# Worship resources

Act on Poverty

The following resources can be used in an Act on Poverty service at any time of year. You are welcome to use or adapt these materials as appropriate for your context.

You will find below:
1. Suggested readings
2. Notes for a sermon or talk
3. Prayers
4. Suggested Hymns and Worship Songs
5. Where to go for more ideas

## 1. Suggested readings

### Amos 5.11-15 and 21-24 - Let justice roll down like water

What can we do to more deeply attend to injustice and inequality in our contexts? How can we identify where things have gone wrong in the structures and systems that surround us?

### Mark 2.3-17 - Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

What freedoms do you have to choose where you place yourself? Where do you think Jesus would place himself in your community? Where are we called to be?

### Mark 4.30-32 - The smallest of all the seeds on earth

What part can we play in sowing the seeds of change? Where can we see signs of the kingdom in our communities? How can we work together to grow God's kingdom of justice and compassion?

### Luke 4.14-21 - He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor

What would it look like for each of us to join in with Jesus' proclamation of good news for those experiencing poverty and marginalisation? What gives us hope that we can act to end poverty?

### Luke 10.25-37 - Who is my neighbour?

How can we address brokenness and division in our context? What are we doing to show love to our neighbours? Who do we 'pass by on the other side'?

## Notes for a sermon or talk

These notes draw together points that you can use in a sermon or talk on poverty, drawing on the gospels of Luke and Matthew.

### The Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37)

- This may be a well-known story for many people in your context but encourage your listeners to hear it afresh. Perhaps invite them to turn to the person next to them and discuss what stands out to them in this parable. What do you think the different people in this story were feeling? What motivated their actions?
- We don't know exactly why the Priest and the Levite of the story were so keen to hurry on past the man who had been assaulted but perhaps their response came at least in part from **fear**. Were they afraid that the man had already died and that approaching him might break religious rules around the handling of dead bodies? Were they concerned that the robbers may still be nearby and that they might become victims too? Did they fear that the man was pretending and that this was a trick of some kind? Whatever the case, the question that was at the front of their minds was: **'If I stop for this man what will happen to me?'** (See Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., 'I've Been to the Mountaintop', a speech delivered in 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee.)

- If we are honest with ourselves perhaps we can identify with this instinct for self-preservation. Jesus' story shows us how that question - 'what will happen to me?' - can lead to problems. **When we draw boundaries around our love and concern, focusing only on ourselves and our priorities, we become people who 'pass by on the other side'. We protect ourselves at a cost to someone else.**

- **Many of us rely on people in low-paying jobs or situations of forced labour, to service our needs**. It is perhaps easier for us if these people are unseen - we can 'pass by' untroubled. Some aspects of our present-day economic and political systems increase the likelihood that we will overlook others in need. For example, the supply chains that bring us food or clothes can be hard to unpick and understand. We don't see underpaid garment workers when we select our clothes for the day or farmers in debt bondage when we make our morning cup of tea.
- **Those with power in our society can encourage division by suggesting that a particular group is a threat.** Political campaigns stir up our need for self-preservation, suggesting that there is a choice between 'us' and 'them'. If we help someone else, we are led to ask, then 'what will happen to me?'

- The person who stops to help is a Samaritan and the implication of the story is that the injured man was Jewish. Jesus would have been well aware of the hostility between Samaritans and Jewish people in his context. Just as the Samaritan crosses the road to help, so Jesus takes his listeners by the hand and crosses the division between Samaritan and Jewish communities. In this way, the parable pushes back against the audience's expectations. Do we need to be open to a similar challenge to our preconceptions and biases? **Can we learn to tell a different story about divisions in our communities?**

## Can we end poverty? (Luke 4.14-21 and Matthew 26.6-13)

- In the reading from Luke Jesus has just returned from the 'wilderness', where he has resisted a series of temptations. Amongst these temptations is the offer that Jesus could be ruler of 'all the kingdoms of the world', if only he will turn away from God the Father and worship the one who tempts him instead.
- It is no accident that Jesus reads aloud a particular section from Isaiah. Jesus has been anointed by the Spirit in baptism and has come out of the wilderness with a mission: to show and enact what God's power is for. In contrast to the tempter's idea that power is about having authority over people, Isaiah's words tell us that **God's power is directed towards the liberation and healing of people who are oppressed and suffering. This is what I am here to do, says Jesus. This is the Good News.**
- Jesus aligns himself with the voices of the prophets who proclaim God's message of hope and promise of justice.

- Theologian Emmanuel Katongole has worked with communities in Africa where violent conflict and poverty lead to daily struggles. His research, however, has shown that the depiction of such communities as 'without hope' is far from the truth. Instead, he suggests, it is here we see the complexity of holding on to hope in the most desperate of situations.

- **Katongole says that hope as a practice involves wrestling, struggling, righteous anger, protesting, and mourning. Our hope is heard in the raising of our voices to God and worldly powers, as we ask "why" and demand justice. It is heard too in the proclamation of a different reality: 'the year of the Lord's favour'.**
- But can we realistically hope for something as radical as an end to poverty? Shouldn't we set our sights a bit lower? After all, doesn't Jesus himself say that "the poor" are always with us? (Matthew 26.6-13). In this passage a woman anoints Jesus' feet with 'very costly ointment'. The disciples call this a 'waste' and point out that the ointment could have been sold and the money given to those in poverty. Jesus replies: 'She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.'
- More than one political leader in recent years has used this phrase 'you will always have the poor with you' to suggest that social action on poverty can only go so far.
- The trouble with this interpretation of what Jesus says is that it misses **the radical scale and scope of the promises of God** that we see in our reading from Luke. Jesus does not announce himself as the one who has come to free only some of the oppressed, or bring good news to some people in poverty. Throughout the Gospels, on the contrary, **Jesus repeatedly stresses that the love, justice and joy of the kingdom are for everyone and that this kingdom is breaking into the world here and now, through him and his disciples**. Jesus is the one who turns the tables, upsets systems, speaks up against exploitation and oppression. Jesus defeats death itself! It's very hard to imagine that he would shrug with resignation as he said, 'the poor are always with you'. So what can we hope for then?

- Liz Theoharis, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign in the USA, has highlighted a connection that it is easy to miss. 'The poor are always with you' is found in Deuteronomy 15, where the rules are set out for the sabbatical or jubilee year: a time of remission of debts, scheduled to take place every seven years. Theoharis points out that Deuteronomy says both 'there will … be no one in need among you' (15.4) and 'there will never cease to be some in need' (i.e. the poor are always with you, 15.11).
- How can both be true? Theoharis suggests that 15.11, **'the poor are always with you' refers to the situation when *the world is not as it should be***. **When we are not following God's ways, then poverty will persist.** The year of Jubilee is a step towards mending the world, bringing it closer to God's kingdom where there will be 'no one in need among you'. The idea that every seven years we should wipe out debts and start again is radical enough in our context of credit cards and payday loans. For Theoharis the Deuteronomy passage is actually saying this doesn't go far enough. This is only a sign, a beginning, of what we should set our sights on.
- So, when Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 15.11 it is to say: **this is the way the world will continue to be if you do not follow God fully, extravagantly, expansively, believing in changes that the world tells you cannot be made - the forgiveness of all debts forever, the abolition of need.**
- The woman with the ointment is then perhaps a better witness to this vision because of the extravagance of her gesture, the recklessness of her love. **That extravagant love is shown to Jesus as one who lived in poverty, knew what it was to be refugee, knew hunger and injustice, who suffered and who was to die. This boundless love and plenty is a sign of what we should hope for, for everyone.**

## Prayers

**A prayer for help to live out our prophetic calling**
God of justice and righteousness, who spoke through the prophet Amos,
Help us to speak truth to power.
Help us to attend to and understand inequality in our community.
Lift up the voices of those excluded from power and give us ears to hear them.
Challenge us to become prophetic speakers in your name and to empower others to do so. Inspire us with your Spirit that we may work together for a more just world.
In Jesus name, Amen

**The Church Action on Poverty Prayer by Urzula Glienecke**
Holy Trinity, you give dignity to all
Remind us that we all are treasured by you
Loving God, you lift up the lowly
Remind us of those among us whose value is not seen
Jesus Christ, you bring good news to the poor
Remind us to reach out for justice for all
Holy Spirit, you free the captives, you challenge and inspire us
Empower us to build a society where everyone belongs.
Amen.

**A variation on the Beatitudes by Deacon Eunice Attwood, Church at the Margins Officer for the Methodist Church.**

Blessed are those who challenge unjust economic structures, for they will be signs of hope.
Blessed are those who amplify the voices and stories of others, for they will learn the wisdom of interdependence.
Blessed are those who recognize their vulnerability and brokenness, for they will resist being the saviours and heroes of other people's stories.
Blessed are those who respond to the needs of others, without the need for recognition or reward, for they serve Christ himself.
Blessed are those who protest and campaign, for they draw attention to injustice.
Blessed are those who nurture friendship amongst diverse people, for they will become an inclusive community.
Blessed are those who rage with anger, for they challenge us to face uncomfortable truths.
Blessed are the curious, for they will see beyond the answers of the powerful.
Blessed are those who celebrate the worth, dignity and value of every human being, for they will recognize the face of God.
Blessed are those who work for racial justice, for they challenge the sin of racism and know the true richness and diversity of God's image.
Blessed are those who enable the leadership of others, for they sustain the present and the future.
Rejoice and be glad, for those who truly listen and learn from people experiencing poverty will share in the liberating, life-giving message of the gospel of Christ.

**Adapted from material produced by the Joint Public Issues Team as part of their Reset the Debt campaign in 2020-22.**

Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

As God's people, let us reaffirm our hope and our task.

God's kingdom is coming
Proclaim Jubilee
For those pushed into poverty
Proclaim Jubilee
For those weighed down by debt
Proclaim Jubilee
For those living in fear
Proclaim Jubilee
For those treated as less than human
Proclaim Jubilee
For those who have lost hope
Proclaim Jubilee
For those held captive by cynicism
Proclaim Jubilee
For all who need to hear good news
Proclaim Jubilee
May our proclamations and our prayers be accompanied by advocacy and action.
God's kingdom come!
Amen.

## Suggested hymns and worship songs

- All Are Welcome (Marty Haugen).
- Bread for the World (Bernadette Farrell).
- Christ Be Our Light (Bernadette Farrell).
- God of all comfort, God of compassion (Joel Payne and Matt Weeks). Created for Christian Aid's 75th Anniversary. Available to listen to **here**.
- God of Justice (Tim Hughes).
- Global Neighbours (Fischy Music). Created in partnership with Christian Aid, particularly suitable for an all-age or children's service. Available to listen to **here**.
- The Kingdom of God is Justice and Peace (Taizé).
- Show Me How to Stand for Justice (Martin E. Leckebusch)
- The Song of Kingdom Come (Paul Field and Martin John Nicholls). Created in partnership with Christian Aid. Available to listen to **here**. You can also download the song together with a call to worship **here**.
- Speak Up (Fischy Music). Created in partnership with Christian Aid, particularly suitable for an all-age or children's service. Available to listen to **here**.
- Till All the Jails are Empty (Carl P. Daw, Jr.)
- Tell Out My Soul (Timothy Dudley-Smith).
- We Lay Our Broken World (Anna Briggs).
- When I Needed a Neighbour (Sydney Carter). Written for Christian Aid in 1965 and re-recorded for Christian Aid's 75th Anniversary. Available to listen to and download **here**.

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