

Study Guide – Just Women, Fall 2017

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Introduction

Welcome to *Just Women*! We hope this leader's guide will help you plan meaningful study sessions using the Fall 2017 issue of the magazine.

In welcoming us to this issue of *Just Women*, Chesla Nickelson reminds us that the United States is number one in the number of men, women, and children who are housed in our nations jails and prisons. In 2015, the total number of persons incarcerated was 2,173,800 with a disproportionate number of those individuals being persons of color. The war on drugs and zero tolerance policies that feed the school-to-prison pipeline has contributed to steadily growing numbers of incarcerated juveniles and adults. This has resulted in us living in an age of mass incarceration.

Coinciding with October, the Month of Mass Incarceration Resistance, the fall issue of *Just Women* will examine the destructive practices of the incarceration system and abuses of the legal system. This study guide offers four sessions. The first will focus on *Called by God: From Serving Time to Serving God* by Sheila Spencer. In this session, we will hear the story of LuWanna Scott's journey from homelessness and drug addiction to serving as an ordained Disciples minister and ambassador to the facility that once provided her shelter. The second session will focus on *Behind Bars; A Day in the Life of a Prison Chaplain* by Lydia Land. In this session, we will have the opportunity to gain insight into a typical day of a prison chaplain. The third session will focus on *Restorative Justice: Wholeness and Healing Through Prison Ministry*, by Nora Jacob. This session will inform us of the practices of Restorative Justice and challenge us to be a part of this process that focuses on reconciliation and wholeness rather than mere punishment. The final session will focus on *Prison Activism: This is Church Too*, by Susan Hudson McBride. In this session we will share the story of one church's ministry that includes it's mission to reform the incarceration system in Tennessee.

Also included in this study guide are four devotions for those who want to connect with information in *Just Women* but do not engage in the full study each time they meet. These devotions introduce the themes of the feature articles that can be read more thoroughly outside of the group meeting.

Preparation

In preparing for the study sessions outlined here, have an individual subscription for each woman in your group. If you need more magazines, go to <http://www.discipleswomen.org>, and follow the link to *Just Women*.

Read through the Fall 2017 edition and familiarize yourself with how the theme is developed in the articles. Ask your group members to read the article that you will be focusing on *before* your meetings so everyone will be prepared to participate in the discussion.

Session 1

Supplies

- Copies of *Called by God: From Serving Time to Serving God* by Sheila Spencer, page 4.
- Bible
- Computer with internet access

In Preparation for Your Meeting

Prior to your meeting review the video *Horizon House LuWanna Video Courtesy of Eli Lilly & Company* at https://youtu.be/dkFj5p_9H6g. Consider what materials from **Going Deeper** you might use.

Opening Prayer

Let us pray:

Jesus, our Master, meet us while we walk in the way
and long to reach the heavenly country;
give us hope so that, following Your light we may keep the way of righteousness
and never wander away into the darkness of this world's night,
while You, who are the Way, the Truth, and the Life,
are shining within us;
for Your own name's sake. Amen.

Mozabric Prayer (Spanish Liturgy)¹

Scripture Focus

Luke 4: 14 – 30

Background

The Gospel of Luke shares the good news that Israel's hope of salvation is extended to the entire world through the agency of Jesus Christ. Jesus brings hope to the marginalized and oppressed, to the voiceless and powerless who are on the fringes of society. It is the good news of reversals and restoration.

Jesus begins his public ministry in his hometown of Nazareth in Chapter 4 of the gospel. Here Jesus is revealed as prophet and Messiah. Filled with the Spirit, Jesus proclaims God's kingdom and embodies God's shalom in acts of healing, forgiveness, and hospitality. In the synagogue, Jesus reads Isaiah 61: 1 – 2 and 58:6.

¹ L.E. McCullough and Elizabeth Bansavage. *Bridge to the Sacred: A Collection of Interfaith Prayers*. Woodbridge, NJ: Silver Spear Publications, LLC, 2016. Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 484 of 1181.

He interprets the scripture as his commissioning for ministry. Those hearing understand how the message applies to them. However, they are confused by the words of the man they know as “Joseph’s son” as he extends God’s promises and God’s hope to outsiders, to those beyond Israel. The congregation responds with hostility and try to kill Jesus.

In this passage, Luke shows the direction of Jesus’ ministry and life.

Questions

- Read Luke 4: 14 – 30. How does Jesus begin his ministry? How does the congregation respond? Those who heard Jesus, understood that God loves them and that God’s salvation was available for them. They rejected that God might love outsiders. Who do we suspect are unworthy of God’s love and outside of God’s salvific plan?
- Watch the video *Horizon House LuWanna Video Courtesy of Eli Lilly & Company*. It can be found at https://youtu.be/dkFj5p_9H6g. Discuss the following: What was LuWanna’s early life like? What resulted in LuWanna leaving home? What was LuWanna’s thinking about her choices? Why did LuWanna go to Horizon House? What is your response to LuWanna’s story? How does LuWanna believe that community is formed? What does community mean to you?
- Why was Scott sentenced to the Indiana Women’s Prison? What insights does her sentencing provide into the judicial system? What happened to Scott while she was in prison? How did her connection with Light of the World Christian Church help sustain her?
- How are mental health concerns another issue in the criminal justice system? How are mental health issues exacerbated by time in jail or prison? What is recidivism? How does the lack of adequate support networks contribute to recidivism? What “additional bars” do individuals who have released from jail or prison face?
- Drug addiction is a significant issue in LuWanna Scott’s life. How did drug addiction contribute to Scott’s initial arrest? How did it contribute to her being in and out of jail between 2001 and 2002? What resources are available in your community for individuals with drug addictions? Why is it important to address underlying addictions when considering the needs of individuals who have been arrested and who have been incarcerated? What is different when drug addiction is considered primarily as a mental health issue rather than primarily as a criminal issue?
- Scott identifies three practical ways to support women who have been incarcerated as they return to their communities: 1) ministry of presence, 2) empathy, and 3) make connections. Define ministry of presence. How do you and your congregation engage in this type of ministry? Discuss how empathy differs from sympathy. Scott states, “sympathy can be disempowering.” How so? How does empathy help us to engage with others while sympathy may continue to separate us? How is empathy more challenging than sympathy? What

- organizations/ groups in your community are already serving individuals in jails and prisons? How might you connect with these? LuWanna Scott states, “It’s dangerous, when you have no hope and believe that not one else cares – not even God.” How do these three ways of supporting women who are incarcerated and who are returning to their communities help provide hope? What are concrete ways that you and your congregation are providing hope for individuals who might feel hopeless? Scott acknowledges that when she first went to Horizon House she responded sarcastically as she had built walls of mistrust. What contributed to those walls of mistrust? Have you ever encountered someone’s “walls”? What was your reaction? How do we help dismantle walls of mistrust?
- What do you feel when you think about ministering with women who are or who have been incarcerated? What are the stereotypes about women who are or who have been incarcerated? What do you see as obstacles to ministering with women who have been incarcerated? How are stereotypes related to those obstacles?

Going Deeper

1) Consider further study on the issue of the impact of the War on Drugs and incarceration of black women by reading Stephanie R. Bush-Baskette. *Misguided Justice: The War on Drugs and the Incarceration of Black Women*. IUniverse, 2010.

2) Explore the following websites and consider how these programs address issues that are raised in Sheila Spencer’s article *Called by God: From Serving Time to Serving God*.

- <https://www.horizonhouse.cc> Horizon House
- <http://www.indystar.com/story/life/2016/02/19/penn-place-new-home-indianapolis-homeless-housing-first/79829682/>

- The article for Penn Place describes a new model of addressing homelessness. On the site it states: [Penn Place is] billed as a [housing-first](#) model, wherein the most vulnerable are housed, then surrounded by the support services they need to manage chronic health conditions, navigate the red tape involved in getting veterans benefits or other government entitlements, and learn how to live in a community setting again, with its rights and responsibilities....It's a coordinated care approach that the affiliated agencies say gives the individuals involved the best chance for success by addressing the root causes of their homelessness in a safe, stable environment.

Housing First

A newer model in the human services and social policy that immediately provides permanent affordable housing for homeless individuals rather than through a series of levels of housing alternatives that ends in independent living.

Closing Prayer

Close with Disciples Women's Benediction or have one of the group members close with prayer.

Devotion

Scripture

Luke 4:14-30

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸“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,

¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” ²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. ²⁵But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers^l in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way

Sexually abused from age 3, LuWanna Scott ran away when her mother was unable to protect her from further abuse. Raped and impregnated at age 13 LuWanna did not trust that anyone would help her, so she ran away again. At age 22, LuWanna had three children, a minimum wage job and a drug addiction that would eventually result in the loss that low paying job.

Homeless, addicted to drugs and feeling hopeless, in 1999 LuWanna wrote a bad check so that she might buy cocaine and commit suicide. She was arrested. Between 2001 and 2002, her drug use continued and she was in and out of jail for violating probation. In 2003, Scott returned to her mother's home so that she could help her recover from surgery. Despite having received permission from her probation officer to make the move, a petition to revoke probation was filed and LuWanna again appeared in court. Although she was innocent of the charge, the judge looked at LuWanna and said, "You'll never amount to anything anyway . . . just throw her away," and sentenced her to Indiana Women's Prison for 103 days.

This was LuWanna's last time in jail. When sentenced LuWanna states, "she realized she would rather be locked up with God than to be released, even from an unjust penal system, back to a life of homelessness, using drugs, and being battered. She believed that God would protect her, and she was going to do the time."

While in prison, LuWanna became ill, temporarily blind, and unable to walk. She spent her time immersed in videotapes of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In prison, LuWanna states that her connection with Light of the World Christian Church in Indianapolis never stopped. Shortly before her release in 2003, LuWanna states, "I woke up and felt an overwhelming sense of the love of God in a dark space, and it never let me go, and I wept. I forgave myself, forgave my mother, forgave and released my past – and eventually would go and make amends to my own daughters." On the day she was released in 2003, she went immediately to Light of the World Church. She fell and kissed the ground, rushed to the altar, and worshipped and thanked God for that moment. Today, LuWanna Scott is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and an ambassador of Horizon House, a ministry that provides the venue for LuWanna to share her story.

Today in this remarkable story, the scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing. May we continue to proclaim the good news that The Spirit of the Lord is upon us as through Christ Jesus we are called to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free. In our words and in our deeds may we proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Let us pray:

Jesus, our Master, meet us while we walk in they way
and long to reach the heavenly country;
give us hope so that, following Your light we may keep the way of righteousness
and never wander away into the darkness of this world's night,

while You, who are the Way, the Truth, and the Life,
and shining within us;
for Your own name's sake. Amen.

Mozabic Prayer (Spanish Liturgy).

Session 2

Supplies

- Copies of *Behind Bars: A Day in the Life of a Prison Chaplain* by Lydia Land, page 7.
- Bible

Icebreaker: *Your Typical Day*

When everyone arrives read:

Look at this day!

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course lies all the verities
and realities of your existence:

the bliss of growth;
the glory of action;
the splendor of achievement;
for yesterday is but a dream,
and tomorrow is only a vision;

Today, well lived, makes every yesterday
a dream of happiness
and every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Salutation to the Dawn (Kalidasa, Indian poet, 5th Century CE)²

Discuss the following:

- Describe your typical day
- What does this poem mean to you?
- How would you define: 1) the bliss of growth, 2) the glory of action, and 3) splendor of achievement.
- How would you define a “well lived” day?

Scripture Focus

Matthew 25: 31 - 46

Background

The gospel of Matthew is primarily concerned with the kingdom of God. Its focus is God’s presence and activity on earth as it anticipates the day when all evil is

² McCullough and Bansavage. Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 484 of 1181

banished. It presupposes that the blessings of the kingdom of heaven requires obedience to the teachings of God's Son. Discipleship is necessary and costly in a world that is hostile to God's reign.

Our verses, 25: 31 – 46, falls within a section of the book that addresses the Last Days, that time when God's will is established and goodness, righteousness, and peace (shalom) prevails. These verses address readiness and urge listeners to be ready. Following two parables that address this theme, chapter 25 ends with a story of the judgment day. Here we are instructed that professing "Jesus as Lord and Savior" must be matched by actions of mercy and compassion. Citizenship in the kingdom of God is seen in our engagement in concern for and relationships with the "least of these."

Questions

- Read Matthew 25: 31 – 46. Describe what is happening in this passage. What is the criterion that Jesus uses for judgment? How are individuals in prison among the "least of these"?
- How was Lydia Land called to prison ministry? What draws Land to engage in prison ministry? Describe Land's typical day. What stood out in her description of her day and her ministry? What surprised you?
- Land believes that poverty results in individuals ending up in prison, a place that no one wants to be. According to Land what is the poverty that leads to prison? Do you agree or disagree? Why? What is the cure for: 1) the poverty of parents, 2) the poverty of self-esteem, 3) the poverty of hope, and 4) the poverty of opportunity? Be specific in what can be done to overcome each type of poverty.
- What is an "old school" correctional chaplain? What frustrates Land about today's call of prison chaplain? Do you think people sometimes believe that the life of discipleship involves having "holidays and weekends" off? How so? How "holidays and weekends off" differ from Sabbath break?
- Land speaks of serving as chaplain to correctional officers and other staff. She indicates the pain of caring for staff when a fellow staff member commits suicide. She states that there are high divorce rates among correctional staff. What do you believe contributes to the stress of working as a correctional officer? What does Land identify as factors that make the job of correctional staff stressful? She states, "you have to have faith in order to work in a prison." Do you agree or disagree? Why? What is the outcome of people not having faith when they work in prison?
- Re-read the section on worship in prison. What surprises you in this section? What do you believe are the challenges of supervising 20 different faith groups? Why is it important for individuals who are incarcerated to have the opportunity to practice his or her faith? What do you think Land means when she states, "living a life of faith can make all the differences in helping inmates do their time – not their time doing them"?
- Land states she does a great deal of grief counseling. How does she define this? What role does grace and forgiveness play in holding persons accountable for their actions?

- Land speaks to the role of local congregations in prison ministries. What are some of the ministry opportunities she suggests? What are the opportunities that are available to your congregation?
- Having discussed Land's day, what characterizes: 1) the bliss of growth, 2) the glory of action, and 3) splendor of achievement. How would you define a "well lived" day?

Closing Prayer

Let us pray:

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer
Episcopal Church.

Devotion

Scripture

Matthew 25:31-46

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

³¹ “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. ³² 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, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ 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; ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ 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.’ ³⁷ 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? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ 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.’ ⁴¹ 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; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ 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.’ ⁴⁴ 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?’ ⁴⁵ 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.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Chaplain Lydia Land states that poverty is alive and well in the world. Every week, “poverty of parents brings angry young adults to prison. Poverty of self-esteem brings people who have been abused in every way you can and cannot imagine. Poverty of hope brings people who have addictions trying to numb suffering. Poverty of opportunity brings the person who has a rap sheet a mile long, yet has become institutionalized to the extent that existing on the outside is impossible.”

Lord, help us to find ways to end poverty in all its manifestations. Help us to claim and proclaim the goodness of the Lord who is generous and blesses abundantly. Help us to empower and equip parents so that they may meet the needs of their children. Help us to communicate the worth and value of each person so that they may know that they are made in the image of God and beloved. Help us to be instruments of hope so that apathy and hopelessness can be overcome. Help us to open doors welcoming and inviting all individuals into opportunities that will allow them to become what God intends them to be.

Chaplain Land writes, “you have to have faith in order to work in a prison.” She states, “Living a life of faith can make all the difference in helping inmates do their time – not their time doing them. The odds are good that if an inmate has been practicing his or her faith on the inside, they will not be back.” She speaks to the importance of forgiveness and of facing our grief.

Lord, help us to be people of faith, to live each day responding to your presence in this world and working for the coming of your kingdom. Strengthen those who find themselves in difficult places where their faith is challenged. Help them to believe in the midst of doubt that you are there and that you care. Help us to know that we are forgiven and help us to forgive others, even ourselves. Be with those who struggle with grief over choices that they have made. Let them know your love and grace, let them experience your mercy and compassion so that they may believe that they are worthy of your forgiveness.

Chaplain Land writes, “What is your church’s ministry to the incarcerated? Instead of trying to decide what color the paint needs to be in the church bathroom, join the “Walk to Emmaus” ministry and go with them into the prison for four days to show the love of Jesus to the inmates. Have the youth bake about 100 cookies, bag them, and donate them to the local jail. Tell your minister to preach on Jesus’ teaching, “When I was in prison, you visited me.” ... Encourage the congregation to nurture those who have family members who are incarcerated; in other words, “be” with those in your congregation who are “doing time” with a loved one. Be a part of the Prison Fellowship program “Angel Tree” which helps get Christmas presents to the children of the incarcerated by having a Christmas party for them at your church fellowship hall.”

Lord, let us seek to visit those in prison so that when we stand before you we may hear, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Session 3

Supplies

- Copies of *Restorative Justice: Wholeness and Healing Through Prison Ministry*, by Nora Jacob, page 10.
- Bible

Opening Prayer

Let us pray:

We offer our thanks to thee
For sending thy only Son to die for us all,
In a world divided by color bars
How sweet a thing it is to know
That in thee we all belong to one family.

There are times when we, unprivileged people,
Weep tears that are not loud but deep,
When we think of the suffering we experience,
We come to thee our only hope and refuge.

Help us, O God, to refuse to be embittered
Against those who handle us with harshness,
We are grateful to thee for the gift of laughter at all times,
Save use from hatred of those who oppress us.
May we follow the spirit of thy Son Jesus Christ.

Bantu Prayer³

Icebreaker

When all the members of your group have arrived, ask them to sit comfortably. Invite them to close their eyes and focus on their breathing for a bit. After a couple of minutes, read the following slowly allowing for time for individuals to picture what you are describing.

³ Ted Brownstein. *The Interfaith Prayer Book*. Lake Worth, FL: Lake Worth Interfaith Network, 2014. 65.

My Personal Web of Relationships ⁴

Imagine you sit in a circle of chairs. One-by-one, people whom you consider close sit down with you. Then others who have touched your life but with whom you are not as close join you. People continue to join the circle: family, friends, co-workers, [prison staff,] and members of your faith community. Included in the circle are elements of nature such as plants, animals, air and water. By now, the chairs are full with all the people and elements that have touched your life, past and present. Connect each of these individuals with a single, crisscrossing strand of string to form a web.

Reflection questions:

1. Do your connections make you feel strong? Weak?
2. With whom do you have strong relationships? What makes those relationships strong?
3. With whom do you have weak or broken relationships? What has made those relationships weak or broken?
4. How have your connections shaped who you are today?
5. How have you and your actions influenced your relationships?

Scripture Focus

Luke 10: 25 – 37

Background

As Jesus tells the parable, those listening would have anticipated that the third traveler on the road would have been a Israelite layperson as the saying “priests, Levites, and all the children of Israel” was the typical way of identifying religious diversity during that time. The Samaritan would have been unexpected and shocking to those hearing the parable. The Samaritan was the other, the enemy. Although they worshipped the same God and honored the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, for the Samaritans the temple in Jerusalem was not the center for worship. Scholars do not agree on when the schism occurred between the Jews and the Samaritans, a name that reflects that the people originated in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. On a religious continuum, the Samaritans occupied the position between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews despised the Samaritans believing that the Samaritans interpreted sacred texts incorrectly and were perpetually unclean, as they did not engage in rituals prescribed by leadership of Jerusalem temple. Samaritans despised the Jews, regarded themselves as the true descendants of the patriarchs and matriarchs and alleging that the Jews were the offspring of intermarriage with pagans. This

⁴ Barb Toews, *Restorative Justice: Rebuilding Your Web of Relationships: A Collection of Reflections for People in Prison*. The Pennsylvania Prison Society, September 2006.
http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/579309/6836787/1273244309357/rj_workbook.pdf?token=F1hJCGt7aNPzKWVHnZz9Ouri9To%3D (website August 13, 2017).

interpretation receives support from 2 Kings 17: 24 – 41.⁵ The Samaritans believed that they were the ones who correctly observed the festivals and rituals of the law.

Questions

- Bantu refers to the Bantu language or people. The people comprise 300 – 600 ethnic groups who speak the Bantu language. The Bantu live from Cameroon to Southern and Central Africa and their origins date back 4000 years. Today, Bantu speaking people are found primarily in Rwanda, Angola, Burundi, Zimbabwe and South Africa and small groups in other Southern African nations. In the nineteenth century the Bantu were brought north from Somalia as slaves. The Bantu people experienced generations of enslavement, colonial oppression, and civil war. The Bantu of South Africa were oppressed under policies of apartheid. The Bantu of Rwanda experienced policies of genocide. Understanding this history, consider the Bantu prayer that was prayed. What is your reaction to this prayer for the oppressor? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. This prayer asks for the ability to live this teaching. What makes reconciliation difficult? What does it take for us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?
- Read Luke 10: 25 – 37. Social sciences inform us that empathy is a universal human trait. As early as a day or two after birth, infants demonstrate empathetic arousal at the distress of others. However, they go on to say that a myriad of factors will impact how one interprets and responds to that empathetic arousal. While the arousal may be a universal human trait, there is not a universal response to that arousal.⁶ What responses do we see in the parable? What priorities do we see demonstrated by the priest and the Levite?
- When the Samaritan is introduced as a traveler on the road, early listeners of Jesus's parable might have anticipated that further violence would be perpetrated on the victim. Instead, he embodies the demands of the law. Who are the people we are suspicious of, expecting them to act in dangerous and violent ways? What comes to mind when you hear: 1) looter, 2) welfare queen, 3) murderer, 4) white collar criminal, 5) sex offender, 6) drug addict.
- The Jews and the Samaritans tended to focus more on their differences than on what they shared in common. They tended to define themselves over and against the other. What is the danger in defining oneself over and against another? What is the danger of losing sight of what we share in common?
- Like the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan saw the victim. Unlike the priest and the Levite, he chose to see the Samaritan up close. He entered his space and got personally involved. This engagement resulted in his being "moved with compassion." What prevents us from truly seeing others? Have your attitudes, understanding of an individual or some group of people been changed as you have

⁵ Christopher D. Marshall. *Compassionate Justice: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012. Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 4036 of 18246.

⁶ Ibid. Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 969 of 18246.

gotten to know that person or a member of that group, i.e. having a black neighbor, volunteering at a soup kitchen or in a jail / prison? Share your experience.

- What is at the heart of the ministries at UrbanMission? Who are their partners?
- Share the following:

Defining Restorative Justice

Restorative justice presupposes that human life grows and flourishes in a web of relationships. Strong connections allow us to meet our basic needs for food shelter, safety, love, comfort, self-worth, and self-realization. In strong webs, everyone is unique and at the same time equal and has equal access to what will provide a meaningful life. Pain causes brokenness within this web and the relationships that form this web over time can distort the web.⁷

Restorative justice argues that crime destroys people and relationships and that justice requires that people be rebuilt and relationships restored. Restorative understands accountability as addressing needs and righting wrongs. It does not focus on punishment but on needs of victims and obligations of offenders, offenders' families and communities, starting with the offender's need to become accountable.

Restorative justice does not end with accountability of the offender. It is also concerned with: 1) offenders' own histories of victimization, 2) healing both offending and victimization, 3) their families and their needs, 4) prevention of crime and reduction in recidivism, 5) social justice, individual power, and 6) the practice of restorative justice in daily life without formal programs.⁸

Restorative Justice asks:

1. Who has been hurt?
2. What does he or she need?
3. Who should be involved in meeting those needs?
4. What is the best way to repair the harm and meet those needs?

These questions are undergirded by the beliefs that everyone counts and needs to be respected, heard and understood. Everyone is capable of change and of healing his or her needs are met and accountability is recognized. It assumes that justice occurs within the web of relationships.⁹

Discuss the following: 1) what is restorative justice? 2) How is it different than justice that focuses on punishment, on rehabilitation? 3) What questions are

⁷ Barb Toews. *The Little Book of Restorative Justice for People In Prison* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006 Kindle Electronic Edition 200 or 1332.

⁸ Ibid. Loc. 95 of 1332.

⁹ Ibid. Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 288 or 1332.

asked in the process of restorative justice? 4) How might the practice of restorative justice be applied in daily life?

- Jacobs writes, “Together, we act for greater wholeness with a special focus on those inside prison walls, people returning to our communities after incarceration, as well as crime victims and survivors. We recognize that a single act of harm often affects hundreds of people – a “ripple effect” that impacts not just victim and offender, but also family, friends, schoolmates, law enforcement representatives, church members, business people, and more. We work to repair that harm.” How does this embody principles of restorative justice? How do these principles align with the vision statement of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that states, ““We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.”
- Describe the ministries of UrbanMission?
- Jacobs states, “It’s easy to forget that people in prison or jail are also God’s beloved children, because we often stereotype those who are incarcerated and label them in negative ways because of the harm they’ve done.” Do you agree or disagree? Why? What stereotypes exist about individuals who have committed crimes?
- How does this article inspire you? How does it challenge you?

Closing Prayer

Let us pray:

Spirit of Life, God of Love, I am entwined in your delicate web of mutuality. The life energy that makes me reach for the sun also moves me to become wrapped, like the strong bittersweet vine and the delicate sweet pea, around those I meet and love. Here in the tangle of my daily life I feel your pulse and sense what it means to be alive. Here, twisted and knotted, I thrive, seeking the light that will pull from me the fragrant blossom of love. Spirit of life, help me to experience the beauty of your interwoven and intricate web, that I might always embrace, without reserve, all those whom my life touches. Amen.¹⁰

¹⁰ Stephen Shick. *Be the Change: Poems, Prayers and Meditations for Peacemakers and Justice Seekers*. Boston, MA: skinner House Books, 2009. Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 923 of 2125.

Devotion

Scripture

Luke 10:25-37

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

As his voice shook with palpable grief, the father of Heather Heyer, the 32 year –old non-violent counter-protestor killed as Neo-Nazis and white supremacists protested in Charlottesville, VA, stated that he forgave James Feld the driver of the car that hit her. He said, “He don’t know no better.” Struggling with grief and anguish over the loss of five young girls when Charles Roberts stormed their one-room school house, parents and members of the Amish community have expressed forgiveness toward the killer and his family. Following years of oppression, denial of justice and gross violations of human rights, men and women come to testify before South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Established in 2000, the Commission was charged with investigating human rights abuses that occurred during the apartheid years of 1960 to 1994, with restoring the victims’ dignity and establishing ways to assist with rehabilitation, and with

considering amnesty applications for offenders who gave full testimony and accepted responsibility and held themselves accountable for their offenses. In each of these situations, there is mercy, there is the ability to move beyond what is expected and open the door for the possibility of grace to enter.

Describing UrbanMission in Pomona, CA, Nora Jacobs states that this new church start seeks to “act for greater wholeness with a special focus on those inside prison walls, people returning to our communities after incarceration as well as crime victims and survivors. She goes on to state, “We recognize that a single act of harm affects hundreds of people – a ‘ripple effect’ that impacts not just victim and offender, but also family, friends, schoolmates, law enforcement representatives, church members, business people, and more. We work to repair that harm.” In summing up the ministries of the church she states, “It’s easy to forget that people in prison or jail are also God’s beloved children, because we often stereotype those who are incarcerated and label them in negative ways because of the harm they’ve done. UrbanMission’s prison-based restorative justice circles, reentry events, art shows, and workshops with children and young people are powerful ways to experience and communicate how incarcerated men, women, and youth are still human beings – people who struggle for love, for connection, and for transformation – just as we do.”

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we hear a story of reversal. We are surprised, as the one who is feared and viewed with suspicion become the source of help. We see the one who is expected to despise the victim moved with compassion as he truly sees another human being. We see what is possible as a schism is crossed and a breach in relationship repaired. We are left to consider what is next for the man going to Jericho and the Samaritan. How will life be different for each of them because of this encounter? How will we be different because of our encounter with them?

Let us pray:

Spirit of Life, God of Love, I am entwined in your delicate web of mutuality. The life energy that makes me reach for the sun also moves me to become wrapped, like the strong bittersweet vine and the delicate sweet peace, around those I meet and love. Here in the tangle of my daily life I feel your pulse and sense what it means to be alive. Here, twisted and knotted, thrive, seeking the light that will pull me from the fragrant blossom of love. Spirit of life, help me to experience the beauty of your interwoven and intricate web, that I might always embrace, without reserve, all those whom my life touches.
Amen.

Session 4

Supplies

- Copies of *Prison Activism: This is Church Too*, by Susan Hudson McBride, page 12.
- Bible
- Poster Board with a line sketch of a traditional church building with a steeple on both sides. At the top of one side print the words, **We Are the Church Because We ...** and on the other side print the words **This is Church Too.**

In Preparation for Your Meeting

Prior to your meeting have a member of your group review the No Exceptions website at <http://noexceptions.net> and be prepared to report on what they find during your gathering.

Opening Prayer

- ³¹ For who is God except the Lord?
And who is a rock besides our God?
- ³² the God who girded me with strength,
and made my way safe.
- ³³ He made my feet like the feet of a deer,
and set me secure on the heights.
- ³⁴ He trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
- ³⁵ You have given me the shield of your salvation,
and your right hand has supported me;
your help^[a] has made me great.
- ³⁶ You gave me a wide place for my steps under me,
and my feet did not slip.
- ³⁷ I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
and did not turn back until they were consumed.
- ³⁸ I struck them down, so that they were not able to rise;
they fell under my feet.
- ³⁹ For you girded me with strength for the battle;
you made my assailants sink under me.
- ⁴⁰ You made my enemies turn their backs to me,
and those who hated me I destroyed.
- ⁴¹ They cried for help, but there was no one to save them;
they cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them.
- ⁴² I beat them fine, like dust before the wind;
I cast them out like the mire of the streets.

Icebreaker

Display the poster board with the side labeled “**We Are the Church Because We...**” facing forward. Make sure that the poster board is secure, as it will be written on during your meeting.

When all your members arrive, ask them to consider what characteristics or activities define the church, i.e., we are the church because we worship together. Have them write these characteristics and activities on the poster board. Do not edit as ideas and thoughts are shared. After the group has completed the list ask: What do you notice about this list? What are some of the things on list that seem easy for you? What words or statements on the list challenge you?

Scripture Focus

Acts 2: 43 - 47

Background

Acts is unique unlike any other narrative in the New Testament. Picking up after the resurrection of Jesus the Christ, it should not be considered the history of the early church as it narrowly focuses on the mission of the early church. This mission is outlined in Acts 1: 8, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 2: 43 – 47 follows the narrative of the indwelling of the Spirit that occurs on Pentecost and Peter’s testimony to Jesus’ enthronement at the right hand of God. It is an account of the daily life of the community. With their teachings confirmed with signs and wonders, the community is portrayed as putting the highest ideals and virtues into practice. The community demonstrates fellowship through economic sharing and unity and hospitality through the breaking of bread. They are characterized by their habit of praising God.

Questions

- Read Acts 2: 43 – 47. Following the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and Peter’s first public sermon, a community of believers gathers in Jerusalem. In this passage, we are given a snapshot of that community. How does Luke describe them? How does this passage describe the community of believers where you gather?
- On its website the Harriet Tubman Community describes itself in these words, “The Harriet Tubman Community is made up of activists dedicated to the radical gospel call where we come together in solidarity as a faith community. Our aim is to immerse ourselves in practical theology such that church is everything we do. We are convicted that Church is the body, the network of living, breathing, still growing souls bound together against the tension of the here and the now. We seek legal reform in the practice of restorative/transformational justice, as church. We seek an end to mass incarceration and the warehousing of human beings, as

church. When we plant a garden with its orchards, herbs, vegetables, and bees, we are being church. We see the other as ourselves, the *Imago Dei* in all creatures, and that is church. Our message comes through spoken word, poetry, art, and the sharing of information, as church. Our going out to find those who lack the tools to create community is about the gospel call to be church. Our heart is in advocacy for the community that rises up from a place of heartfelt commitment. Inasmuch as we work together to answer a call greater than ourselves, the radical call that envelops all of creation, we are church.” What similarities do you find between this community and the community described in Acts 2: 43 – 47. What words stand out for you in this description? What inspires you in this description? What challenges you?

- How does Susan Hudson McBride describe the members of the Harriet Tubman House (HTM)? She states that the community has adopted the phrase, “All means all.” What is your reaction to this description? How would you describe the membership of your community? How would you describe the background and beliefs of your members? Who would feel welcomed by your community? Are there those who would not feel welcomed by your community?
- What are the ministries of HTM? Report on the No Exceptions ministry website. What is the focus of this ministry? What examples of the destructive power of mass incarceration does McBride share? What examples of the disruptive nature and destructive power of mass incarceration are you aware of?
- How did McBride first become involved in prison activism?
- Review what you wrote on the poster entitled, “**We Are the Church Because We....**” “Turn the poster over to the second side that is titled, “**This is Church Too...**”. Based on what you have read in McBride’s article write additional words or statements that describe characteristics and activities that define what it means to be the church. What is your reaction to the new list? What inspires you? How does this affirm or challenge your previous view of church?
- Based on the articles within this issue of Just Women how would you define prison ministries? How would you define prison activism? How are they similar? How can they differ?
- Tell those who are gathered that they will not need to share answers to the following questions. Ask the following allowing time between questions for reflection: How comfortable are you in engaging in prison ministry? In prison activism? Silently name your fears or concerns regarding prison ministry? What would be needed to overcome those fears or concerns? Have your beliefs or attitudes changed about those who are incarcerated or have been arrested for committing a crime? If so what has changed?

Going Deeper

- 1) Consider hosting a screening of Ava DuVernay’s documentary 13th, that traces the history of American slavery through chattel slavery to today’s mass incarceration. The documentary can be found on Netflix. It can also be found on free movies at <https://fmovies.is/film/13th.vv8zl/q8kl0j>. A discussion guide can be found at <https://www.coc.org/files/Film%20Discussion%20Guide%2013th.pdf>.

- 2) Consider reading and hosting a discussion of Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. New York, NY: Spiegel and Grau, 2014. *Just Mercy* is the winner of the Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction, the NAACP Image Award for Nonfiction, The Books for a Better Life Award and is an American Library Association Notable Book. A discussion guide for *Just Mercy* can be found at <http://bryanstevenson.com/discussion-guide/>.

Closing Prayer

In 2010, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) reports that 1.5 million of the 2.3 million inmates in our nations prisons and jails meet the medical criteria for substance abuse (65%). Another 458,000 meet the medical criteria for having a history of substance abuse. Combined these two groups constitute 85% of the prison population. Alcohol is implicated in ½ of the incarceration of all those in jails and prisons and illicit drugs are implicated in ¾ of all the incarcerations.

Only 11% of these individuals receive treatment of any kind. CASA further finds that if all inmates receive treatment and 10% of those individuals remained substance, crime free and employed, the program would pay for itself.¹¹

Let us pray:

God of wholeness, we lift up anyone who is or has been addicted to any kind of substance.

For those whose addictions started innocently as a result of a doctor's prescription, have mercy.

For those who wanted to belong so much they paid too high a price, have mercy.

For those who wanted to blot out the intolerable pain of living, have mercy.

And for those who just wanted to have fun, have mercy.

For those who are not yet in recovery, guide them.

For those who are recovering day by day, strengthen and support them.

For anyone in a relationship with a recovering or active addict, help them to detach lovingly.

¹¹ New CASA Report finds 65% of All U.S. Inmates Meet Medical Criteria for Substance Abuse Addiction, Only 11% Receive Any Treatment. New York, NY, February 26, 2010. <https://www.centeronaddiction.org/newsroom/press-releases/2010-behind-bars-II>. (website August 23, 2017)

For we pray in the name of Jesus, who when faced with life-or-death struggle, wrestled with it, and then made the hard choice, for the love of God and us, his sisters and brothers. Amen.¹²

¹² Jane Richardson Jensen and Patricia Harris-Watkins. *She Who Prays: A Woman's Interfaith Prayer Book*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2005. 92.

Devotion

Scripture

Psalm 18: 31 – 42

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

- ³¹ For who is God except the Lord?
And who is a rock besides our God?—
³² the God who girded me with strength,
and made my way safe.
³³ He made my feet like the feet of a deer,
and set me secure on the heights.
³⁴ He trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
³⁵ You have given me the shield of your salvation,
and your right hand has supported me;
your help^[a] has made me great.
³⁶ You gave me a wide place for my steps under me,
and my feet did not slip.
³⁷ I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
and did not turn back until they were consumed.
³⁸ I struck them down, so that they were not able to rise;
they fell under my feet.
³⁹ For you girded me with strength for the battle;
you made my assailants sink under me.
⁴⁰ You made my enemies turn their backs to me,
and those who hated me I destroyed.
⁴¹ They cried for help, but there was no one to save them;
they cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them.
⁴² I beat them fine, like dust before the wind;
I cast them out like the mire of the streets.

Psalm 18 is a prayer of thanks for divine deliverance that is attributed to King David. It is very similar to a David's prayer near the end of his life that is found in 2 Samuel 22. The words of praise in Psalm 18 are spoken in the midst of ordinary life. They are a spontaneous expression of thanksgiving and blessing spoken in the midst of deliverance.

In the midst of conflict and difficulty, David is keenly aware of God's presence. The psalm begins and ends proclaiming God's presence and God's power. Verses 31 – 42 focus on how God keeps God's promises and how God is a refuge for those in trouble. They declare that God trains and equips those who confront evil and injustice.

Girded in prayer we too are trained and equip to subdue hatred, to overcome prejudice, and to fight injustice. We too can trust that God will be with us and sustain us as we seek to identify and dismantle unjust systems of the world. We too can trust God's presence and God's word.

The Harriet Tubman Community in Tennessee knows that they are a community girded with strength and sustained by God who is their rock. On their website the congregation states: “[Our] Community is made up of activists dedicated to the radical gospel call where we come together in solidarity as a faith community. Our aim is to immerse ourselves in practical theology such that church is everything we do. We are convicted that Church is the body, the network of living, breathing, still growing souls bound together against the tension of the here and the now. We seek legal reform in the practice of restorative/transformational justice, as church. We seek an end to mass incarceration and the warehousing of human beings, as church.”

One flaw of the incarceration system is the denial of mental health services and treatment programs for those who are addicted to drugs and alcohol. In 2010, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) reports that 1.5 million of the 2.3 million inmates in our nation's prisons and jails meet the medical criteria for substance abuse (65%). Another 458,000 meet the medical criteria for having a history of substance abuse. Combined these two groups constitute 85% of the prison population. Alcohol is implicated in 1/2 of the incarceration of all those in jails and prisons and illicit drugs are implicated in 3/4 of all the incarcerations.

Only 11% of these individuals receive treatment of any kind. CASA further finds that if all inmates receive treatment and 10% of those individuals remained substance, crime free and employed, the program would pay for itself.¹³

Let us pray for all those who struggle with addiction and who are denied access to treatment to ease their struggle:

God of wholeness, we lift up anyone who is or has been addicted to any kind of substance.

For those whose addictions started innocently as a result of a doctor's prescription, have mercy.

For those who wanted to belong so much they paid too high a price, have mercy.

For those who wanted to blot out the intolerable pain of living, have mercy.

And for those who just wanted to have fun, have mercy.

For those who are not yet in recovery, guide them.

¹³ New CASA Report finds 65% of All U.S. Inmates Meet Medical Criteria for Substance Abuse Addiction, Only 11% Receive Any Treatment. New York, NY, February 26, 2010. <https://www.centeronaddiction.org/newsroom/press-releases/2010-behind-bars-II> (website August 23, 2017)

For those who are recovering day by day, strengthen and support them.

For anyone in a relationship with a recovering or active addict, help them to detach lovingly.

For we pray in the name of Jesus, who when faced with life-or-death struggle, wrestled with it, and then made the hard choice, for the love of God and us, his sisters and brothers. Amen.

About the Author

The Reverend Dr. Beth Rupe has served congregations in Kentucky and Illinois. She currently lives in Bloomington, IL and serves as Interim Minister of Women's Ministries for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in IL and WI (CCIW), Regional Elder to the McLean Livingston congregations for CCIW, and co-facilitator of the CCIW's Pro-Reconciliation and Anti-Racism Team. She writes *Prayer Stations* and the quarterly study guides for *Just Women*. She has written congregational resources for Disciples Home Ministries, including for Advent and Lenten Devotionals and Laity Sunday materials, and book reviews that have been published in the *Lexington Theological Quarterly*. Beth practices contemplative prayer. She is an elder, co – chair of the Evangelism Committee, and is currently teaching a class on the Book of Psalms and prayer in her local congregation, Centennial Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Bloomington. Beth is a member of Bloomington-Normal's Not In Our Town's Faith and Outreach Committee. She is married to Mark. They enjoy traveling and spending time with family and friends. They have two adult children, Sarah (Aaron) and Benjamin and two granddaughters, Chloe and Emilia.