

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | March 22, 2018

In this week's long reading of Mark's account of Jesus's last days before crucifixion, we hear Jesus say again, "the poor are with you always." This comes in the beginning of the Passion reading as the women wash him with expensive ointment, to which the disciples begin to reprimand, declaring that the ointment should be sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus's response echoes Deuteronomy 15, one of the most liberating "Jubilee" passages in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 15 explains that if people follow God's commandments there will be no poverty.

The [Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis](#), speaking at the [Vineyard Justice Network's](#) 2015 Forum: Jesus, the Kingdom, and the Poor, explains that, "In fact, this passage lays out the Sabbath and Jubilee prescriptions that are given so that the people of God know what to do to ensure that there is no poverty – that God's bounty is enjoyed by all. It concludes that because people do not follow what God has laid out, 'there will never cease to be some in need on the earth' (or, 'the poor you always have with you'), and because of that, it is our duty to God to "open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor."

Rather than selling something valuable and donating the money to the poor, as the disciples suggest in this passage, the people of God are supposed to be organizing their society to enact the Jubilee. This is Jesus's reminder in this passage. As Rev. Dr. Theoharis boldly [states](#), "What God demands of God's followers is justice, not charity."

We are called, as Jesus's followers, to stand alongside those who are poor. Filled with Jesus's love, we are called to reform structures and systems that keep God's children trapped in poverty.

Rev. Dr. Theoharis [reminds us](#) that Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."

ADVOCACY ASK

One of the ways you can help address structures that keep people poor in New Jersey is to work to pass Earned Sick Days and Equal Pay legislation.

[Register here](#) to attend a Lobby Day on Monday, March 26 to help pass [Earned Sick Days](#) for all New Jersey workers and [Equal Pay](#). ([Learn more here](#).)