



News and Views from the General Board of Church & Society of The United Methodist Church

## Global Poverty Bible Study (Session IV)

February 1, 2008

### A New Year in God's World

By Alexis Coleman, Pastor, Harpers Ferry, W. VA

This is the fourth session of a five-week Bible-based study on the world's poorest people and our response to alleviate systemic suffering. We invite you to devote a few weeks to studying "A New Year in God's World."

Alexis Coleman, pastor of two United Methodist churches in Harpers Ferry, W. VA., is author of "A New Year in God's World." She is a third-year practice in mission and ministry student at the General Board of Church & Society from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., and a certified candidate for Elders order in the Western North Carolina Conference.

This five-week congregation-based group Bible study is an invitation to deepen our awareness of Scripture:

- In the *literal* sense — How do we hear God's Word speaking for itself?
- In the *allegorical* sense — How do we receive and digest God's Word personally?
- In the *moral* sense — How do we respond to God's Word inviting us to take action?

"A New Year in God's World" includes five weekly Bible studies with short Scripture reading, questions for group reflection and action, facts on the state of the global poor and congregational prayers.

For more information on how to use this study please contact Alexis Coleman at [Ac Coleman@umc-gbcs.org](mailto:Ac Coleman@umc-gbcs.org) or Neal Christie at [NChristie@umc-gbcs.org](mailto:NChristie@umc-gbcs.org).

### A New Year in God's World

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## Gathering and Introductions

### Opening Prayer

#### Biblical Text: Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>31</sup>When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

<sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?"

<sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

<sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

<sup>44</sup>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?"

<sup>45</sup>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."

<sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the

righteous into eternal life.

— NRSV

## **Lectio Divina Shared in Community<sup>1</sup>**

### **Listening for the Gentle Touch of Christ the Word** (*The Literal Sense*)

1. One person reads aloud twice the passage of scripture as others are attentive to some segment especially meaningful to them.
2. Silence for 1-2 minutes. Each hears and silently repeats a word or phrase that attracts.
3. Share aloud a word or phrase that has attracted each person. A simple statement of one or a few words. No elaboration.

### **How Christ the Word speaks to me** (*The Allegorical Sense*)

1. Second reading of the same passage by another person.
2. Silence for 2-3 minutes. Reflect on "Where does the content of this reading touch my life today?"
3. Share aloud briefly: "I hear, I see..."

### **What Christ the Word Invites me to do** (*The Moral Sense*)

1. Third reading by still another person.
2. Silence for 2-3 minutes. Reflect on "I believe that God wants me to \_\_\_\_\_ today/this week."
3. Share aloud at somewhat greater length the results of each person's reflection. Be especially aware of what is shared by the person to your right.
4. After full sharing, pray for the person to your right.

*Note:* Anyone may pass at any time. If instead of sharing with the group you prefer to pray silently, simply state this aloud and conclude your silent prayer with Amen.

## **Global Poverty: How the Rich Can Help**

In the year 2000, then Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan presented the world with a document called *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

This document became the basis for the Millennium Declaration that sets forth goals to reduce extreme poverty, disease and deprivation. These goals are known as the

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>2</sup>. All eight MDGs are quantifiable and time-bound.

The first goal is to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty. Its two targets are:

- To halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 per day.
- To halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

In the 1990s “the rich world had famously committed to the target of 0.7% of GNP (Gross National Product) devoted to official development assistance, direct financial aid to poor countries, yet the share of financial aid as a proportion of rich-world GNP actually declined from 0.3 to 0.2% during the 1990s”.<sup>3</sup>

The *Millennium Development Goals Report 2007* states: “Success in achieving the MDGs in the poorest and most disadvantaged countries cannot be achieved by these countries alone. Developed countries need to deliver fully on long-standing commitments to achieve the official development assistance (ODA) target of 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) by 2015. It requires, in particular, the Group of 8 industrialized nations to live up to its 2005 pledge to double aid to Africa by 2010 and European Union Member States to allocate 0.7% of GNI to ODA by 2015. In spite of these commitments, ODA declined between 2005 and 2006 and is expected to continue to fall slightly in 2007 as debt relief declines.”<sup>4</sup>

Jeffrey Sachs, author of *The End of Poverty*, (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2005), estimates that the net needs for ODA flows would be about \$195 billion per year by 2015. This figure does not include help for poor countries to adapt to long-term climate change. This figure is only .54% of the projected rich-world GNP, significantly less than the .7% promised.<sup>5</sup>

A few big countries account for most of what is needed. “The United States is the largest missing element in financing the Millennium Development Goals, almost half of the total foreign assistance shortfall,”<sup>6</sup> according to Sachs. Even with non-governmental donor assistance of approximately \$3 billion per year, the U.S. total giving is just .18% of the .7% that has been pledged. Sachs writes that Japan, Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom must also increase their giving.

## Discussion

Read the following quotes and discuss the questions that follow:

“Achieving .7% of GNP in official development assistance in the United States would hardly be a stretch. On the spending side of the budget, the United States spent as much in Iraq for two weeks of support for the war (about \$2.5 billion) as it does for an entire year of economic development assistance in Africa. In its first two years, the Iraq war cost about \$60 billion per year, roughly the same increment needed to reach 0.7% of GNP. The overall rise in military spending has been on the order of \$150 billion per year, comparing fiscal year 2001 as President Bush came into office and fiscal year 2005, an increase of 1.5% of GNP.”<sup>7</sup>

“Americans would dearly love to believe that the United States can be an island of stability and prosperity in a global sea of poverty and economic failure. History, however, proves otherwise.”<sup>8</sup>

1. What is your initial reaction to Sachs?
2. Do you feel that it is more important for the United States to honor its commitment to fighting terrorism or to fighting poverty? Or, do you think it is possible to do both?

## Applying the Biblical Text

This parable of the sheep and the goats appears only in Matthew’s Gospel. It discusses how God will choose who will inherit the kingdom.

Take a moment to talk about ways we decide who will inherit our “stuff.” How alike or different are we from God?

There are actually three groups of people identified in the passage: the sheep, the goats and those who are ministered to. Discuss who you are in the parable. Do you believe that the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison will automatically inherit the kingdom? Is Matthew talking about the spiritual needs or the physical needs of people?

In the course of this study it has become painfully obvious that the U.S. is headed for or is already in a recession. This economic slowdown is already having global impact. Many

people, including ourselves, are already feeling the pinch. Often when we feel insecure about our finances, we tend to hold on to what we do have a little tighter. Are we willing to be sheep when times are hard for us?

Jeffrey Sachs writes that he has been asked dozens of times if help for Africa would backfire into an even greater population explosion, which would in turn lead to more hunger, poverty and suffering.<sup>[9]</sup> Think about this question in relation to our passage from Matthew. Is there a pragmatic way we can approach being sheep?

### **Leaving**

Pray together: Our God in Heaven, in this New Year direct our paths to your will. Give us a heart for those who are poor, remind us daily that you mourn with them in their plight, and guide us in our quest to care for them. In Christ's name, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.rc.net/saginaw/srsclare/lectio.html>, accessed January 7, 2008.

<sup>2</sup>For more information on the Millennium Development Goals go to

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

<sup>3</sup>Sachs, Jeffrey D., The End of Poverty, (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2005), 210-213.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/mdg2007.pdf>, accessed January 29, 2008, page 5.

<sup>5</sup>Sachs, 299-301.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 303.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 307.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 332.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 323. Sachs' answer to the question will be given in next week's study.

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