Prayer of Repentance: Lord, help "us" not to be among the "theys" who fail to know, see and value our neighbors. Help us not to turn a blind eye to injustice or You.

Lynn Brinkley
Pan African Koinonia Field Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

– Matthew 5:6, NRSV

The Being and Doing of Faith

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes reveal blessings rooted in ethics, like the concept of righteousness—closely linked to justice. This righteousness, the act of doing what is right, flows from our inner beings and our relationship with God. The work of justice, then, is not only something we do but something we become. It is an active choice born from the depth of our faith and commitment to God's will.

To be "blessed" here is to experience an honor and wholeness that arise from a life oriented toward God. When our desire for God motivates us, we find a holy completeness that connects our inner selves to our outer actions.

Throughout Matthew's Gospel, we see the bond between righteousness and justice. Jesus presents a radical truth: The blessing of a covenant relationship with God extends beyond one people to encompass all—Jews and Gentiles alike. This invitation to righteousness and justice is for everyone, calling us into a life of true belonging and purpose.

When we recognize our place in God's story, we encounter our true selves, shaped by the life-altering awareness of God who dwells with us and within us. Trusting in God and empowered by the Spirit, we can take on the psalmist's vision: *"Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky"* (Ps. 85:10-11, NRSV).

Prayer: Loving, liberating, life-giving God, instill in us a desire to walk in the way of Christ and to live as agents of Your justice in the world. In Your strength, we stand; in Your wisdom, we find our purpose; and through Your heart, we love the world You so deeply cherish. In Your Holy Name, we pray, Amen.

Elizabeth Nance-Coker
Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina

SATURDAY Reflection

Each week during Lent, Saturdays will provide a space to reflect, journal and challenge yourself to see your community and the world in a new light: a space to create and a space for justice work.

– A Space to Bear Burdens and Hope –

Aaron Douglas', *The Crucifixion* (1927), reimagines Simon of Cyrene as a powerful figure, heroically bearing Christ's cross with strength and resolve. His active gaze toward God's light symbolizes hope amidst the burden of his task. The connection to the Great Migration—where African Americans sought freedom and opportunity while carrying the weight of systemic oppression—invites us to consider those who have labored for justice in the face of adversity.

Journaling Prompts

- Reflect on the image of Simon carrying Christ's cross. How does it inspire you to think about the burdens of those who have worked for justice in your own community or family?
- What does it mean to carry hope even while bearing heavy burdens?
- Write a prayer asking God for the strength and vision to labor for justice with perseverance and hope.

SCAN THE QR CODE *to listen to the Lenten 2025 playlist.*

Take Action Resources

Books, Articles & Podcasts

Books on Race and Reconciliation

African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities (PDF)

Resources

Conversation Starter Concepts

"How Can We Solve the Black Maternal Health Crisis?" (John Hopkins)

Podcasts on Race and Reconciliation (PDF)

Visual Resources on Race (PDF)

More Links

Dr. Emmanuel McCall Racial Justice and Leadership Initiative

CBF Latino Network: Familia

Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy – Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Racial Justice Pilgrimages

Application for McCall Racial Justice Pilgrimage Seed Grant

Get Involved

Vote Riders

Center for Common Ground

Sojourners

BJC Center for Faith and Justice and Reconciliation

Fellowship Southwest

Together for Hope

Racial Equity Institute

Equal Justice Initiative

SUNDAY Reflection

Building Bridges of Justice

As Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds shouted, *"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"* (Matthew 21:9). This moment, filled with hope and anticipation, reminds us that true peace and justice come through selfless love and humble service.

Jeremiah 29:7 challenges us to *"seek the peace and prosperity of the city... because if it prospers, you too will prosper."* This verse, paired with the promise in verse 11 that God has *"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,"* reminds us of our collective responsibility: Our flourishing is tied to the well-being of those around us.

Reflect on this insight from the Narrative of America Project:

"A real challenge is it may not be what we need or want, but is it what others outside of us need, and how is God going to use us to make sure that they get what they need as well?"

True justice calls us to look beyond ourselves, asking how we can be vessels for God's work in meeting the needs of others. It is not enough to want change; we must be willing to act, to give and to sacrifice in ways that align with God's broader plans for all His people.

Journaling Prompts

- Reflect on a time when God used you to help meet someone else's need. How did it shape your faith?
- What do you believe God is calling you to do to meet the needs of others in your community?
- How can you discern between what you want and what others truly need?
- With whom in your life or community might you collaborate to build a more just and inclusive future?
- Write a prayer asking God to reveal ways you can act in love and justice for the benefit of others.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." Then the Lord replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die."

– Deuteronomy 18:15-20, NRSV

Raised Up to Be a Prophet?

Thousands of years ago, the Lord promised to raise up another prophet like Moses and, in doing so, also conveyed that the calling of any prophet is to speak everything the Lord commands. We often begin our journeys of faith believing that the work of the prophet is to predict the future. But in the purest sense, the prophetic vocation is about speaking on behalf of God in the present. If that involves a message about the future, it is for the sake of faithfulness in the present. Just as often, it can be a word of challenge or justice or hope or a description of how God is at work in the present. In all cases, it is the mandate of the prophet to listen to how the Lord is speaking and then communicate what is heard. The highest virtue of any prophet is faithfulness in hearing and speaking. Prophets do not create messages. Instead, prophets receive them and pass them along.

In today's world, the prophet's voice is urgently needed. We witness words and actions that deepen divides, perpetuate systemic racism, and fuel fear and oppression. Too often, these destructive messages are given by those who claim to represent God. Now, more than ever, we need prophetic voices committed to racial justice, lifting up the oppressed, dismantling inequity, and envisioning a world where every life is valued and protected because we know that this is still what the Lord requires of us.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." This is more than an individual calling; it's a mandate for the entire church. The Lord seeks to raise up communities of prophetic witness—communities that denounce racism, champion equity and amplify the voices of the marginalized. This prophetic charge is for you, for me and for our congregations. Will we have the courage to embody God's heart and join God's mission of justice, so that we might be a beacon of hope, reflecting God's true image in this world? Will we speak in ways that reflect the heart, mind and mission of God?

Prayer: Lord, raise up our congregations and each of us as followers of Jesus to be faithful prophets. Give us the courage to hear you clearly and to speak your word boldly in pursuit of racial justice and love. May we be instruments of your truth, embodying hope, love and equity in all we do. In Christ's name, Amen.

Paul A. Baxley
Executive Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Decatur, Georgia

Justice Note

Policymakers and advocates can use the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) to prioritize resources for disadvantaged communities, addressing long-standing disparities with equity in mind. Learn more: Access the CEJST here.

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"...one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

– Ephesians 4:5, NRSVUE

Take Us to the Water

This portion of Paul's letter to the Ephesians is often described as the "crown of Paulism," as it calls us to a unity that transcends divisions. Paul's words invite us to see the Church as a unified body—a body formed around one Lord, one shared faith, and a baptismal identity that erases distinctions. In Christ, the division between Jew and Gentile no longer exists; they are equal members, called to grow as one in the body of Christ.

"The toe bone's connected to the foot bone." Yet, in North America, the Church remains visibly divided along racial lines. Black and white churches stand as enduring symbols of segregation, legacies of a time when Christianity was distorted by the heresy of white supremacy. Instead of embodying the "one faith" Paul describes, these divisions reflect a "gospel" that racializes identity, creating insiders and outsiders based on skin color. Baptism calls us to cast aside this false binary of "us vs. them" and embrace the fullness of our identity in Christ—a shared identity that transcends race, background and status.

Today, the North American church could focus less on multiplication and more on healing its divisions. After all, what's the difference between First and Second Baptist Church? Too often, we end up with a watered-down gospel that treats baptism like a dunking contest. Instead, baptism is meant to be transformative—a regenerative call that unites us in love, justice, and a shared identity under one Lord. The 'one baptism' we share is not merely a ritual; it's an invitation to embody the unity and justice of God's kingdom. As we reflect on these waters of new life, may they draw us together toward a true unity, grounded in God's call for equality and justice.

Prayer: Take us to the water, O Lord. Unite us under the one who stood in line to be baptized as a demonstration of new life. In the name of Jesus the Christ, I pray. Amen.

Starlette Thomas
Director, The Raceless Gospel Initiative
Bowie, Maryland

Justice Note

The Raceless Gospel

Rev. Starlette Thomas is an author, activist, visual artist and race abolitionist dedicated to leading dialogues on race and its impact on faith communities. She serves as the director of The Raceless Gospel Initiative at Good Faith Media, which aims to empower Christians to address the sociopolitical construct of race and its injustices within churches and society. For more insights into her work, explore her podcast, "The Raceless Gospel," where she engages in conversations about race, religion and politics. Good Faith Media.

Additionally, her book, *Take Me to the Water: The Raceless Gospel as Baptismal Pedagogy for a Desegregated Church*, offers a profound examination of race and faith. Good Faith Media.

To delve deeper into Rev. Thomas' initiatives and resources, visit her website racelessgospel.com.

Hope Justice & Relationships
Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

– Micah 6:8, NIV

The Lord Expects What Is Good and Does Good

For those who follow the Lord, certain questions persist: "What do you want from us, God? What do you expect from your people?" Jesus faced a similar question from a group of Pharisees who, unfortunately, sought not to learn from, but to trap Him (Matthew 22:34-40).

Among the ancient Israelites, as recounted in the First Testament, there was a tendency among Temple leaders to believe that following God meant adhering to an extensive list of rules. These leaders thought that since God is great, the list of commandments should also be extensive. Religious scholars identified 613 commandments in the Torah, or Law of God. But the length of this list became problematic as the commandments shifted from being sources of justice and peace to mere rituals, sacrifices and traditions, often stripped of meaning and disconnected from the needs of the people.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees was simple yet revolutionary: The Law is fulfilled in love—love for God, love for others and love for oneself. Long before, the prophet Micah also simplified the commandments with a call to "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God." These are not acts of ritual, but calls to a life of justice and compassion, especially in a world filled with racial and social injustice.

Today, we're reminded that God does not call us to empty rituals but to a love that actively seeks justice, kindness and humility. This is God's response to the injustices in our world: a love that transforms systems, relationships and lives. What God seeks amidst our brokenness is what God has always sought—to do good, to act with justice, and to bring life to others, to ourselves and to God's creation.

Reflection: How can our faith, doctrines and practices better align with what God most expects from us—justice, mercy and humility? May our actions reflect not mere rituals, but lives that promote life for all.

Prayer: Lord, help us to align our faith, doctrines and practices with what You truly expect—justice, mercy and humility. May our actions move beyond empty rituals to reflect Your love and bring life to all. Amen.

Harold Segura
Director Regional de Fe y Compromiso
World Vision, Latin America & Caribbean

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"You must not mistreat or oppress foreigners in any way. Remember, you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt."

– Exodus 22:21, NLT

Golden Rule

In Exodus 22, God outlines instructions for the Israelites to live holy lives after being freed from captivity. God's care for God's children extends to those often marginalized—orphans, widows and foreigners. If treating others justly weren't a human struggle, there would be no need for these instructions.

Consider how you treat others in your daily life: your coworkers, fellow church members and friends of your children. This verse invites us to examine our hearts and actions. God welcomed us into God's story through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and we are called to be like Him. Today, treat others with justice and compassion, just as God treats us. To mistreat foreigners while living under God's grace contradicts Christ's example. Let us be good stewards of God's gifts, including the people God places in our lives. Ask God to reveal how you might better love those who are different from you—and be open to God's response.

Prayer: Father, we repent for our sins against You and Your children and ask for Your forgiveness. Thank You for the freedom and grace we have through Jesus Christ. Soften our hearts and mold us in Your love and justice. We thank You and glorify Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Naya Welcher
Young Adult Coordinator, First Baptist East Point
East Point, Georgia

Hope Justice & Relationships

Jeremiah 29:7 & 11

"When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers."

– Proverbs 21:15, NIV

Hope and Defiant Joy

This passage is challenging to read. Justice seems to be arbitrary at best. Joy is hard to find and terror seems to be everywhere. Yet God calls us to hope for what could and should be, daring us to believe in the possibility of change and in God's justice. In short, God calls us to hope.

But how do we hold onto hope for God's justice when systemic racism upholds unchecked violence and when rape, torture and harassment are brushed off as the rights of those in power?

The answer lies in joy. Joy is found in the midst of sorrow; it enters through the cracks of corruption, grief, anxiety and defeat. It is a resilient strength that cannot be stripped away without our consent. Joy remembers the reality of resurrection even while enduring crucifixion. Joy is the witness of hope in God's justice.

God's justice also brings terror to evildoers. Those who perpetuate injustice live with the anxiety of knowing they might be caught or the pathology of believing they never will. For the oppressed, joy and hope stand in bold defiance against this evil, strengthening us to carry on.

Below is the benediction my husband and I wrote for our church. We say it at the close of every service—not because we always feel it, but precisely because we often don't. It is a declaration, a request and a way to bear one another's burdens.

May you leave this place walking in the power of the Holy Spirit to be:

Resilient and hopeful

Defiantly joyful

Prophetic and just

Embracing God's trust

As we spur one another on to love and good deeds.

This benediction reminds us to do what is right—even if it feels futile—simply because it is right. Doing what is right is an act of resistance, a declaration of faith that we trust God. And God entrusts us to partner with God in bringing "Thy kingdom come." It is upon us to embrace this calling and work for God's justice which is perfect—because the world's justice clearly is not.

Amy Jacober
Pastor, Harbor Church
Phoenix, Arizona