

God and The Poor

On this day when we gather to support and celebrate Fifth Street Ministries, I want to talk about God and the Poor. We are so grateful to the ministry of Fifth Street Ministries for their ministry to the poor of Statesville, and for giving us a place to serve.

I

There are over 2,000 verses in the Bible about care for the poor. Why so many?

Because:

- 1) Humans tend to be selfish and care only for their own.
- 2) Good people get “compassion fatigue”. There are just so many we can care about.
- 3) Governments and institutions tend to protect the wealthy and powerful and ignore the poor.

II

The Jewish Bible is divided into three parts which I picture as three concentric circles: *Torah*; *Prophets*; *Writings*. Each call for the care of the poor.

- 1) Torah: The most oft repeated command in the Torah: Take care of the widows, orphans and strangers (immigrants). In other words, the poor and vulnerable.
- 2) Prophets: They denounced injustice and disregard of poor. Micah: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with your

God.” (Micah 6:8) Amos: “Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24) We sometimes reduce it to a trickle.

3) Writings: Psalm 72: “Give the king thy justice, O God.... May he defend the cause of the poor....and give deliverance to the needy.” In a democracy, this is up to us!

Proverbs 14: 31: “Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor Him.” I memorized a lot of verses growing up in Southern Baptist churches, but not *this* one.

III

Those three circles comprise Hebrew Scripture. The Christian scripture adds a fourth circle, The New Testament. The care for the poor is all through the N.T. I highlight Matthew 25:31-40. Jesus said that persons and nations will be judged by how they care for these—note the specificity: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger (or immigrant), the naked, the sick and those who are imprisoned. Whom have you imagined as I named them? He closed with the words, “In as much as you have done it to one of the least of these, you have done it to me.”

In other words, *Jesus waits for us in them*. Another place he waits for us is at this table.

IV

Someone has rephrased the Kingdom of God as the Kin-dom of God. In God’s Kin-dom we recognize that we and all the peoples of the earth are kin. Today’s

communion is a small but important sign of God's Kin-dom. Come and, in the bread and wine, share the goodness and mercy of God.