

Lent 2012



Economic Justice

Themed Biblical Study Resource
Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland



Lent Resource 2012, abridged, A5 Version

Pagination is designed to correspond with the full, A4 version

All scriptural quotations are from the NRSV.

New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition, copyright 1989,
1995,

Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of
Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights
reserved.

Collects are taken from the Book of Common Prayer

Copyright 2004 by the Representative Body of the Church of Ireland

A resource by the Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland
for free use of the Church of Ireland and the churches generally.



*You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall
bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your
forehead. (Deut 6:6-7)*



Table of contents

Introduction

Introduction to Lent 2012—Economic Justice
Lenten Thoughts
Notes on the ACC project

Week One

Introduction
Readings—Deut 15:1–18; James 2:1–17
Notes
Questions

Week Two

Introduction
Readings—Amos 6; Mark 10:17–34
Notes
Questions

Week Three

Introduction
Readings—Psalm 73; Luke 1:39–58
Notes
Questions

Week Four

Introduction
Readings—Ezekiel 27:1–36; Luke 6:17–38
Notes
Questions



Week Five

Introduction

Readings—Isaiah 58; I Corinthians II:I7–34

Notes

Questions

Additional Resources

Further Passages on Economic Justice

Recommended Publications on Economic Justice

Useful Weblinks

Collects

Justice-related prayers for group use

About

BACI and the writing team

Feedback

Observations, Feedback, and the ACC Bible in the Life of the church

Introduction

As Christians, we understand the character and purposes of God through the collected books that make up the Bible (Old and New Testaments). Yet, real difficulties can arise as we attempt to read this book across the ‘gap’ of time and space. Increasing awareness of our historically shaped consciousness and the impact of linguistic and cultural relativism have contributed to the growing sense that the ‘gap’ is too wide for these ancient texts to still speak reliably to us. This loss of confidence has left many of us feeling estranged from the very source of our Christian faith. Fewer Bible studies and sermons that are only cursorily mention the Bible are symptomatic.

One of the express aims of the Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland (BACI) is to draw on the many excellent insights of scholarship that can help us to bridge the gap. We believe that an informed reading of Scripture will actually encourage the faith of the Church. This is not a simple task but with humility and discernment the Bible will continue to witness to the Word, the eternal wisdom of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Last year BACI sponsored a Lent course on the theme of creation. Once again this year’s theme has been chosen so that the Church of Ireland can participate in the Anglican Communion’s “Bible in the Life of the Church” project (see www.anglicancommunion.org). This three-year project has two specific aims:

1. to discover how Anglicans worldwide read their Bibles and
2. to begin to provide some of the tools that will enable a deeper engagement with Scripture.

The Lent course for 2012 is, appropriately enough, on the theme of economic justice. Week by week, selected passages are given along with short commentaries, suggestions for further reading and questions for group discussion.

BACI now enjoys the support and patronage of both Archbishops, and so we extend a warm invitation to all parishes and dioceses to join us in this adventure.! Our hope and prayer is that this Lenten resource will not only further the conversation between biblical scholarship and the Church but will, more importantly, continue to open us up to the transformative wisdom of the Scriptures.

Please take the time to consider the process and results of your Bible study. Not only the content but also the method of reading the Bible influences our understanding of it. To assess how the Church of Ireland and the Anglican Communion read the Bible, we strongly urge you to share your thoughts and the way your group interacted with the study with BACI and the ACC. On the last three pages (43-44) of this resource are feedback questions. Please take the time to answer the questions and return them to BACI.

As we begin to prepare for Holy Week and Easter, it is interesting to note that economic considerations were an important motivation in the plot to have Jesus killed. Not only did Jesus's expulsion of the money lenders from the temple anger the religious leaders (Mark 11: 15-18), John makes it part of motivations for Jesus's betrayal (John 12:1-8). It is one of the wonderful reversals we see take place between the pre-Easter city and the post-Easter city (Acts 2: 44; 4: 32-35).

Governments still wrestle with economics, and we continue to live through a period of history in which the complexities of globalisation can seem overwhelming. However, economic justice remains an urgent task, and our recent experience of the question here in Ireland has once again put the challenge into sharp focus. At a grassroots level the 'Occupy' phenomenon that started on Wall Street in September 2011 (and has spread to many cities around the world) is an indication that people are looking for new ways of organising the way we manage financial resources. There is a growing sense that something important has been lost, and people are searching for values that will better express our human condition.

So, in general terms, what does economic justice look like? How can the Church contribute to the great problems of our own day? In more specific terms, what does economic justice look like in our own communities? How might our lives need to change in order to bear witness to the God revealed in the Scriptures? These are some of the big questions that are addressed by this year's theme.

The Bible is full of good things to say about economic justice. It speaks to the local, the national, the international and even to the cosmic dimensions of justice in which economic justice is an important expression. As ever, the answers do not just fall effortlessly off the page. If, in the spirit of Proverbs 2:4, we are to 'make our ears attentive to wisdom', then we will need

to read, talk and pray as if we are searching for hidden treasure. We will then move beyond simply an intellectual engagement with our topic and, in very practical ways, we will begin to model communities in which economic justice is a reality. This vocation will at times be costly and painful, but it will also have the potential to create surprising oases of joy.

Social justice as faith in action

Deuteronomy is the fifth of the five books of the Law (the *Torah*) in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Law has a strong sense of the world as set in order by God, from the creation narratives of Genesis to the ordering of human relationships towards one another and towards God in the legal codes of the subsequent books. The covenant between God and God's people is the key expression of this ordering of relationships in Deuteronomy. Covenant speaks of God's lasting commitment to the people on the one hand, with the ongoing obligations of the appropriate human response to God's favour on the other hand.

Deuteronomy 15 is grounded in this relationship of blessing and obedience: the land is God's gift, and how the Israelites must act in this context is fundamentally shaped by that fact. Deut. 15:1-6 requires the remission of debts every seventh year. The cycle of poverty, degradation and exploitation which long-term indebtedness presupposes is interrupted by the restoration of relationships to their divinely-gifted state where there will be enough for all to live as functioning members of the community. This seven-yearly restoration clearly echoes the pattern of Sabbath (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15). The ideal circumstances of Deut. 15:4-5 are tempered by the recognition in verses 6-11 that reality does not always measure up to ideal standards, but this does not lessen the obligations of mutual support and solidarity that constitute covenant faith. To give to the needy neighbour, to restore the debt-ridden fellow-member of the community to his or her status within that community is to act in acceptance of God's blessing and God's gifts.

The following set of injunctions, in Deut. 15:12-18, develops the theme of the Sabbath restoration of relationships

specifically in relation to members of the community who have been reduced to bonded labour, presumably, again, as a result of becoming caught in an inescapable trap of indebtedness. What is envisaged, however, is not merely the legal end to a period of bondage in the seventh year, but the recognition of the right of one's fellow member of the community of covenant faith to the means necessary for a dignified and secure life within that community. The right of freedom, like the land, is God's gift. Freedom in the land, however, does not mean independence, but interdependence before God.

In a similar vein, the Letter of James characterises God as one who gives generously (Jas. 1:5, 17), and who defends the rights of those under social and economic pressures (Jas. 1:9, 27; 5:4), which have resulted in them being pushed to a marginal place within the prevailing social order. Jas. 2:1-17 offers a number of concrete examples of how followers of Jesus Christ are challenged, or better, *obliged* by the faith they claim to identify themselves wholeheartedly with God's view of the world. Within the prevailing earthly social order, the rich may possess power and status, but the real nature of this power and status is exploitative and oppressive, defying God's order of the universe (Jas. 2:2-3, 6-7). The poor and destitute (Jas. 2:2, 15), however, have no hope but their dependence on God; they cannot provide for themselves and can only trust in God's provision (Jas. 2:5). Those who have no hope but God's faithfulness exemplify dependence on God for anyone who would claim the faith of Jesus Christ.

Faith is not a superficial claim to believe; it is a deep commitment of utter identification with the purposes of God. To have faith is to act in accordance with God's will, and God's will - God's *Torah* - requires selfless, generous, even costly loyalty to one's fellow, one's neighbour, one's brother or sister (Jas. 2:8, 15-17).

- A. (Deut. 15:1) The seventh year: the principle of release in the seventh year is first expressed in Ex. 21:2, within one of the oldest passages of the Law, with reference to the release of male slaves; a sabbatical fallow year for land is laid down in Ex. 23:10-11. As well as Deut. 15, the ideal envisaged by the sabbatical principle is also further developed in Lev. 25.
- B. (Deut. 15:12) The ancient Babylonian law-code of Hammurabi provided for release from debt-slavery after three years; it seems likely that a practice known elsewhere in the ancient world has been codified in the Hebrew Bible in a way that ties it into the symbolic importance of the Sabbath.
- C. (Jas. 2:2) The Greek word translated as “poor” does not simply mean “not well-off”, but has the much stronger sense of “destitute”; someone who has lost his means of living and his status within society.
- D. (Jas. 2:5) The poor who are “rich in faith” and “heirs of the kingdom” may suggest early Christian prophets who lived in accordance with Jesus’ injunction in Luke 9:2-3 to proclaim the kingdom without regard to the provision of their daily needs, thus living in radical dependence on God, and, in practice, on those who would welcome them and provide for them.
- E. (Jas. 2:13) Mercy is an important biblical concept, which has strongly relational overtones. Mercy is often associated with the restoration to their place in society of those who have lost their livelihood and status, such as the demon-possessed man of Mk 5:19, the “tax collectors and sinners” of Matt. 9:11-13, or the debt-slaves of the parable in Matt. 18:33.

1. How do we regard debt in our society? To what extent is our attitude to debt informed by our Christian faith?
2. Does the idea of debt remission make us uncomfortable? Why might this be? Is debt remission even practical in today's complex global economy? How might we observe the spirit, if not the letter, of the obligations laid down in these passages?
3. What is the relationship between economy and community?
4. Are there discrepancies between God's will, as discerned in Scripture, and the prevailing social and economic wisdom in our world today? Which do we find it easier to identify with? How deep is such identification in practice?
5. Who is our 'neighbour', our 'brother or sister'?
6. How do issues of lending and borrowing impact the Church of Ireland?

Can the rich be saved?

In Amos 6, we see the rich as passive spectators, watching disaster unfold around them yet seemingly inured from it all by a firewall of prosperity. Verses 4-6 describe in graphic terms the luxuries that continue to surround them and which continue to occupy their full attention and demand their unwavering devotion. Instead, they should have been grieving at what was happening around them (verse 6b), and vigilant to the impending threat of disaster (verse 3).

This was a time, approximately 760 BCE, of economic prosperity in the northern kingdom. Jeroboam (I:I), seemingly an able administrator, had cashed in on the decline of other nations around him. He took control of trade routes, the nation boomed and a rich upper class came into being. Archaeological excavations, including the discovery of the Samaritan ostraca, have demonstrated the grandeur of Jeroboam's fortress city together with the luxury and false worship which so vexed Amos. Amos saw beyond the affluence to deeper realities of impending judgement.

Would the rich listen to this severe critic of their lifestyle and their attitude? There would always be the temptation to write Amos off: a mere shepherd and, coming from the southern kingdom (Tekoa; see I:I), how dare he interfere with his criticisms of life in the northern kingdom! Subsequent history supplies its own commentary on this: Damascus and Samaria were overrun by a resurgent Assyria in 721 BCE; its people were taken away into exile and the land re-populated by people from elsewhere.

This is one of many passages in the Old Testament where the prophets denounce a selfish, unseeing materialism going hand-in-hand with superficial religiosity. It is tempting to draw parallels with our own situation, when Europe and the wider world continue to teeter on the brink of economic disaster. Those who are well-off are always in danger of refusing to see the situation and respond in any meaningful way.

Mark 10:17-34 admirably demonstrates how the gospels can be read as story rather than simple historical record. The rich man, in contrast to Amos 6, is portrayed in this story as an active participant. His actions and emotions, and those of the people around him, are vividly recorded. He runs up to Jesus (verse 17); his quest is sincere, as Jesus clearly sees (verse 21: 'Jesus looked at him and loved him'). He knows that keeping commandments, however important, is not enough; something more personal is required. Most significantly for our theme, faced with the challenge to sell all and then follow Jesus, 'his face fell' – disappointment, dismay, the realisation that for him, 'the price is too high'. But to his credit, he sees clearly the choice he has to make.

In this man's case, his possessions were an obstacle to wholehearted discipleship. No wonder the watching disciples were filled with consternation (verse 26). In the rest of the New Testament, however, it becomes clear that some of Jesus' followers and early Christians were rich. The danger is that we see this as somehow letting us off the hook. Christian discipleship will inevitably involve loss of some sort (thus consider Peter's words in verse 28). This loss could well in some way be financial; many of the temptations that face us are to do with money and possessions (thus verse 23; see also I Timothy 6:6-19, contra Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 2 Corinthians 8,9).

- A. (Amos 6:4): Ivory decor was popular for inlays in furniture and for wall panels. One of the principal sources of ivory was elephant tusks, which were imported from Aram (where Syrian elephants were not yet extinct). For those who could afford it, the best quality meats came from specially bred sheep and cattle that were kept in stalls (see Malachi 4:2) and fattened with barley prior to slaughter.
- B. (Amos 6:6): possibly they were not only drinking to excess in these large bowls but perhaps also of profaning sacred objects. Banqueters in the ancient world were often treated by a generous host to fine oils that would be used to anoint their foreheads. This provided a glistening sheen to their countenance and also would have added a fragrance to their persons and the room. (See also Psalm 104:15 – but here as something to celebrate, not condemn!).
- C. (Amos 6:13): ‘Lo-debar’ is Hebrew for ‘nowhere’ and is likely a pun by Amos on a location in Ammonite or Aramean territory. The context implies that the Israelite kingdom had just conquered the city or had had a military victory in the area. Amos sees the rejoicing caused by this as only masquing Israel’s own conquest.
- D. (Amos 6:14): ‘Lebo-Hamath’ is likely the Anti-Lebanon mountain range, in the northernmost reaches of Palestine; ‘Wadi Arabah’ is a seasonal river either near Jericho or in the Transjordan, in either case the southern border of Northern Israel. The phrase thus represents the totality of the kingdom.
- E. (Mark 10:17): Few people ran under the hot sun. His whole attitude speaks of earnestness and even urgency. It is possible that Peter’s words in verse 28 are an attempt to contrast the young man’s failure to face the challenge of discipleship with their own response.
- F. (Mark 10:22): ‘His face fell’ – a rare Greek verb is used to describe a very strong emotion.

1. What are the modern equivalents of the luxuries cited in Amos 6:4-5? How many of our own habits and possessions should rightly be classed as luxuries but are unthinkingly assumed to be necessities?
2. How concerned are we at the economic situation that has developed in recent years? While it is easy to blame others (e.g. bankers!), is this a mechanism for blinding ourselves to our own attitudes and responsibilities? Are our concerns chiefly about how we are affected rather than concern for others?
3. What sacrifices are we willing to pay to play our part in helping to put things right?
4. Do you know of any churches that run courses in Christian discipleship? If so, do you know if they include material on Christian attitudes to, and use of, money and possessions?
5. Have you heard of the Old Testament principle of tithing, in which one-tenth of our income is given to the Lord (e.g. Leviticus 27:30-32)? If so, have you ever considered putting it into practice?
6. Would you consider getting together with other Christians and sharing (at least some) details of your regular income and expenditure, being willing thereby to be accountable to each other within such a group?
7. What financial pressures and temptations threaten the reality of your own discipleship?

Exalting the humble and meek

Reading the four Gospels, they give a far more colourful picture of Mary than only being 'meek and mild'. She is a woman of initiatives and deep thoughts. After the Archangel Gabriel had foretold the birth of Jesus, she goes to her relative Elizabeth with 'haste'. After the two women have greeted each other, Mary bursts into song.¹ This song is in the history of the Church known as the 'Magnificat'.²

It is a powerful song in two parts. The first part (verses 46-49) conveys Mary's personal feelings. She praises God for what he has done to her. Her words reveal that Mary knows her life will never be the same again and the world will never be the same again. The second part of Mary's Song (verses 50-55) widens the perspectives. It is about us, and all who fear the Lord are drawn in. It tells us about God's power and what God can do. Then as well as now as well as in the future.

This part of the song sets out how God wants us to live. Indeed we may well be changed as we consider the three challenges that meet us. The first challenge is about moral change: 'He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.' (1:51). The Christian faith involves the death of our own pride. If we live close to Christ and follow his teaching, then there is no room for being stiff-necked. Instead we are shaped by love, humility and forgiveness. The second challenge is social: 'He has brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly' (1:52). The Christian faith ends our thinking about prestige. If we take this verse seriously, it means that all of us, no matter our financial situation, class or background, have the same value. Hence all in our society should have access to the same services in terms of health, education and social opportunity. The third challenge relates to economic change: 'he has filled the hungry ... and sent the rich away empty' (1:53). The Christian

faith strives for a society where no one has too much and no one has too little. Such a society is based on the principles to give with joy and to be hospitable.

These three challenges lead to change. Taking them seriously means that our complacency is confronted, and if we listen carefully it may indeed force us out of our own comfort zones. Reciting or singing these familiar and traditional words is at the same time both comforting and challenging.

The main question in Psalm 73 is why the wicked and arrogant prosper and why the good, honest and godly (righteous) suffer, struggle and face difficulties. To the righteous, this is a conundrum or even a scandal. This theme is familiar in other biblical texts, for instance, there are many parallels with the Book of Job. There are also parallels with Psalm 37 and 49. The conclusion reached in all these different texts, however, differs. As in Psalm 49, there is a realisation in Psalm 73 of the transitory nature of worldly wealth.

Verse 17 is the turning point in Psalm 73, and after that the psalmist sees the solution to his problem: walking closely with God will open one up to his counsel, guidance and protection. At the end of the day it is only God that can receive us with honour. The psalmist reaches the conclusion that no matter how many worldly goods we have, unless we have God as well, something is missing. To be a whole person requires faith, which is a timeless insight.

1. It should be noted that some early manuscripts of the Gospel according to Luke ascribe the song to Elizabeth rather than Mary. It is also interesting that this song echoes the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Sam 2:1-10).

2. Latin *Magnificat anima mea* means 'my soul magnifies'.

Psalm 73

- A. (73:1): Asaph – was an ancestor of the Temple singers and one of David's chief musicians. For instance 1 Chronicles 25:1 and 2 Chronicles 5:12.
'pure in heart' – honest and faithful to God in word and action.
- B. (73:3): 'prosperity' – could also mean 'good health'.
- C. (73:4): 'sleek' – could also mean fat. In other words referring to some one rich and affluent.
- D. (73:6): 'necklace' – a symbol worn as a sign of importance.
- E. (73:7): 'eyes swell out with fatness' – wealth and riches have made them arrogant and conceited.
- F. (73:9): 'set their months against heaven' means to be against God.
- G. (73:13): 'washed my hands in innocence' means to prove oneself without guilt. It is a symbolic action. A cleaning ritual performed to prove innocence. This could have been part of an oath of purification, e.g., Deut. 21:6. Pilate also washed his hands as a sign of innocence when Jesus was brought before him, Matt. 27:24.
- H. (73:18): 'in slippery places' – means that someone's life is like a slippery path on which they may fall.
- I. (73:19): 'terrors' this could mean misfortunes or demons.
- J. (73:22): 'stupid' – means that the psalmist found it hard to believe that there is divine justice and righteousness.
- K. (73:23): 'I am continually with you' – to realise that one belongs to God.
- L. (73:23): 'hold my right hand' – to be honoured.
- M. (73:26): 'my flesh and my heart' – the sum of one's vitality

Luke 1:39-58

- N. (1:41): 'Leapt' – the movement of the baby as Mary greeted Elizabeth indicated a future relationship between the two babies. i.e. John recognises Jesus as Lord. Elizabeth also recognises this and filled by the Holy Spirit, she interprets her baby's leap and she makes the first Christological confession in verse 43. There is a 'leaping' parallel in Gen. 25:22 when Esau and Jacob leapt in Rebekah's womb.
- O. (1: 46-56): The Magnificat, Mary's Song of Praise, follows the Hebrew poetry pattern. Words, phrases and expressions clearly have their roots in the Old Testament. For instance, 'for the Mighty one has done' (Luke 1:49), can imply past, present or future time, which is a common trait in Hebrew poetry. There are similarities and parallels with Hannah's Prayer or Song of Praise in I Sam. 2:1-11.
- P. (1:48-49): Mary's lowliness is contrasted by God being the Mighty One.

1. Who are the rich, arrogant and mighty today? And who are the lowly, humble and meek?
2. The Magnificat is a powerful song, full of challenges: moral, social and economic. What does this song say to you? What does this song say to the Church? How do we handle and justify the fact that some people 'jump the queue' because they have the financial resources to do so, rather than individuals being assessed according to need, for instance, when it comes to health matters?
3. How do we view an 'austerity budget' and the European economic crisis in the light of the Magnificat? Who is 'lifted up' and who is 'brought down'?
4. How do we approach the issue of the righteous person's suffering and the prosperous non-believer's success?
5. Psalm 73 reaches the conclusion that without faith we cannot become a whole person. How does your faith improve you and what does it bring to your life?

Choosing Poor Values

Both passages this week invert normal human ways of thinking about economic values, although they represent very different kinds of texts and the original audiences were quite divergent.

The first passage, from Ezekiel, is a prophetic and poetic lament over the city of Tyre. Tyre was a very wealthy city, known for its long-distance maritime trade and its fabulously expensive purple dye. Likely written around the time of the siege of Tyre by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in the early 6th Century BCE—not long in time from that king’s conquest of Jerusalem—the prophet depicts Tyre as a massive and expensive flagship which suddenly and unexpectedly sinks in the middle of a voyage. Not only can the ship’s finery not save it from sinking to the bottom of the sea, but its wide-ranging trade partners can only watch in horror. Wealth cannot persuade God to withhold judgement. When read with Ezekiel’s subsequent oracle against Tyre in chapter 28, the prophet shows that wealth made Tyre prideful as well as feel secure. The Phoenician cities (of which Tyre was the most important at the time) were long-time trade partners of the Israelite kingdoms, and they shared a similar culture. Though seemingly directed at wealthy Tyre, the lament was really meant for the ears of Judeans who were facing subjection and exile. One can almost sense a feeling of pity as well as warning in Ezekiel’s perspective on Tyre.

The second reading comes from Luke’s version of the Beatitudes, another version of which appears in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3-12). The form of the first section is unique in the literature of the period, although it echoes covenant blessings and curses such as those of Deuteronomy. Unlike these, however, Luke’s blessings and woes

describe a present state rather than a future one. Our normal perspective on poverty and wealth is inverted, with the poor called blessed and the rich lamented. These are followed by a list of injunctions for the use and attitude one ought to hold towards possessions and money; rather than valuing the prestige or profit which a relationship could proffer, Jesus commands the valuing of people through a series of difficult imperatives. Spoken to 'his disciples', the words as presented by Luke seem to imply that the original listeners were a mix of poor and rich, though Luke was writing for a (presumably wealthy) patron.

In both passages those deemed successful by the world are almost pitied for choosing the wrong set of values; while money may buy things valued by many, these are not the things which are to be valued by God's people. Instead, God's people need to choose what the world sees as 'poor' values.

- A. (Ezekiel 27:2): Tyre was a major maritime city on an island (in what is now the Lebanon). It was Phoenician, and famous in antiquity for its trading and trading colonies throughout the Mediterranean world.
- B. (Ezekiel 27:3): Hebrew word can be understood normally as 'I' or as 'ship', in keeping with the metaphor in the rest of the chapter.
- C. (Ezekiel 27:5): Senir is Mount Hermon in the Ante-lebanon range, famous as a sacred mountain.
- D. (Ezekiel 27:7): location unknown; Cyprus has been suggested, although it was not a known source of purple (while Tyre itself was).
- E. (Ezekiel 27:8–9): Arvad, Sidon, and Gebal are other important Phoenician ports, at this time less prosperous than Tyre.
- F. (Ezekiel 27:10): Paras, Lud, and Put: usually understood as Persia, Lydia, and Libya, three countries far apart.
- G. (Ezekiel 27:11): Gammad is otherwise unknown.
- H. (Ezekiel 27:12): Tarshish was in southern Spain on the Guadalquivir River. It was known for bronze trading and even had trade links with Britain. It was where Jonah was said to flee to.
- I. (Ezekiel 27:13): Javan, Meshech, Tubal: all areas in Anatolia, modern-day Turkey and Armenia.
- J. (Ezekiel 27:15): Dedan, an important trading city in Arabia. Emendation gives Rhodians.
- K. (Ezekiel 27:18): Helbon in northern Syria was known for the excellence of its wine.
- L. (Ezekiel 27:19): Likely a list from southern Arabia, areas known for the spice trade.

- M. (Ezekiel 27:23): 'Eden' likely refers to a region near Armenia or Kurdistan.
- N. (Ezekiel 27:26): The east wind is notorious for being violent and dangerous.
- O. (Ezekiel 27:31): Traditional acts of mourning.
- P. (Luke 6:20-26): The 'blesseds' appear in Matt. 5:1-12, where the list is much longer; but the woes are unique to Luke. Luke only has 'the poor' while Matthew gives 'the poor in spirit'.
- Q. (Luke 6:34): the word 'to lend' only appears here and in Matt. 5:42. Lending for interest to other Jews is forbidden in the Torah; this saying of Jesus, then, must either refer to lending to Gentiles (members outside the group) or to the expectation of receiving the principle back, rather than interest. In either case, it is more strict than the Torah's injunctions on lending.
- R. (Luke 6:35): Word translated 'expecting nothing in return' only appears here in New Testament. Properly means 'despair.'
- S. (Luke 6:38): the 'measure' uses the language of grain transactions

1. What is it about wealth which the passages find objectionable?
2. Do the two passages share concerns or ideas? How do they differ?
3. What response do you think Ezekiel wanted from his listeners?
4. What response do you think Luke expected from his audience?
5. What values do these readings consider important for the heavenly economy?
6. What don't the passages say about the rich?
7. What are the dangers of riches in these passages?
8. What are the dangers of poverty in these passages?
9. How do these passages contribute to a biblical understanding of economic justice?
10. What practical suggestions do these passages make for being an economically just people?
11. What do these readings say about the values current in the Church of Ireland?

Week Five Introduction

Finding a Fast and a Feast that the Lord Would Choose

This week's texts emerge from contexts in which factions threatened to undermine the witness of God's people in the world. The texts engage the question of what it is that makes our ritual observances acceptable to God. Both passages make the point that neither fasting nor feasting is inherently pleasing to God, but that each must be embraced as a practice of social justice and each must convey the equality and embrace of the kingdom of God.

Isaiah 58:1-14 comes from the period immediately following the return from Babylonian exile. Beginning in chapter 56 and continuing through the end of the book of Isaiah, the prophet turns his attention to the conditions in Judah following the return. This is a period of rebuilding. It is a period in which the temple and its structures as well as the power dynamics of the community are being negotiated for a new context. Who will control Jerusalem and its day-to-day functioning? Who will have charge of the temple and how will it be administered? Who has a right to claim the land, and with it the possibility of agricultural production and economic stability?

The returning exiles did not return to an empty land. There were people already living there who considered themselves worshippers of Israel's God. Some of these seem to have been descendants of those brought into the land by the Assyrians after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE. They claimed to have been worshipping Israel's God since then (Ezra 4:2). Others were presumably those left behind in the land at the time of the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and their descendants. Each of these groups, as well as the returning exiles themselves, had a stake in the questions concerning the make-up of the new community in Jerusalem, and each had a stake in the

question of who had the right to be called the people of God.

The returned exiles busied themselves with setting up a new community. Their activities are largely profiled in Ezra and Nehemiah. They rebuilt the temple and the city wall. They focused heavily on obedience to the Law of Moses. Ezra read this law aloud to the people (Neh. 8:1-12) and they promised to obey it. The leaders of this group defined those who belonged within the community of the faithful as those who were ethnically pure and as those who kept the law. They forced Jewish men to divorce foreign wives (Ezra 10:1-44; Neh. 13:23-27) and closed the gates of the city to enforce the keeping of Sabbath (Neh. 13:19-22). These practices limited who could belong to the community, and they also limited who had access to power and to land. In the ancient world land passed largely through inheritance, and the divorcing of foreign wives had implications for land inheritance as well as for the welfare of the women and their children.

In this context of debate over the identity of God's people, the prophet responsible for Isaiah 56-66 makes shocking statements about the inclusion of foreigners and eunuchs among those whom the LORD would bless and give a place within the temple if they kept the Sabbath (Isaiah 56:3-7). The Sabbath then, for this prophet, becomes a means for breaking down barriers between people. It is the means by which one might gain a place within the community, not a means or a time for exclusion.

The passage under consideration builds not only on debate about Sabbath keeping and religious identity in its historical period, but also upon a connection between Sabbath keeping and economic justice in Deuteronomy. Throughout Deuteronomy the people are exhorted to care for the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner resident among them. The commandment to keep the Sabbath differs somewhat in Deuteronomy from the parallel commandment in Exodus. In Exodus the Sabbath commandment is justified with reference to the rest of God at the end of the seven days of creation. In Deuteronomy, however, the Sabbath is commanded with the instruction that none of the household is to do any work so that 'your male and female slave may rest as well as you' (Deut. 5:14). The commandment is justified and reinforced with reference to Israel's memory of slavery in Egypt. In these ways, the prophet turns Ezra and Nehemiah's interest in keeping the law against them in the debate over the identity of God's people. The law itself requires

care for the foreigner and links the Sabbath with justice for workers and slaves. Isaiah 58 calls the returnees' fasts inappropriate and ineffective because they 'serve their own interests' (Isa. 58:3, 13) and 'oppress all [their] workers' (Isa. 58:3).

While the time period and imagery of the first passage may be unfamiliar to us, the second passage is etched into our corporate consciousness as portions of it appear in our liturgy for the Lord's Supper. The words of institution which appear within it (I Cor. 11:23-25) are part of a larger argument that Paul is making throughout the letter about the nature of the church and the Christian community. Like the prophet, Paul writes for a community in which there are factions (I Cor. 11:18-19) and here as well, the division has to do with determining who is 'genuine' (v. 19). Providing a suitable response to that sense of division is the first indication that Paul gives of the reason for writing the letter we now know as I Corinthians (1:10-11). Paul launches the body of his letter with an appeal to the believers at Corinth 'that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose' (1:10). He describes the divisions he sees in the Corinthian church as mimicking the world's mode of grasping for power and rejects these as the opposite of the spirit of Christ (1:18-31). Elsewhere in the letter he refers to the believers as the body of Christ (12:12-27).

This focus on unity within the church and the description of the Christian community as the 'body of Christ' illustrate that the threat of eating and drinking in an 'unworthy manner' (I Cor. 11:27) is intimately tied to the concerns Paul expresses over factions (I Cor. 11:18-19) and 'humiliating those who have nothing' (I Cor. 11:22). Paul is concerned that the Corinthian church's celebration around the Lord's table ought to express the unity of the body of Christ and ought to act out a type of justice and equity that differs from the world's notions of prestige and power (I Cor. 11:32).

- A. (Isaiah 58:1): ‘Shout out do not hold back’: There is a tension between the command to shout out without restraint and the content of that shouting. One expects a joyful proclamation; the reference to a ‘trumpet’ is a *shofar* – a musical instrument associated with temple liturgy. One expects that the shouting will call the people to worship, but instead it is to announce to them their rebellion. This tension between the expectation created by the first half of the verse and the second continues into verse 2, and in both cases highlights the prophet’s sense that the people’s appearances as holy people are deceiving.
- B. (Isaiah 58:2) : ‘as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness’: The phrasing here implies that they are not righteous. Whatever their fasting is, it is not producing righteousness.
- C. (Isaiah 58:3 & 5): ‘humble ourselves’: This phrase is difficult to translate. The verb means to afflict or deny oneself. The word translated ourselves is notoriously difficult to render in English and means persons but often with specific attention being drawn to their animating breath or spirit and desires. The phrase here translated ‘humble ourselves’ is used by the book of Leviticus as an expression of the special sort of fasting that accompanied the annual Day of Atonement ritual (Lev. 16 and 23). In the regulations for that ritual, any Israelites who did not ‘humble themselves’ would be cut off from the people.
- D. (Isaiah 58:6-7): The prophet outlines a very different mode of self-denial and calls upon the hearers to embrace fasting not as a ritual but as a time of letting the interests of others come before their own. The fasting that is outlined is one that is profoundly bound up in righting socio-economic wrongs.

E. (Isaiah 58:12): This verse contains imagery of rebuilding. In this time period there was a focus on reconstruction of Jerusalem's city walls and temple. Here the rebuilders are promised a place in the history of reconstruction if they will attend first to the issues of social and economic justice.

I Corinthians II:17-34

F. (I Cor. II:19): This verse should be read as sarcastic. In light of Paul's broader message in the letter and his opening exhortations to be of one mind, it would seem that he is either citing the language of those who have written to him about these matters or is rejecting their implied position through sarcasm.

G. (I Cor. II:20): 'it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper': Paul calls the Corinthians' celebrations not the Lord's Supper because it does not honour the Lord and instead they seek to honour themselves. There is a marked contrast between the 'Lord's Supper' (v. 20) and 'your own supper' (v. 21).

H. (I Cor. II:27): 'in an unworthy manner': Given the thrust of the letter and the broader context this unworthy manner should be seen as eating without regard for the other members of the body of Christ. This is particularly the case in light of the following note that judgement is for those who 'eat and drink without discerning the body' (v. 29) and of Paul's anger over the Corinthians' practice of 'humiliat[ing] those who have nothing' (v. 22).

Week Five Questions

(Isaiah 58:1-17):

1. After reading the text aloud, ask the group to react to the images of the text. Do any depictions jump out at you? How do you respond to them?
2. Divide the group in two. Ask one group to generate a list of things they can say based on this text about a fast that is pleasing to God, and the other group to make a list of things this text says about a fast that is not pleasing to God. Compare the two lists. As a group discuss whether you can make some general comments about the differences between the two fasts. What is the nature of a fast that pleases God?
3. To Discuss: How do our Lenten fasts compare with the two types of fasts described in this passage? Why do we fast during Lent? What would a fast motivated by economic justice look like for us?
4. To Discuss: What is the relationship between economic justice and self-interest? How do they relate in this text? How do they relate in modern society? Can they co-exist and if so, in what way?
5. To Discuss: This passage sees the outgrowth of economic justice being restoration. What would such restoration look like for our society?
6. To Discuss: How can we as a faith community embrace a fast that the Lord would choose? What would that look like? What practical measures might we take as a group?

(I Corinthians 11:17-34):

1. Paul draws a distinction between the Lord's Supper and our own. How would we articulate the differences between these? How does Paul describe each? What should the primary emphases of the Lord's Supper be according to this text?
2. What about the Corinthians' practices 'humiliate[s] those who have nothing'?

3. What sort of divisions does our community face? In what ways are we responding appropriately to these? In what ways can we improve?
4. How does Paul use the quotation from the tradition (v. 23-26) to respond to the divisions among the Corinthians? Why do you suppose he does this? Does his argument work for you?
5. What does Paul mean by eating in ‘an unworthy manner’? What makes a communion celebration worthy? What do we do that is either worthy or unworthy? What can we do to make our table celebrations more focused on the body of Christ?
6. Give each member of the group a copy of the most recent communion liturgy from the congregation’s worship. Ask them to interact with the liturgy in light of their reading of this passage. What elements of the liturgy reflect an interpretation of this passage? What about the liturgy points to economic justice? How focused are we on those issues in our celebration of Holy Communion? How can we make them more prominent?

(Drawing the texts together):

1. Based on these two texts, how would you describe the relationship between ritual observance and social and economic justice?
2. How should Christians think about self-interest in light of these texts?
3. What is the relationship between community identity and economic justice? Do we have a special responsibility for those within our group’s boundaries? Do economic circumstances tempt us to re-draw those boundaries? How can our community respond to these pressures?

Please take a moment to offer your reflections on this study on pages 43-44.

- **Job 29–31**

Job contrasts his good deeds to the poor and vulnerable with his suffering and asks for justice

- **Deuteronomy 24:17–22**

Laws providing for the poor, widow, and alien

- **James 5:1–6**

Condemnation of rich oppressors

- **Mark 14:3–9**

Jesus anointed with costly perfume

- **Revelation 18**

Condemnation of systems of greed

- **Micah 3:5–12**

Prophets and teachers corrupted by money

On Justice:

- Biddle, Mark E. "The Biblical prohibition against usury." *Interpretation* 65[2011]: 117-127.
- Colwell, Matthew. "Practicing Sabbath Economics: How to Live in the Light of God's Abundance and Provision." *Sojourners Magazine* 37.5 (2008): 20-24.
- Crainshaw, Jill. "Living the Feast: Liturgical Etiquette for Beulah's Table." *Liturgy*, 22.1 (Feb 01 [2007]): 19-26.
- Gadzekpo, Richard. "A Survey of the Deuteronomist's Theology of Poverty Alleviation." *AME Zion Quarterly Review* 120 no 2 (2007): 9-13.
- Hann, Roelff. *The Economics of Honor: Biblical Reflections on Property and Money*. trans. By Bert Hielema. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Jensen, David Hadley (Interviewee). "David H Jensen: Global Weariness and Sabbath Rest." *Insights* 122.2 (2007): 12-15.
- Myers, Ched. "'God Speed the Year of Jubilee!' Jesus' New Economy of Grace: The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics." *Sojourners* 27 (1998): 24-28, 36-39.
- Myers, Ched. "Why Sabbath Economics?" *Living Pulpit* 12 no 2 Ap-Je (2003): 14-15.
- Petersen, Eugene. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987: pp 63-83.
- Witherington, Ben, III. *Jesus and Money*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010.

On particular Books:

- Cook, Stephen L. *Conversations with Scripture: Second Isaiah*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2008.
- Heffelfinger, Katie M. *'I am Large, I Contain Multitudes.'* *Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- Moxnes, Halvor. *The Economy of the Kingdom. Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

Schmidt, Frederick W. *Conversations with Scripture: The Gospel of Luke*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2009.

On the Church of Ireland and Reading the Bible:

Olhausen, William and Jason M. Silverman. "Where Angels Fear To Tread? Considering the Bible in the Church of Ireland." *Search* 34.3 (2011): 182-187.

Pierce, Andrew. A description of the use of the Bible in the Church of Ireland. Clare Amos and Stephen Lyon, eds. Norwich Press, forthcoming.

Internet:

"Bible and Social Justice overview." http://www.umc-gbcs.org/atf/cf/%7B325AB72F-313E-4CC3-BB1A-EF0A52968A8D%7D/The_Bible_and_Social_Justice.pdf

Artson, Rabbi Bradley Shavit. "Biblical Economic Justice: Supply and Demand Isn't Enough" *Huffington Post* 9 Jan 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-bradley-shavit-artson/supply-demand-isnt-enough_b_1178974.html

Beatitude Society. "Poverty and Economic Justice." <http://www.beatitudessociety.org/resources-regarding-poverty-economic-justice>

Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice. <http://clbsj.org/>

Episcopal Network for Economic Justice. <http://www.enej.org/>

John Mark Ministries. "Economic Justice." <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/1477.htm>

Mott, Stephen and Ronald J. Sider. "Economic Justice: a Biblical Paradigm." *Transformation* 17.2 (2002):15-63. http://www.ocms.ac.uk/transformation/articles/1702.050_mott.pdf

Theology Library: Economic Justice. <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/economic.htm>

Heavenly Father,
Whose children suffered at the hands of Herod:
By your great might frustrate all evil designs,
And establish your reign of justice, love and peace;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God and Father,
You have so ordered our life
That we are dependent on one another;
Prosper those engaged in commerce and industry
And direct their minds and hands
That they may rightly use your gifts in the service of others;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Lord,
Who has taught us that all our doings without charity are
nothing worth;
Send Thy Holy Spirit,
And pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity,
The very bond of peace and of all virtues,
Without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee;
Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake.

O God,
Whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in
heaven and earth;
We humbly beseech thee to put away from us
All hurtful things,
And to give us those things which be profitable for us;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Almighty God,
Whose blessed Son called Matthew the tax-collector
To be an apostle and evangelist:
Give us grace to forsake the selfish pursuit of gain
And the possessive love of riches:
That we may follow in the way of your Son Jesus Christ,
Who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever.

O almighty and everlasting God,
Who hast graciously given unto us
The fruits of the earth in their season;
We yield thee humble and hearty thanks for this thy bounty;
Beseeching thee to give us grace rightly
To use the same to thy glory,
And the relief of those that need;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit,
One God, world without end.

Some prayers from Christian Aid's *Dear Life*.

God of all creation
in your teeming and orderly world,
we have disturbed the balance –
the rich forcing the poor
to wreck environments.
Help us to renew the landscape,
restoring what has been destroyed,
so that life may continue,
precarious but able to endure.

God of the just weight
and the fair measure,
let me remember the hands
that harvested my food, my drink,
not only in my prayers
but in the marketplace.
Let me not seek a bargain
That leaves another hungry.

Other prayers

For group prayer

God give strength
to those who are passed over
for the necessities of life.
For you have always chosen
those who are called nothing,
of no account, officially not there –
and with them fashioned your will for our world.

○ God, you promise a world
where those who now weep shall laugh,
those who are hungry shall feast,
those who are poor now and excluded,
shall have your kingdom for their own.
I want this world too.
I renounce despair.
I will act for change.
I choose to be included
in your great feast of life,

○ God, you took upon you
the yoke of humanity
and the burden of love,
and did not find it easy;
let us learn from you
to share the weight of all this aching world,
that our souls may be light,
and our hearts rested,
as together we are carried by you
in Jesus Christ.

Some Prayers from the Iona Community

O God, you are always true to us in love
and we are left wanting to say sorry
for our faithlessness to you and one another,
for our forgetting the poor and the broken,
for our failure to cherish creation.
Give us life, O God, to change,
And enable us to change that we may live.

Spirit of truth and judgement,
who alone can cast out
the powers that grip our world
at this point of crisis,
give us your discernment,
that we may accurately name what is evil,
and know the way that leads to peace,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Spirit of integrity,
you drive us into the desert,
to search out our truth.
Give us clarity to know what is right,
that we may abandon the false innocence
of failing to choose at all,
but my follow the purposes of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

God of history,
you share our joys and crushing
sorrows,
you hear the cries of the afflicted,
you fill the hungry,
and you set free the oppressed.
We pray for the end to all injustice.
Inspire us with God's all embracing
love,
challenge us with Jesus's sacrificial
love,
empower us with the Spirit's
transforming love,
that we and all God's children may
live and be free. Amen.

O God of all creation,
lead us in your way of love
and fill us with your Spirit.
Choose us to bring good news to the
poor,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
to bring sight to the blind
and set free the oppressed.
So shall your new creation come
and your will be done. Amen

These materials were compiled and written through the efforts of the following :

Rev. Dr. Ron Elsdon
Dr. Katie Heffelfinger
Dr. David Hutchinson-Edgar
Rev. Dr. Virginia Kennerley
Rev. Darren McCallig
Rev. Dr. William Olhausen
Dr. Jason M. Silverman
Rev. Helene Steed

This study material is a project of the Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland, intended for the free use of all, and to enable the Church of Ireland to interact with the Anglican Consultative Council's Bible in the Life of the Church project.

The patrons of the Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland are

His Grace, the Archbishop of Armagh and his Grace, the Archbishop of Dublin

The interim committee is

Dr. Margaret Daly-Denton
Dr. Katie Heffelfinger
Dr. David Hutchinson-Edgar
Dr. Ken Fennelly
Rev. Dr. K. Virginia Kennerley
Rev. Darren McCallig
Rev. Dr. William Olhausen
Dr. Andrew Pierce
Dr. Jason M. Silverman
Ms. Judith Wilkinson

The Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland exists to enrich and deepen the use of the Bible in the Church of Ireland by encouraging rigorous and faith-based biblical study.

Feedback How to participate in the ACC

As part of the Anglican Consultative Council's project 'The Bible in the Life of the Church', BACI is seeking feedback on this study itself as well as reflection on how the Bible is read in the Church of Ireland today. To do this, we encourage all groups who use this resource to answer the questions on this and the following page and return them to BACI at baci.anglican@gmail.com. We would hope for at least one response per group, but individuals are also encouraged to relate their experiences. BACI will collate and forward the results to the ACC.



What was the group? (Parish, diocesan, ad hoc)_____

Was this a new or established group?_____

How many of the passages were studied?_____

Who was present? Was there an 'expert'?_____

Did the group discuss equally, or was there a speaker?_____

How involved were the members?_____

Were other biblical passages mentioned or discussed? If so, which?_____

How similarly or differently did people interpret the passages?_____

Were links made with people's lives?_____

What energised the group?_____

What were the group going to do with what they learned?_____

Did they find the selection and notes helpful?_____

Any critiques of the material?_____

What would your group have liked to make the study more relevant or interesting? _____

Reflecting on the Study itself, please consider these questions:

In what ways did your group engage with the Bible?

Did you find your study confirming what you already knew/ believed, or was it challenging/transformational? Why?

Thinking about what you have just done, what were you doing with the Bible, and why were you doing it?

Was there evidence of examples of behaviour relating to interscriptural awareness – the range of diversity of biblical material and relationship with other texts; interplay between scripture and personal experience; any overt disagreements with scripture? How did the group handle these?

What do you think this means for the way the Bible is read and used today in the Church of Ireland? Does anything need to change? ____

Any other comments or observations?
