



Global Poverty

A New Year in God's World

Introduction

As we move into the season of Epiphany, it is appropriate to take time to live with God's Word incarnate in Jesus Christ by shedding more light on the plight of the world's poorest people and our response to alleviate systemic suffering. We invite you to devote a few weeks to studying "A New Year in God's World."



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

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

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

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

For more information on how to use this study please contact Alexis Coleman at Acolemand@umc-gbcs.org or Neal Christie at NChristie@umc-gbcs.org

Session 1

Gathering and Introductions

Opening Prayer

Biblical Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ²a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ³a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; ⁷a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. ⁹What gain have the workers from their toil? ¹⁰I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with.

¹¹He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹²I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; ¹³moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. (NRSV)

*Lectio Divina Shared in Community*¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Global Poverty: The Grim Picture

Facts and Statistics

Each day:

- 20,000 people die of extreme poverty
- 8,000 children die of malaria
- 5,000 mothers and fathers die of tuberculosis
- 7,500 young adults die of AIDS

Thousands more die of diarrhea, respiratory infections and other diseases that prey on bodies weakened by chronic hunger.[\[2\]](#)

There are three degrees of poverty:

- Extreme – Households cannot meet basic needs for survival. They are chronically hungry, unable to access health care, lack the amenities of safe drinking water and sanitation, cannot afford education for some or all of the children, and perhaps lack rudimentary shelter, such as a roof to keep the rain out of the hut, a chimney to remove the smoke from the cook stove, and basic articles of clothing, such as shoes.

Extreme poverty occurs only in developing countries. The World Bank classifies these as people who have \$1 of income per day (measured at purchasing power parity). In 2001 there were approximately 1.1 billion people living in extreme poverty: 93% of the world's extreme poor live in East Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In East Asia 15% of the population was considered to be extremely poor in 2001, in South Asia it was 32%, and in sub-Saharan Africa it is almost 50%. Latin America's extreme poverty rate is around 10% and Eastern Europe is around 4%.

- Moderate – Basic needs are met, but just barely. Income is between \$1 and \$2 per day. In 2001 there were approx. 1.6 billion people living in moderate poverty: 87% of the moderate poor live in East Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa; 15% of Latin Americans live in moderate poverty.
- Relative – Lack access to cultural goods, entertainment, recreation, and to quality health care, educations and other prerequisites for upward social mobility. The relative poor are in high-income countries.[\[3\]](#)

According to Jeffrey Sachs, ending poverty means: 1) to end the plight of the extreme poor who struggle daily for survival and 2) to ensure that all of the world's poor have the chance to climb the ladder of development.[\[4\]](#)

Discussion

Read the following quotes by Jeffrey Sachs and discuss the questions that which follow:

"Everybody on Earth can and should enjoy basic standards of nutrition, health, water and sanitation, shelter, and other minimum needs for survival, well-being, and participation in society."[\[5\]](#)

"As a global society, we should ensure that the international rules of the game in economic management do not advertently or inadvertently set snares among the lower rungs of the ladder in the form of inadequate development assistance, protectionist trade barriers, destabilizing global financial practices, poorly designed rules for intellectual property, and the like, that prevent the low-income world from climbing up the rungs of development."[\[6\]](#)

1. On first reading, what is your initial response to Sachs's assertions? How strongly do you agree or disagree with him?
2. If you have a flip chart or chalk board, list some reasons for agreeing and for disagreeing with Sachs so everyone can see them. Otherwise, jot them down on a sheet of paper.
3. What do you see as the primary barriers to making either of these assertions a reality?
4. How do you think other people you know would react to Sachs?

Applying the Biblical Text

In the Hebrew Bible the book of Ecclesiastes is called Koheleth for the author of the book. Koheleth claims to have been king over Israel in Jerusalem (verse 1:12), but the word Koheleth means either: 1) one who addresses an assembly, such as a speaker or preacher, or 2) one who collects or gathers.

If the latter is the case, it could be that Koheleth gathered wisdom sayings for the sake of teaching. There was controversy among Judaism about the worth of Koheleth being included as sacred Scripture.

While some Jews believed that Solomon was the author, others stressed its religious ideas. Koheleth's intention was not to teach about God, but rather to tell what he had discovered regarding life and what man might gain from life.

Koheleth was not a prophet declaring the word of God, he teaches neither faith nor obedience to God. Instead, he presents reflection and research as to what humans must accept as truth for the guidance of life. In the world as Koheleth saw it every possible occurrence or event is followed by an event of a contrary character. He advances this concept of opposites in order to teach that God has made everything beautiful in its time.^[7]

In chapter 3 Koheleth says that nothing is better for man than that he should be happy, that happiness is a gift from God, but life is just an eternal round of events. The lack of any apparent purpose in things is the worst feature of life. Humans have no advantage over the beast. Both have the same fate, which is death and the return to the dust.^[8]

Jeffrey Sachs says that, economically speaking, we can end extreme poverty in our generation (by 2025).

- Does the historical and theological background of Ecclesiastes diminish or increase its value to us as Christians?
- Do we believe that there is a time for everything?
- Is this the time to end extreme poverty?
- How do you feel about Koheleth's statement in Ecclesiastes 3:13?
- While we don't see extreme poverty in the United States, the relative poor live all around us. What is our Christian responsibility to the relative poor?

Leaving

Have someone read Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 again.

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

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

[2] Sachs, Jeffrey D., *The End of Poverty*, (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2005), p. VII.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 20-23.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *The Interpreter's Bible*, volume 5, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 3 and 17.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Session 2

Gathering and Introductions

Opening Prayer

Biblical Text: Psalm 8

¹O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

²Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

³When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

⁵Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

⁷all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

⁸the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

⁹O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

(NRSV)

Lectio Divina Shared in Community¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Global Poverty: 16 Poverty Traps

According to Stephen Smith, author of *Ending Global Poverty: A Guide to What Works*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), "impoverished people frequently suffer from malnutrition, poor health and illiteracy; live in environmentally degraded areas; have little political voice; and attempt to earn a meager living on small and marginal farms or in dilapidated urban slums"

Smith says the poor are not lazy, but are caught in poverty traps. A trap implies there is a trapper, and it also implies a way out — mostly with the help of others.²

Poverty is not always a permanent situation, but a poverty trap is one that “keeps the poor enslaved to the vicious cycle of poverty.”³

The 16 major poverty traps are:⁴

1. **Family child labor traps.** Many families need the children to work, which means the children cannot get much needed education. In 2003 the World Bank estimated that 100 million children were unable to go to school due to poverty.
2. **Illiteracy traps.** Parents may not send their children to school because they cannot afford the transportation, school uniforms or school fees. The family often does not have access to credit to borrow needed money.
3. **Working capital traps.** In a working capital trap, microentrepreneurs must make do with an inventory too small to be productive. This means they will have too little net income to purchase more inventory.
4. **Uninsurable risk traps.** The people with the fewest assets face the greatest chances of losing what is most important to them. Farmers unable to get weather insurance will orient their farming approach to minimize the risk of catastrophic ruin. In doing this, however, it is unlikely that they can take advantage of opportunities to build assets that could lift them out of poverty.
5. **Debt bondage traps.** Moneylenders calibrate loan amounts and interest payments to ensure that a family can never get out of debt. Sometimes the rate of pay is too low to pay even the interest. Often the children of bonded laborers are born into bondage. This is slavery by another name. According to Free the Slaves, about 27 million people live in debt bondage and related forms of slavery today.
6. **Information traps.** The poorest of the poor work hard to put meals on the table. Even when other opportunities exist to make a higher wage, their employers have no incentive to help them learn what these are.
7. **Undernutrition and illness traps.** Undernutrition makes a person too weak to work productively, thus leading to wages too small to pay for sufficient food. Poor shelter from severe weather can also cause sleepless and prolonged illness, reducing earning power to afford better housing.
8. **Low-skill traps.** If no employers in an area are seeking skilled workers, there is no incentive for the poor to invest in higher skills; employers are unlikely to invest in areas with no skilled workers, though.
9. **High fertility traps.** Women continue to have children to increase the possibility that someone will have the means and willingness to care for them when they are too old to work.
10. **Subsistence traps.** Specialization can be a key to productivity, but one can only specialize if he or she can trade for other needed goods or services. If everyone in an area is subsistence farming, there is no one locally with whom to trade.
11. **Farm erosion traps.** The poor are so desperate for food that they knowingly overuse the land, reducing the soil fertility and productivity for the next year. In some cases they even eat the seed for next year. Any gains in farming productivity are lost due to poor soil quality. Buying fertilizer and other soil improvements are of no help if you cannot afford them or borrow for them.
12. **Common property mismanagement traps.** Lakes are overfished, forests are not managed, land is overgrazed. Once community management of common resources has broken down, it is difficult to restore.
13. **Collective action traps.** Often the poor could improve their circumstances by working jointly, yet this takes a leader to organize. The poor have neither the time nor the resources for this generally.
14. **Criminality traps.** Youths without work and education are often drawn to gang membership and other cultures of criminality. The costs to the community are great: Assets are destroyed, valuable resources must be diverted to security, and often the lives of able-bodied persons are taken.
15. **Mental health traps.** Depression and anxiety are pervasive among the poor. Not knowing where your next meal is coming from causes high emotional stress. Many poor are ashamed of their poverty. They feel terrible that they are unable to provide for their children. Poor women often face domestic violence and abuse. Drug and alcohol abuse becomes increasingly common.
16. **Powerlessness traps.** It is not only relatively impersonal forces such as the environment or even the market that keep the poor poor, but the connivance of the rich who benefit from low wages and subservience. Smith writes: “Poverty entrapment is poverty of, by and for the rich.”⁵

Discussion

Read the following quotes by Stephen Smith and discuss the questions that follow:

“From the study of poverty traps we get confirmation that not only is poverty not the fault of the poor, neither are the things usually blamed on the poor, such as high poverty, the underlying cause of poverty — they are a result of poverty.”⁶

“As the rich (and middle class) grow richer, those who remain in absolute poverty may feel even poorer. In fact, in a real sense they are poorer, since social standing and differences in capabilities are part of the multidimensional nature of poverty. And as the economy around you develops, the gap between the capabilities of the poor and what is needed in regular employment grows greater and can become more difficult to cross.”⁷

1. In the United States we are often taught that poverty is the fault of the poor and that hard work can overcome poverty, but Smith disputes both of these. Do you agree with Smith or with common thought, or with both or neither?
2. Were you surprised by any of the 16 poverty traps? Which were most surprising for you and for your group?
3. Smith has keenly separated issues that entrap the poor, while noting that the poorest of the poor actually face several of these traps at once. Which of these traps would you be interested in learning more about and why?
4. Smith seems to place some of the blame for poverty on the wealthy. How do you feel about that? Do you consider your wealth to be part of the problem of the poor?
5. Which of these traps do you think the relative poor of the United States face?

Applying the Biblical Text

Psalms 8 begins by declaring the majesty of God. It is a hymn of praise for God and God’s creation. The songs that humans can sing in praise of God are like the babblings of babes and infants. In verse 2, the bulwark referred to by the psalmist is the firmament. In one ancient creation myth the divine defeated the dragon of chaos and created the firmament as a fortress or bulwark that was impregnable against the enemy and the avenger. God’s heaven is above the firmament. The psalmist is obviously

outdoors at night (verse 3) contemplating God’s creation, and then begins to think of our place in God’s world (verses 4-6).

Note that the term son of man is a synonym for man. Both terms refer to the collective of humanity, not to one man.

The psalmist says that although we are insignificant, we are no accident. God has created us for a high purpose and function: to serve as God’s deputy on earth. Our affinity is with the Maker, not with the made. Lastly, lest we become too boastful, the psalmist reminds us that all majesty belongs to God.⁸

1. The psalmist tells us that God is mindful of us; God thinks of us. What do you believe God thinks when God sees the huge stratification of wealth among us?
2. The psalmist says that God has given us dominion over creation. Remind yourselves of those things specifically listed in verses 7 and 8. Note some things that the psalmist has not included. Do we have dominion over these as well?
3. Do you think the psalmist would say that it is within our dominion to end extreme poverty? What do you say?
4. Why doesn’t God simply end extreme poverty?
5. The breaking of the levees in New Orleans brought some of the poorest people in the U.S. into our public consciousness and consciences. Do you think that the poor of New Orleans have received too much media attention compared with the poor in other areas of the country and the world?

Leaving

Read Psalm 8 together.

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

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

² Smith, Stephen C. *Ending Global Poverty: A Guide to What Works*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 11.

³ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴ Ibid., p. 12-17.

⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

⁸ The Interpreter's Bible, volume 4, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 48-53.

Session 3

Gathering and Introductions

Opening Prayer

Biblical Text: Revelation 21:1-6

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;

⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

⁶Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

(NRSV)

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

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4. After full sharing, pray for the person to your right.

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

Global Poverty: 8 Keys to Escaping Poverty Traps

In last week's study we examined 16 poverty traps in which conditions today make it likely that poverty will continue tomorrow.

According to Stephen Smith, author of *Ending Global Poverty: A Guide to What Works*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), there are keys to capability that "open the door to increasing income and wealth, which can in turn provided the means for building further capabilities and assets and resiliency to the many risks and shocks that people in developing countries face."²

The keys to capability are interrelated, which means that unlocking one sometimes unlocks others. It also means that unlocking one is also limited if you cannot unlock the others.

The eight keys to capability are:³

1. **Health and nutrition for adults to work and children to grow to their full potential.** The poor do not need much to escape the under-nutrition trap. To end poverty we must address hunger. Food security, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has three components: food availability, food access, and adequate food utilization, (knowing and

providing a proper diet, safe water, and sanitation).

There is no shortage of food in the world, but ending hunger does not mean simply that we ship food where it is needed. This is generally not effective except in a crisis situation.

Food shipments generally lower food prices in the cities, where better-off people tend to live. The lower food prices make conditions worse for poor farmers. Very little food actually reaches the rural areas where the chronically poor live.

A more permanent solution is to increase the purchasing power of the poor. "As long as most of the poor remain farmers, it is vital to improve the productivity of their farms, along with ensuring their claim on the income from that productivity."

Access to clean water and to basic sanitation are also critical. It takes an average two hours per day for poor women to fetch water. If the water is not clean, it must be boiled. This uses up scarce fuel wood and creates indoor and outdoor air pollution. And last, better health knowledge among the poor is critically needed.

2. **Basic education to build the foundations for self-reliance.** Tens of millions of people speak only indigenous and tribal languages that are different from the dominant language. Governments rarely make it easy to learn to read in indigenous languages, and reading materials are limited. To learn to read, you often must learn to speak the official language of the country, but learning a language you seldom have opportunity to practice is difficult. The opportunities of literacy include being able to read signs, fill out forms, use a telephone. Learning to count coins in the marketplace is an invaluable skill.
3. **Credit and basic insurance for working capital and defense against risk.** For the rural peasant farmer, access to credit provides the chance to purchase tools, a draft animal or small tractor, fertilizer, and irrigation – all of which help a farmer improve productivity, diversify crops, and move towards commercial farming. For the rural landless laborer, credit can mean being able to purchase raw material such as cloth and tools such as a sewing so that a person can move from survival into business. For the poor urban peddler, access to credit means the chance to build a bigger inventory. Microfinancing is a way for the poor to borrow small amounts of money. You can be a microfinancier! Go to www.kiva.org for more information about microfinancing. This form of credit is expanding. Currently only 11% of the world's 240 million poorest families are being served. Insurance frees people from unnecessary worries. Small farmers try to minimize their risks from weather and price by diversifying

their crops. In doing this they give up substantial profits that would come from specialization.

4. **Access to functioning markets for income and opportunities to acquire assets.** “The need of the poor for land is critical, and is also emblematic of problems gaining access to markets and productive resources.” The rural poor say that owning enough land to make a living, and owning it securely, would make the most positive difference in their lives. At least 100 million households depend on farming land that they do not securely own. When farmers have insecure land tenure rights, there is incentive to treat the land as a short-term resource. Large landowners often do not want to dilute their holdings. Therefore, they overprice the land. Poor farmers often cannot get the credit they need. Land reform could provide needed changes. But even with land reform, to be able to move beyond subsistence farming, farmers need to be able to sell what they grow. Many farmers live on paths miles from the nearest road. Roads give people essential connections to markets.
5. **Access to the benefits of new technologies for higher productivity.** In order to take advantage of market opportunities, raise productivity and escape from poverty traps, the poor must have access to useful knowledge and improved technologies. New technologies such as contraception, medicines, high-yielding crop varieties, and telecommunications have already benefited the poor. Specific job skills may become obsolete. The poor need to learn to learn, to learn how to adapt, and to learn to make use of new technologies.
6. **A non-degraded and stable environment to ensure sustainable development.** The poor are both victims and perpetrators of environmental degradation. The poor have a high rate of fertility, practice slash-and-burn agriculture in rainforests, overuse soil and overforage for fuelwood. Slum dwellers face environmental hazards that exceed those in rural areas. With increasing income and with the help of NGOs (non-governmental organization), the poor are able to improve their environment and get help with environmental protection when needed.
7. **Personal empowerment to gain freedom from exploitation and torment.** Personal empowerment can unlock the strongbox where the other keys are. Those without power find it difficult to get the power and resources they need to make a better life. “When elites benefit from others’ poverty or powerlessness, they often actively perpetuate both. They do this with coercive exploitation enforced with terror.”

8. **Community empowerment to ensure effective participation in the wider world.** The poor depend on their community’s security to survive, to defend their rights, and to preserve their opportunities to improve the lives of their families. Communities and social networks that are strong need to be protected. Communities that are weak must be developed.

Discussion

“Humans are social beings with a fundamental need to fit into the communities around us. To fit in requires consumption to a certain standard ... And as the standard consumption of communities rise and extends to new products such as initially shoes, then radio, and then televisions, the poor may feel under great pressure to acquire these symbols of minimum standing in the community. If a poor family has no other money for a radio, they may forgo food and medical attention to remain respectable and connected to society. The drive not to fall too far behind one’s peers seems as strong as the drive to eat high-calorie foods ... And owning a radio is observable to your peers in a way that the number of grams of protein you consume is not.”^[4]

1. What do you think about Smith’s observation?
2. Discuss in your group how Smith’s observation is true at all income levels in the U.S.
3. In the 8 keys to capability, Smith says that eliminating hunger is the first key to ending poverty. Do you believe that ending hunger is possible?
4. Which of these keys do you think would help the relative poor of the United States?

Applying the Biblical Text

Revelation is a book that is both apocalyptic and eschatological. Apocalyptic literature is that in which there is always a dualism of supernatural powers. In Jewish and Christian apocalypticism, the force of evil, sometimes referred to as Satan, opposes the righteous God. God is always superior to the evil opponent, although God allows evil to rule for a limited time. Apocalypticism “attempts to explain the age-long existence of evil, especially in the form of the afflictions and suffering of the righteous, and at the same time proposes a dramatic solution to the problem.” Eschatology is that literature which deals with the last things, with the end of this present age and with life in the age to come.^[5]

In the passage for this week, John describes the beginning of the new age, an age in which God descends from the throne to dwell with God’s people (the righteous). This text celebrates that all evil has passed and

the reign of God has come. It is a great celebration indeed. Note God's excitement in verse 6: "It is done!"

As Christians we believe in the reign, or kingdom, of God. This passage is a kingdom passage. It gives us a description of what God's final reign will be like. In Christian corporate life and in our private prayers, we pray the Lord's Prayer. We pray for the kingdom to come, and we believe that it will come in God's time.

As Christians we also believe that we can see glimpses of the kingdom in our lives now. When we pray for the kingdom, we are praying that we would become kingdom people not only by claiming our own place in the kingdom, but also by claiming the kingdom for others and working towards it.

Read some other kingdom texts together: Isaiah 2:4; Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 11:4-9; and Luke 4:16-21. Discuss together how ending extreme poverty now is a sign of the kingdom to come.

Leaving

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

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

² Smith, Stephen C. *Ending Global Poverty: A Guide to What Works*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 31.

³ *Ibid.*, 31-45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵ The Interpreter's Bible, volume 12, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 347-348 and 529-530.

Session 4

Gathering and Introductions

Opening Prayer

Biblical Text: Matthew 25:31-46

³¹When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then 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; ³⁵for 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, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

³⁷Then 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?" ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?"

⁴⁰And 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."

⁴¹Then 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; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I 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."

⁴⁴Then 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?"

⁴⁵Then 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." ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Lectio Divina Shared in Community¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Global Poverty: How the Rich Can Help

In the year 2000, then Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan presented the world with a document called *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*. This document became the basis for the Millennium Declaration that sets forth goals to reduce extreme poverty, disease and deprivation. These goals are known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)². All eight MDGs are quantifiable and time-bound.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion

Read the following quotes and discuss the questions that follow:

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

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

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

Applying the Biblical Text

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

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

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

In the course of this study it has become painfully obvious that the U.S. is headed for or is already in a recession. This economic slowdown is already having global impact. Many people, including ourselves, are already feeling the pinch. Often when we feel insecure about our finances, we tend to hold on to what we do have a little tighter. Are we willing to be sheep when times are hard for us?

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

Leaving

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

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

²For more information on the Millennium Development Goals go to

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

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

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

⁵Sachs, 299-301.

⁶Ibid., 303.

⁷Ibid., 307.

⁸Ibid., 332.

⁹Ibid., 323. Sachs’ answer to the question will be given in next week’s study.

Session 5

Gathering and Introductions

Opening Prayer

Bible Study

The biblical texts that we have been studying in our sessions were the lectionary texts for New Year's Day. Each text presents its own challenge to us as we look at it in light of global poverty. In this final session, take some time in your group to reread these scriptures together one more time.

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1-13
2. Psalm 8
3. Revelation 21:1-6
4. Matthew 25:31-46

What is the picture of God we get when we put these scriptures together? Using these texts only, list on a sheet of paper some words which describe who God is and what God expects from us.

Finally, compose a statement from these words that would reflect to others the vision that God has given your group.

Global Poverty: What Churches and Individuals Can Do

1. **Continue to read on this issue.** Jeffrey Sachs's *The End of Poverty* and Stephen Smith's *Ending Global Poverty* are excellent places to start. Both are written for lay people. Both authors present more about the economics of poverty and what kinds of programs are already working. Smith, in particular, dedicates several chapters at the end of his book to suggestions about getting started in the fight to end poverty.[1]
2. **Keep talking about global poverty.** Remind people that our leading global economists believe that we can end extreme poverty in our generation, but we must reprioritize in order to make it happen. Who better than Christians to lead the way?
3. **Ask your pastor to let your group plan and lead a worship service on global poverty.**
4. **Learn more about the Millennium Development Goals.** The United Methodist Church is a partner in the Nothing But Nets campaign to eliminate malaria. Nothing But Nets (see <http://nothingbutnets.net>), whose lead members are the United Nations, the National Basketball Association and The United Methodist Church, provides insecticide-treated bed nets to families in malaria zones, primarily in Africa. Malaria kills 1 million children per year. For \$10 Nothing But Nets can purchase a bed net, deliver it, and explain its use. A family of four can safely sleep under the net for four years. The Nothing But Nets Web site has information about donating individually or starting a "netraiser" team. Remember that poor health is one of the 16 poverty traps, and malaria is certainly one of the largest causes of poor health, especially in Africa.
5. **Buy an ark, or a part of one!** Heifer International provides food-producing animals to the poor. For \$120 you can provide a goat that will produce milk for a poor family to drink. Extra milk can be made into cheese, butter or yogurt and used to feed the family or sold for income. The goat manure can be used as fertilizer. Families are taught how to care for their animals. When the animals reproduce, their babies are given to others persons in the community, thus spreading your gift even further. Other animals such as water buffalo, cows, rabbits, llamas, chickens, geese, etc, are also available as gifts. Ten dollars can purchase a share of an animal. Five thousand dollars purchases an ark of 15 pairs of animals. You can get more details from www.heifer.org. Heifer offers congregational resources and often someone is in your area representing Heifer who will come to speak and to help you get started. (Note: From personal experience, Heifer is a great way to get all ages in your church involved in the struggle against poverty.)
6. **Become a microfinancier.** On www.kiva.org you can loan as little as \$25 to an entrepreneur somewhere in the world, and you can select the borrower! You can see a picture of the borrower(s), find out something about the business being started, how much money is needed, and what the repayment terms are. When your loan is repaid, you can loan it again!
7. **Support the GROWTH Act.** This Global Resources and Opportunities for Women to Thrive Act is designed to bring about self-sufficiency for women around the globe. Women are the backbone of the global economy, making up about 40% of the labor force in East and Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Women farmers produce 60% to 80% of the food in most developing countries. Despite this, women in developing countries tend to work in the lowest paid sectors, have less stable

incomes, work longer hours, have less access to training and education, and have fewer economic opportunities than men. With adequate income, women are less vulnerable to trafficking and HIV/AIDS, and have more options in the face of violence or abuse. The GROWTH Act would reshape U.S. assistance and trade policy to promote women's ability to start and grow businesses, enhance women's land and property rights, increase women's access to higher quality employment, and more. You can call the Congressional Switchboard at (202) 224-3121. The bill in the U.S. Senate is S. 2069 and in the U.S. House it is HR. 2965.

8. **Support the Global Poverty Act.** This act declares that it is official U.S. policy to promote the reduction of global poverty, the elimination of extreme global poverty, and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015. The act requires the President to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to carry out that policy. The act also includes guidelines for what the strategy should include from aid, trade and debt relief to working with the international community, businesses and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to ensuring environmental sustainability. The act requires that the President's strategy include specific and measurable goals; and requires the President to report back to Congress on progress made in the implementation of the global poverty strategy. The Senate bill number is S. 2433.

Discussion

Is your group or church ready to do something to help end extreme poverty in our generation? Take some time to merge the vision statement you created at the beginning of today's session to write a plan of action for yourself and for your church. Share your plans and then pray over each one. Remember that 20,000 of God's children die of extreme poverty for each day that we wait to help.

Leaving

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

¹In last week's session I noted that Jeffrey Sachs has been asked if help for Africa would backfire into an even greater population explosion. Sachs's answer is that ending extreme poverty would be the best guarantor of ending today's population explosion. He says, "fertility rates come down as economic development proceeds ... As households move from subsistence agriculture to commercial farming and especially to urban life, they also choose to have fewer children." (See pages 323-326, *The End of Poverty*, for his complete explanation.) [1] Note: In last week's session I noted that Jeffrey Sachs has been asked if help for Africa would backfire into an even greater population explosion. Sachs's answer is that ending extreme poverty would be the best guarantor of ending today's population explosion. He says, "fertility rates come down as economic development proceeds...As households move from subsistence agriculture to commercial farming and especially to urban life, they also choose to have fewer children." See pages 323-326 for his complete explanation.



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What does the Lord require of you?

To **act justly** and to **love mercy** and to
walk humbly with your God.