



## Week 3: The Intersection Between Racism and Poverty

Sunday, September 18

*I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God's call.*  
Ephesians 1:18a (CEB)

There are many statistics that cite the disparity of wealth between the white population and the Black and Latinx populations in the United States, but our family lived it and witnessed it during my daughter's time in high school.

In a town whose public school system had a high rate of white flight to private schools and neighboring town districts, we sent our daughter to a school where she was in the minority. Less than 15% of the student body was white. At her graduation, she was easily spotted as she was the only blond female in the 300-member class.

While we were by no means the richest people in town, she was one of the wealthiest students at her school — something she tried very hard to keep on the down-low. The correlation between race and poverty was not hard for her to make.

Now at college with a predominantly white student body, our daughter has realized that her fellow students don't know what she knows. They haven't lived with, studied with, played with and performed with people who don't look like them, people whose families struggle to pay rent, people for whom daily bread is not guaranteed. Her world view is different. Often, our very opinionated daughter is not very patient with her current classmates' ignorance on the causes and systemic cycles of poverty — especially when it is related to race. She is much more aware of her privilege than the average 21-year-old white woman because she lived in the midst of people who did not share her status.

It is easy to ignore and dismiss articles and statistics.

It is much harder to ignore and dismiss *people* — especially people with whom you are in community.

**Action:** Take an assessment of your communities — school, church, neighborhood, social and professional groups. What is the makeup of those social networks? What shifts can you make to be more involved in communities where people who don't look like you make up the majority?

**Prayer:** *Loving God, open the eyes of our hearts to the people around us. Help us to forge communities that make the systems of injustice in our world impossible to ignore and imperative to address. May we work with each other side by side. May they know we are Christians by our love. Amen.*



Anne Russ is an ordained pastor with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). She has a heart for small church ministry, Christian camping and the power of the Web to spread the Good News of the Gospel. Anne is a fiercely supportive theater mom, a loud laughter and a lover of good stories. She is a displaced Southerner living in New York who pastors through her online platform, [DoubtingBeliever.com](http://DoubtingBeliever.com).



## Monday, September 19

*The Lord takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people.*

*The Lord enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people:*

*“It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses.*

*What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?”*

*declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty. The Lord says, “The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, strutting along with swaying hips, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the Lord will make their scalps bald.” In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and anklets and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls. Instead of fragrance there will be a stench; instead of a sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding. Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle. The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground. Isaiah 3:13–26 (NIV)*

After pronouncing judgment against the people for their brutality against the poor, Isaiah calls out the excessive wealth displayed in the lavish dress of the women of Israel. The prophet is making a direct connection between the culture of luxury among the powerful and wealthy and the culture of misery and suffering among the poor.

This is a prophetic call for modesty — true biblical modesty, which isn’t a matter of exposed flesh but exposed wealth. For generations the church has willfully misapplied Scripture’s call to modesty. We have rules about the length of shorts worn by adolescent girls, the width of their tank-top straps and the tightness of their yoga pants, but exposed flesh was never the prophet’s concern. He was making the case that their love of high-end bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces was crushing the people and grinding the face of the poor.

Isaiah wanted those with wealth to choose love of neighbor over love of fashion. King David praised God when his cup ran over — but those who came after him never made that mistake. They never allowed God’s blessings to flow through them to other people — they simply bought a bigger cup. Creation is good — there is enough for shalom, the mutual flourishing of all living beings. But when some of us take more than we need, we consign others to a life of lack.

In America, past and present, that often happens deliberately when white people pass laws and create policies — like redlining, gentrification and funding schools through property taxes —

designed to create and maintain economic disparities benefiting white people — all the while lecturing people impoverished by these systems about “taking financial responsibility.” We need to advocate for a holy culture of economic modesty with as much vigor and intensity as we ever did for misogynistic dress codes.

**Action:** Make a modesty audit of your life. How are you displaying signs of your wealth — do you post pictures of vacations or lavish gifts on social media? Are there upcoming purchases that you could reconsider through a lens of true biblical modesty?

**Prayer:** *Giving and gracious God, we know that there is more than enough in your good creation. Help us to not take more than we need and to share what we have so that no one is in need. Amen.*



Kate Murphy is the pastor of The Grove Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. She and her husband are raising three daughters and zero pets. She enjoys reading, running, talking and procrastinating.



**Tuesday, September 20**

*The Lord loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of God's unfailing love.*  
Psalm 33:5 (NIV)

Whether we like to believe or acknowledge it, those of us who are white have participated (willingly or even unwittingly) in systems that perpetuate the cycle of poverty for our non-white neighbors. Perhaps none can so directly trace our participation than those who are descended from white veterans of World War II.

While there are numerous ways black veterans were prevented from receiving the benefits of the GI Bill ([you can learn more here](#)), none was so instrumental in helping to create the wealth gap between white and black that exists today as the VA home loan program. The VA guaranteed the loans, but did not administer them, so any institution who chose to refuse loans to Black people was free to do so.

According to historian Ira Katznelson in the book *When Affirmative Action Was White*, in 1947, only two of the more than 3,200 VA-guaranteed home loans in 13 Mississippi cities went to Black borrowers. In New York and the northern New Jersey suburbs, fewer than 100 of the 67,000 mortgages insured by the GI bill supported home purchases by non-white people.

If the house your white grandfather bought in 1950 Levittown (Long Island or Pennsylvania) for \$4,500 under the GI bill is worth \$400,000 today, your family wealth is going to be greater than your friend whose Black grandfather couldn't even get a loan at the time.

No matter how progressive, inclusive and anti-racist you think you are, if you look like me, you are benefiting from racist systems designed to benefit us. May we not let denial, guilt or lack of understanding keep us from working to dismantle these systems.

**Action:** Educate yourself (and others) about the unjust and unbalanced systems that have caused the racial disparity in generational wealth. Knowing they exist is imperative to reversing their effects.

**Prayer:** *God of justice, help us put aside our pride and any preconceived notions we may be harboring when it comes to systems of oppression. May we be open to learning, growing and changing to help bring about your Kin-dom here on earth. Amen.*



Anne Russ is an ordained pastor with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). She has a heart for small church ministry, Christian camping and the power of the Web to spread the Good News of the Gospel. Anne is a fiercely supportive theater mom, a loud laughher and a lover of good stories. She is a displaced Southerner living in New York who pastors through her online platform, [DoubtingBeliever.com](http://DoubtingBeliever.com).



### Wednesday, September 21

*So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 1 Corinthians 12:25–26 (NIV)*

When any part of the body of Christ is suffering, we all suffer. Today the suffering is being disproportionately borne by people of color. Knowingly and unknowingly, we have formed great division in the body. Political and financial leaders have created a racial wealth gap in this country that exacerbates the already-disproportionate suffering people of color experience.

BIPOC brothers and sisters among us are disproportionately killed by guns and Covid, laid off, evicted, stopped at the border when seeking asylum and plagued by widening educational disparities. Poverty and food insecurity are rising. Survival is day-to-day life for too many. Jillian Hanesworth, Buffalo, New York's poet laureate and an East Side resident, said after the May 14 shooting of 10 Black individuals at an East Side supermarket, "I think a lot of people, especially on the East Side of Buffalo, have been forced to live in a perpetual state of survival. And it's always something. If it's not something with the police, it's something in the water. If it's not the water, it's public health. It's literacy. It's crime. It's housing. All of this is a symptom of poverty. ... So, we have been stuck in this state of survival. We don't exist to survive. We can demand more. We are owed more."

It is well past time when we should live in a world where all parts of the body are of equal concern for each other. Achieving a body with no division may seem like a dream, but we have been called by God to strive for it. Let us strive forward together.

**Action:** Educate yourself and advocate! Contact your Bread for the World organizer (find your organizer [here](#)) and ask her/him to lead a group you're a part of in the Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation. To learn about the simulation, go to [bread.org/library/racial-wealth-gap-learning-simulation](https://bread.org/library/racial-wealth-gap-learning-simulation). Get involved in the Poor People's Campaign. Learn more at [poorpeoplescampaign.org](https://poorpeoplescampaign.org). Both organizations have good advocacy suggestions, actions you can participate in and legislative policy priorities.

**Prayer:** *Oh God, suffering is all around us and we lament the pain and the grief that comes with it. Open our ears so that we may hear the message of those who are hurting. Open our eyes so that we may see injustices down to their root causes. Open our minds so that we may better understand the complexities of unjust systems and situations and then see ways forward that honor those who suffer. Use us, God, to help you achieve a world without division, where all parts are honored equally. Amen.*



Wendy Gist has been the mission advocate for Hunger, Poverty and Peacemaking Issues for the Presbyteries of San Fernando and San Gabriel in the Los Angeles area for the past 16 years. From 1994–2000, she and her husband, David, were mission co-workers in Nicaragua. They both worked for CEPAD, the Council of Evangelical Churches in Nicaragua. Wendy’s primary job was being a delegation coordinator for countless groups coming to learn about Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan culture. Wendy is also the proud mother of two young adults, both of whom were born in Nicaragua. She and her husband have recently become short-term foster parents for unaccompanied minors coming across the border, which is a whole new adventure. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, traveling and being out in nature.





**Thursday, September 22**

*If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Philippians 2:1–5 (NRSV)*

One of my favorite partnerships I experienced growing up was when my father, a pastor for the predominantly white Presbyterian Church in our town in the deep South, worked with a few Black ministers from different denominations to coordinate a church service where all our churches would worship together. This was perhaps one of the only times where any church in Lake Charles, Louisiana, had a pretty even split of Black and white worshippers. After worship we would all gather around tables for fried catfish. It was a partnership in the Spirit that I'm sure made the Lord's joy complete!

As I got older, I began to learn what a church budget was. Our church budget was a constant discussion topic, and at times, seemed to be all that some church members could focus on. Meanwhile, friends from a local Latinx church (where finances were tight) would tell me about all the work their church did: feeding those who were hungry and putting on a toy drive for lower-income families at Christmas. Perhaps we can all learn from the small, lower-income churches, put our selfish ambition aside and look to the interest of others rather than our own. It is time to join Christ at their table where we are called to live out what the world calls impossible! One mind, one love and partnership through the Spirit.

**Action:** Develop a partnership through the Spirit with a congregation different than yours. Remember that you are not there to help, but rather to experience and learn while worshipping among others.

**Prayer:** *Oh Lord, we thank you for your call to live as one body through you. We ask that you lead us to help make your joy complete through our actions and the love we have for one another. Help us remember to look for the interests of others and to be the light for a dark world. As we face a world filled with hate, we are reminded to love one another just as you love us, oh God. Bring us all under one partnership through your Spirit. Amen.*



Aaron Seay is beginning his second year of his Master of Divinity hybrid program at Duke Divinity School. He is a preacher's kid who felt a call to ministry halfway through college after working as a leader for Mo-Ranch youth conferences for several years and takes pride in working as coordinator of youth ministry for the Presbytery of New Covenant. He currently lives in Houston with his dog, Easton.

**Friday, September 23**

*You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace.* Isaiah 55:12a (ESV)

The author of Isaiah 55 is speaking to a people in exile and explaining to them what they can hope to do and to be once that exile is done. He is extolling them to keep hope and faith in a difficult time because of God's presence and action in their lives. I wonder what it sounded like to those exiled folks.

For people in poverty, a voice of hope can sound like a lie or something unattainable because of the circumstances of daily life that are without the necessary resources for thriving. For people of color a voice speaking this sort of hope might be unbelievable because it is not a reality in life now. For those who face poverty or racism in daily life, there are many needs that go unmet because of lack of access or discrimination. When poverty and racism meet, things are compounded and even more difficult. Singing a song of joy might seem completely out of the realm of possibility.

Our hope is that living into Jesus' command to love will alleviate poverty and end racism. For those of us with the privilege of wealth or of whiteness this love means we must be willing to name our privilege and use it to assist those who have neither. For all of us living Jesus' command means we will one day live to "go out with joy and be led forth in peace" in a world where poverty and racism are no more.

**Action:** Read some stories of [the PC\(USA\) Committee on Self-Development of People](#) and the impact this work has in helping many people of color overcome poverty and share a story in your community.

**Prayer:** *God of the marginalized, put feet to our prayers and lead us to lift up and listen to voices that are not being heard. Help us to use whatever power and privilege we may possess to create a better world for all. Amen.*



The Rev. Jessica Dixon is a transitional pastor/intentional interim serving Old Tennent Presbyterian Church in Manalapan, New Jersey. She is a transitional ministry teacher, and on the Team of Three (leadership team) for the Transitional Ministry Education Consortium. She has served as transitional pastor to churches in Chicago Presbytery, Indian Nations Presbytery (Norman, Oklahoma) and now in the new Presbytery of the Coastlands. A native of Denver and a graduate of McCormick Seminary, she has loved all the places she has had a chance to see and the ways she has had a chance to serve.



**Saturday, September 24**

*For you always have the poor with you. Mark 14:7 (NRSV)*

As a child, I grew up with the refrain, “We don't see color.” It was often repeated by adults in my community who meant well, who thought they simplified the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s message for children's ears. My parents shared with us the music of Peter, Paul and Mary; we watched “The Cosby Show”; and we had an extra set of grandparents who were a gay couple. Iconic white middle-class liberals in a notoriously conservative pocket of the United States.

This refrain of “we don't see color” echoed throughout my life. As I grew, I studied history and social studies, and I earned degrees in Political Science and Political Theory. I realized the narrative that I had been taught about race, color, creed, etc., being “meaningless” was a fallacy. My elders meant well, but they oversimplified the lessons learned by those who fought in the civil rights movement. As the scales fell from my eyes, I learned about the insidious nature of environmental racism, housing discrimination and voter rights denials. In course after course, from story to story, I realized that the colorblindness that I had so professed was part of the more immense evil of systemic racism.

A parallel between the oversimplification of the Rev. Dr. King's message to a single sentence, and Jesus saying, “The poor will always be with you” in the Gospel of Mark, is not lost on me. After many years of thinking about the intersection of race and poverty, these two stories overlap effortlessly. The Rev. Dr. King reminded us often that we cannot ignore differences away, pay our way out of disparity or simplify the narrative of poverty into sound bites.

Christ wasn't affirming poverty as a natural state of being when he said the poor will always be with us. He reminded his followers to take moments of joy in their lives and refreshment before coming back to the fight. To be restored in the spirit so that they could dismantle the systems that cause suffering. Jesus tells Judas the poor will be with you always only once. He repeatedly tells those who follow him that they are commissioned to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the afflicted and visit the imprisoned. The poor are with us is not a mandate to continue to oppress and discriminate, but rather to address the needs as generations come to pass.

**Action:** Consider where you have accepted things as they are: ignored needs that could be addressed, pled colorblindness, taken hard-heartedness that poverty is an unanswerable issue? How has your perception of race and poverty changed throughout your life?

**Prayer:** *God of the poor, lead us out of complacency and move us away from well-meaning teachings that simply aren't true. May we not shrug our shoulders at issues of race and poverty, but continue to work for peace and justice for all God's children. Amen.*



The Rev. Kimberly Reinholz is an Episcopal priest, currently between calls, most recently the associate rector of Grace and Holt Trinity Church in Richmond, Virginia. She currently lives in New Jersey with her clergy spouse, two kids and a rescue dog. She has a passion for working with youth and young adults and believes that the church isn't dying, rather changing. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be.