

**THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 14, 2008
MARKING HUMAN RIGHTS DAY, DECEMBER 10
PRESBYTERIAN PEACEMAKING PROGRAM**

LECTIONARY TEXTS FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

Luke 1:47–55

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

John 1:6–8, 19–28

PREPARATION

December 10, 2008, marks the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Sixty years ago, men and women gathered for the signing of a document that declared all people have rights—that there is inherent worth and dignity in every human person. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a secular document that shares some of the deepest convictions of our faith. In theological terms, the declaration is rooted in the belief that people everywhere deserve to live the abundant and full life proclaimed by Jesus. As the Rev. Bob Smylie, former Presbyterian Representative to the United Nations notes, Jesus’ “self-described calling included release of the captives, sight for the blind, and liberty for the oppressed. These signaled Jesus’ unique concern for human rights—what is ours by virtue of the fact that we are created as children of God. The phrase ‘human rights’ is not biblical. The biblical message uses the language of justice, freedom, peace, and security. These concepts are woven into the biblical fabric: the historical narratives, the books of the law, the prophetic teachings, wisdom in proverbs and the psalms, Jesus knew them as vital requirements for human fulfillment. They resonate throughout Jesus’ teachings, the writings of the disciples, and in Revelation.” During Advent, we join the world in longing for the day the promise of abundant, full life for all will be realized and in working in Christ’s name for that day.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

We gather today as your people. Help us see beyond difference and glimpse your image in each of us. Help us listen closely that we may hear your word spoken in a thousand different ways. Help us protect the weak, challenge the strong, free the prisoner, proclaim peace in violence, and heal the broken. We give thanks for the legacy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we pray that people everywhere might come to know the hope and promise embodied in that document. As your people, we ask that you help us to welcome one another into our common calling as we seek to serve you and the people of every land as we live into your reign. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We are free!

All: Free to do justice and love mercy!

One: We are God’s people!

All: Called and chosen to proclaim sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed!

One: We are a living covenant!

All: Sign to the world of God’s redeeming love, everlasting peace and coming reign!

One: Let us proclaim God’s new reign; let us worship our living Lord!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Reconciling and redeeming Lord, we dwell in fear. Fear of those who are different, fear of words we do not understand, fear of what might come, fear of not being the best, fear of losing power. We separate ourselves, building walls so great they seem impenetrable. Walls that are visible and walls we cannot see. Walls around houses, walls around communities, walls around nations. Desperately hoping to keep ourselves safe, we build walls. Call us from this place of fear. Pour your Holy Spirit upon us that we might remember who we are and to whom we belong. Teach us to walk beside you, caring for our neighbors, creating plowshares, feeding and nurturing. Demand that we live into your call to be ministers of reconciliation and servants of your reign. We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.

LITANY

One: God, in Jesus you make possible full, abundant life spiritually, physically, and in all its dimensions.

All: In Jesus you call us to pray and work to make that life possible for all people.

One: We pray for the imprisoned: the slave, the child held in bondage, the prisoner without hope of trial, the refugee bound in exile.

All: We pray for freedom! Bring freedom from chains that bind and freedom from sin that destroys.

One: For the invisible: the sick who lie in beds far from hospitals, the peoples whose land and language are dying, the poor in nameless slums, the undocumented, those whose humanity is denied and ignored.

All: We pray for sight! Open our eyes to see the dignity and the promise you have given each person.

One: For the injured: those who are broken by systems of injustice, the tortured, victims of violence, those who have lost hope.

All: We pray for wholeness! Bind up the broken places in each person's life. Where violence and hatred have taken away, help us to rebuild and restore.

One: We pray for the day when justice and mercy shall kiss;

All: when swords will lay beside the river;

One: when all nations will be gathered together;

All: when we will see each other clearly;

One: when your will is done;

All: and your peace is known.

One: Teach us Lord:

All: To love one another as you first loved us.

One: Teach us Lord:

All: To care for the least of our sisters and brothers, as you care for us.

One: Teach us Lord:

All: To know our own dignity and the worth and promise of all people.

One: We pray all these things, in the name of Jesus Christ, our brother and our Lord.

All: Amen.

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NOTES

The 210th General Assembly (1998) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted to “celebrate the affirmation of the dignity and value of human life affirmed in the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ and the International Bill of Human Rights, rejoicing in the hope that has been given to multitudes around the world; grateful for the vision that still inspires those who work and hope for a more humane future for all.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Presbyterian United Nations Office—www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/un/index.htm

60th Anniversary Universal Declaration of Human Rights—www.un.org/events/humanrights/udhr60/

Human Rights Day Worship Resources—www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/worship/worship.htm#rightsday

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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