

## #1: Let Justice Roll Like a River

Listen to track 1 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

### Scripture:

"Take from me the noise of your songs... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Amos 5:23-24

### Devotions:

As our "mission-trip-in-town," my youth group and I wanted to help serve Thanksgiving dinner for those in need, but the Salvation Army was full of volunteers. They sent us to "Boulevard Gardens," where a small group of African American women had been providing holiday meals for over 30 years. Miss Mary and her volunteers welcomed our help, and we shared in the best Thanksgiving meal ever.

Miss Mary and her church choir raised money all year in order to provide a feast for poor and homeless people. Miss Mary offered "eat in" and "carry out" meals. She inspired her friends, children, and even grandchildren to serve. But after 30 years, she was tired. That's how I got hooked, on Miss Mary's behalf, to coordinate holiday meals at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The first year, I helped on the serving line, where the other volunteers and I sang Christmas carols right out loud. The next year, Miss Mary asked me to stand at the door to greet the guests. As a doorkeeper, I get to say the first, "Welcome" to those who are hungry.

Miss Mary introduced me to a part of town that I normally don't see -- a great need and amazing response was happening right in my backyard! It feels good to be part of providing for immediate, physical needs of people. And, as a single woman, I have a new family at the Gardens, where I share a delicious holiday meal with other hungry people who seek company. I'm proud to be part of Miss Mary's crew.

Last year, our community threw a big celebration for Miss Mary and her husband, for their faithful service. Enough money was raised to start a foundation to help those in need. If asked, I'll be ready to serve the foundation, too. I believe that we can make a difference in our own community, not just in far away places. Justice and righteousness flow freely, by God's grace and our service.

**Prayer:** Thank you, dear Lord, for bringing us together in mission. Thank you for showing us places that could use our help. Thank you for surprising us – when the ones we serve have so much to offer us. Amen.

**Reflection:** Tell about your favorite Thanksgiving meal. What made it significant for you? How could you add a service activity to your Thanksgiving celebration?

Deaconess Barbara Herzinger, Valparaiso, IN

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- 2. Ecumenically approaches the Christian call to service.*
- 3. Energizes people to serve among and advocate for all affected by brokenness; and seeks to restore wholeness for all creation.*

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## #2: *God is Always Near*

Listen to track 2 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

### **Scripture:**

"I am with you always." Matthew 28: 20

### **Devotions:**

Seeing God in nature is a fairly easy task. We marvel at the grandeur of the sky, sunsets on water can leave us breathless, the majesty of mountains is incredible, flowers awaken our senses with their beauty, and the creatures that fly, run, crawl or swim and share the earth with us are amazing. Yes indeed, God is there! And very quickly we are moved to acknowledge God's presence in creation and in that moment of observance we may even add a brief prayer of thanksgiving for God's creativity.

It is easy to see God in the beauty of creation. More difficult is to see God in poverty and suffering. In a familiar parable of the end times (Matt. 25:31-46), the King rewards those who have seemed to be "the least of these" – the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, those in tatters, the sick, the imprisoned. To see God in the brokenness of this world and to respond to that brokenness is to see God in a bigger way.

This is our call to servant ministry: to respond to a broken world by seeing God in a bigger way.

And we have help. As we hear the final verse of this song, God's word, the broken bread, and the prayers of the people will sustain, strengthen and renew us in our call. Notice that the word "trust" is repeated often in this verse. In responding to injury and injustice, we are called to trust -- trust that Someone greater than us is in charge; trust that striving for justice and peace is God's will; and trust that as we serve a broken world, "God is always near."

### **Prayer:**

Ever-present God, we see you in the beauty of nature, hear you in the laughter of children, feel you in the embrace of a friend. By the power of your Spirit, help us to also see you in the face of the homeless, hear you in the sobs of the broken-hearted, and feel you in the handshake of a stranger. In your Holy Name we pray, Amen.

### **Reflection:**

Where do I go to appreciate God's presence in the beauty of creation? Where do I see God's face in "the least of these?" When has my trust in God wavered and when does it soar?

Deaconess Jan Janzow, Waukesha, WI

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### #3: Freedom is Coming

Listen to track 3 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.



#### Scripture:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" Philippians 2:3-8

#### Devotion:

"Freedom is coming, yes I know." In this song we can almost hear South Africans willing their freedom into being, praying it into being. Their cause was just, as is the cause of many who still struggle for their freedom today. As Christians, we know that God calls us to do our part in living out love and compassion for those who suffer, to help them to find the freedom that they are seeking.

We also know, however, that in our attempts to help, our intentions are not always pure, the consequences of our actions are complex, and sometimes we even do more harm than good.

As various countries of the world continue to undergo radical political changes, and different religious, political and economic perspectives vie for influence and power, we are called to remember Christ's example of humility and empathy. In the incarnation, God became one of us in order to understand our predicament. What a comfort to know that God meets us where we are, even when our good intentions go awry, and that God gives us an example to follow when we want to show love to those struggling for freedom.

**Prayer:** Holy and humble Lord, I am but one person. Teach me to follow your example of servant-service. Give me wisdom to listen before I act, and empathy to learn and hear other perspectives. In your holy name I pray. Amen.

**Reflection:** When you hear about struggles for freedom around the world, what message do you hear? How can we, as God's people, work for freedom in a diverse world?

Deaconess Katherine Peters, formerly of San Jose, Costa Rica

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## #4: Break My Heart (The Compassion Song)

Listen to track 4 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

### Scripture:

"A bruised reed God will not break, and a smoldering wick God will not snuff out. In faithfulness God will bring forth justice." Isaiah 42:3



### Devotions:

In this world that warns us to ready ourselves for the danger around the corner, it seems weak to ask for a tender heart. The world would challenge: "Is it not wiser to ask for strength of heart to stand up to the next enemy?" But we hear that still, small voice beckoning us to respond in love, to live in hope, to be open rather than closed.

Perhaps that voice within is the one that needs no invitation, and needs not wait for our permission; the voice that calls us not to be unwilling servants, but to be partners with God, to live on this earth as if in heaven; the voice that assures us that come what may, we are not alone.

Daily we listen to this voice -- not in empty repetition, but in sincere devotion, longing to go deeper still, living as God's lovers in this world. As such, we have not so much broken hearts, but open hearts, willing to see pain as well as unexpected beauty. We trust in God who seeks not to crush us, but to uphold us and strengthen us to walk alongside others who also need reassurance that they are not alone, that their strength will be renewed, their faith restored.

### Prayer:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with your free Spirit. Psalm 51:10-12

### Reflection:

- Hold a stone tightly in your hand. Feel its coolness. Feel its hardness. Consider the stone wall you have allowed to build round your heart for protection. Ponder for a time. Consider how God has been your protection even in the hardest times.
- Hold the stone in your open hand. Envision more fully what it is like for you to dwell safely, upheld by God's own hand. Ponder for a time. Thank God for being your true safe place, your rock. Might you ask God to open your heart more fully? To "break" your heart?
- Place the stone in front of you. Allow it to represent those whom God longs to love through you: the sick, the poor, the ones who need tenderness, the lost, the lame, the suffering.
- As a sign of your longing and openness, lift the stone to your heart. Speak the words of Psalm 31:3, "Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name, lead and guide me."

Deaconess April Boyden, Bellingham WA

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## #5: *Vamos Todos (Let Us Go, Now)*

Listen to track 5 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in ELW 523. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)



### Scripture:

"The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors, the kind of people who will return the favor. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You'll be – and experience – a blessing. They won't be able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned – oh, how it will be returned! – at the resurrection of God's people."

Luke 14:12-14 (from *The Message*)

### Devotion:

The chorus of this hymn is fun to sing! When I first learned the song, I sang it with many communities, and they liked it, too. At times, however, I feel disconnected from the verses. Sometimes I have an idealized view of Salvadoran field laborers all working together, forgetting how hard their labor must be as I listen to this joyful tune.

Sometimes I feel guilty for being a rich person from the US -- even though I am not rich by US standards. I wonder how I might share in the "banquete" with people who have endured so many more hardships than I have. Am I invited, too? Do I hold myself back from the banquet by comparing myself with those who have more and those who have less?

God wants to have a house full of hungry guests! God's banquet of love and mercy is a bountiful gift, offered freely and generously to all of us. It is in coming to the "banquete," a banquet of love prepared by God, that we find our place of belonging. It is not because of our money, education or achievements. It is not because of our sacrifices, poverty or endured hardships. We find our place, our "puesto," in the true reassurance of belonging to God who through Jesus set the table for us. It is not just a snack, but a banquet with the concept of "enough" - enough for all.

In that reassuring grace, there is enough for all, space for all, and mission for all. We can be servants sent to invite others, so that the Master's house is full, that all have a place in God's embrace.

### Prayer:

Dear God of Enough, thank you for the invitation to join the banquet. Thank you for a place in your embrace. Thank you for the reassurance of belonging. Empower me to invite others. Amen.

### Reflection:

Where in your life are you being invited? What is it that could keep you from joining the banquet? Who could you invite to the banquet?

Deaconess Judi Duemler-Tyler, Phoenix, AZ

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## #6: God of Every Servant Heart

Listen to track 6 of Songs of Justice and Peace.

*(This song was written by Deaconess Dawn Riske, in honor of teacher/mentor/servant, Deaconess Louise Williams.)*



### Scripture:

"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all; for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Mark 10:43b-45

### Devotions:

What a procession of servants are spoken of in Scripture! Moses, Israel, and King David; Jesus' mother Mary, the Apostles Peter, Paul and John; first century ministers Epaphras, Timothy, and Phoebe; and our beloved "Master Servant," Jesus. Everyone on this amazing list claimed the humble title of servant, and we have just scratched the surface.

The Lutheran Deaconess Association has a list of servants that goes back nearly 100 years. Clara, Rose and Evelyn; Hertha, Geri, and Eunice; Jan, Carmen . . . and Louise, in whose honor this song was written. It is indeed our gift and our joy to care for others and make a difference in God's world through our varieties of service.

You may have decided to make the world a better place through a Servant Event. As your heart and soul express God's love through service, remember someone who freely served you and met your needs. Give God thanks for their actions. Then, let the actions of your hands and your feet join with your prayers on behalf of the people you are serving now. Take your place in the grand procession of servants led by our Savior Jesus.

### Prayer:

God of every servant heart, show me ways to love and serve you. Amen

### Reflection:

- *If you are on a servant event or mission trip, put an object in the middle of your group that symbolizes your task. Discuss why you chose that object.*
- The song repeats, "In community you place us..." How are you affecting the community around you? Have you ever thought that God placed you here?
- How does serving others shape you into a new community? How might your group become a stronger community?

Deaconess Dawn Riske, St. Louis, MO

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## #7: *Canticle of the Turning*

Listen to track 7 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in ELW 723. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)

### **Scriptures:**

"The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it, the world and those who dwell therein."

Psalm 24:1

"...When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Luke 21:28

### **Devotions:**

Inner city work can mean endless service opportunities, the prospects of which can be exciting!

However, walking through streets of condemned buildings, tutoring children from broken homes, knowing individuals with many troubles, and witnessing great hunger in many forms can be overwhelming. The needs surpass more than what we can offer, causing our bodies to grow weary and our hearts to be faint. Sometimes we feel guilty about our inability to save the city.

Our hope is in a loving, caring God who is already at work as we wait for the time when "night" will completely vanish away. Those who work in the city look to a day when sufferings will be no more, when and all mouths will be fed. Until then, God gives us a glimpse of new dawn. Restoration efforts happen through us! God, the God of our crushed hearts, uses us to reach others in "turning the world around."

### **Prayer:**

Dear Savior of all, when we grow weary and discouraged, You are still there. We are small, but You continue to work great things in and through our small efforts. Save us Lord, and remind us of Your saving work. Amen.

### **Reflection:**

Think about your experience in a city. What do you especially notice that leaves you feeling faint or yearning for the "dawn?"

By contrast, where do you see God "turning the world around" right now?

Deaconess Susan Predoehl, Green Valley, AZ

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## #8: God of Feasting and of Hunger

Listen to track 8 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

### Scripture:

They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or sun beat down on them. Isaiah 49:9

### Devotions:

A Catholic lay woman, an accountant by trade, was one of the people who inspired a young Lutheran deaconess to go to El Salvador in 1989. Jean Donovan gave her life, literally, to the struggle for justice in that war-torn and hungry nation. When she was assassinated by security forces on December 2, 1980, her story inspired many North Americans to risk the abundance and security of a middle class lifestyle in order to accompany the poor in their search for liberation. Just weeks before his death that same year, Bishop Romero, of El Salvador said,

“Let my blood be the seed of liberty, a sign that our hope will soon be reality.  
If they kill me, I will rise in the Salvadoran people.”

In 1992 peace came in El Salvador. It was a negotiated settlement paid for by the blood of many, many martyrs. It was a beautiful thing to witness the first elections in peacetime and to see poor, barely-literate peasant farmers proudly, tearfully exercising their voting rights. But things did not get better quickly for the poor majority -- they still had little more than tortillas and salt to eat and little access to medical care, even years after the peace accords were signed. Far too many of them continue to wait for the day proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah, “*They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or sun beat down on them.*” (Isaiah 49:9). They, like all of us, wait in hope for God’s peace to come.

In downtown San José, Costa Rica, there is an amazing set of statues, placed strategically in front of the Central Bank of Costa Rica, the equivalent of the Federal Reserve. They are poor peasant farmers who are not celebrating. Hunger and the seething indignation are engraved on their creased, desperate faces. The piece is called, “La Espera.” In Spanish there is only one verb for “waiting” and “hoping”, *esperar*, so the title can be alternately translated as, “The Waiting,” or, “The Hoping.” It’s an interesting juxtaposition: the smart, well-fed suit-and-tie professionals who labor at the Central Bank must pass by these statues every day on their way to their offices.

The time of hopeful waiting will not be endless if government and ordinary citizens act together. All wait for Justice. Justice is access to housing, food, education, healthcare, credit, and technical assistance to work the land. Justice will insure all people the just fruits of their labors.



Photo by Deaconess  
Megan Ross

### Prayer:

Loving God, look with favor on the little ones, the silent ones who wait when the blessings seems too late. Inspire us with a sense of urgency to work for a more just social and economic structure, so that all may share equally in your goodness. Amen.

### Reflection:

What do you think it means, “When the blessing seems too late?” Can the bounty of our blessings blind us to the needs of others? How might your service project be part of God’s blessing?

Deaconess Heidi Michelsen, San José, Costa Rica

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## #9: Psalm 146

Listen to track 9 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in your Bible, Psalm 146

### Scripture:

"Hallelujah! The LORD gives justice to those who are oppressed and food to those who hunger." Psalm 146: 7

### Devotions:

When will all the hungry have enough to eat, the oppressed and imprisoned be free, justice and wholeness be restored? When, O Lord, are you going to do these things?

No matter how many times I read this psalm, these questions still burn. And I don't even think of myself as hungry, oppressed, blind, or captive! Imagine, then, how the hearts of the ancient Israelites, Jesus and his disciples, and countless faithful watchers of the Church have ached to sing these words over the years. Why haven't we given up hope?

Surprisingly, the psalm does not treat hope as problematic. God creates everything and reigns forever! Jesus has blazed the way for us - through a messy world that desperately needs a word of pardon and hope, through death and failure, to the newest life imaginable. Through our baptism, the Holy Spirit renews this life in us as we continually abandon it, binding us by breath: Christ's living Body in the world - hidden, broken, vulnerable; but with a word of promise that will not return to God empty. (Is. 55:11)

With this God as our help, society will be reordered so that the weak and little ones will flourish. The righteous will rejoice in hope and the evil in this world will not be able to destroy it.

You can be the word of hope. You can bring "food to those who hunger," one person, one meal, one program at a time. Your service is a sign of God's love and action in the world today.

### Prayer:

Open our eyes, Lord, to see the gifts you shower all around us! Lift our despairing hearts to dare a new way of living! Amen.

### Reflection:

What does God's word of hope sound like to you? Who needs to hear it?  
How can your service make a difference?

Deaconess Rebecca Elfman, Kingston, PA

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## #10: When the Poor Ones: Cuando El Pobre

Listen to track 10 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in ELW 725. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)

### Scripture:

"I will place my dwelling in your midst... I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people." Lev. 26:11-12

### Devotions:

There, in southern, inland, Brazil, we put on our walking shoes. We walked dirt paths where family farmers grow vegetables, coffee beans, and coconuts. We walked the grassy fields where snake boxes are filled with anti-venom for hapless travellers who might get bitten. We walked stone sidewalks to see cacao beans and drying racks for bananas.

We stopped at a home where a woman baked us a coconut cake. She apologized for using juice instead of milk. She had to sell the cow in order to buy an old car, so she can drive the neighborhood children eight miles to school. This family had so little in comparison to us; and yet they shared what they had, offering comfort and gladness to our tired feet.

These people could walk a different path. They could walk in the way of large corporations, which take the best lands, the ancestral lands, for their own profit, with little care what happens to the people. They could walk in the way of the government, which allows this action. Or they could walk in the way of the Church, which organizes cooperatives where families can pool their resources for the betterment of all.

We walked, for a few days, with these people, who walk in the way of sharing and caring. And we saw God, there by our side, walking our way.

### Prayer:

Vs 3: "When our spirits, like a chalice, brim with gladness; when our voices, full and clear, sing out the truth; when our longings, free from envy, seek the humble: we see God, here by our side, walking our way." Open our eyes, Lord, to see the places you walk. Teach us what we yet may do to be united with the poor in many lands. Amen.

### Reflection:

Put a shoe in the middle of your group. Where have these shoes been today? If this shoe could talk, what would it say about your mission experience? How was God walking with you today?

Deaconess Diane Marten, Indianapolis, IN

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## #11: O Day of Peace/Let Streams of Living Justice



Listen to track 11 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in ELW 711 and 710. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)

This combination of the two hymns brings together the central message that there can only be true peace for all when justice is alive and flowing to all. Each verse in *Let Streams of Living Justice* grows out of a Scripture passage.

**Amos 5:21-24.** Read or sing verse 1 of *Let Streams of Living Justice* (ELW 710)

Amos prophesied at a time when the rich were getting richer—on the backs of the poor. Amos' words of judgment to Israel speak profoundly to North American Christians who attend church regularly yet rarely give a thought to the poor and marginalized whose lives are hidden from us.

- How have you helped bring about justice? How might a service project or mission trip help to bring justice to those who seek it?

The good news in this verse is the word spoken by God ("But let justice roll down like waters...") and becomes our prayer addressed to God.

**Revelation 22:1-5.** Read or sing verse 2 of *Let Streams of Living Justice* (ELW 710)

We've moved from the present world to our future life with God and the Lamb in the holy city. The leaves of the trees lining the river of life are "for the healing of the nations;" the source of the river is the throne of God and the Lamb.

The words move quickly from the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation to the image of God as the weaver, who mends into one fabric our gifts with the needs of the world. Our hope comes from the assurance that we are the threads in God's hands.

- How can God weave your gifts into the world to bring about healing?

**John 14:1-7.** Read or sing verse 3 of "*Let Streams of Living Justice*" (ELW 710).

Jesus speaks these words of reassurance to his disciples in the Gospel of John just before his betrayal, suffering, and death. His way is the way of the cross; his truth is in opposition to the truth of the world; his life, which ends as the Passover lambs are slain, is given for the sake of the world.

- What Images for the Church do you hear in this verse?

The stanza culminates with the center of our faith: Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and "the life—the Crucified." Our faith in him, who suffered injustice for our sake, empowers us to work to fulfill the dreams of justice for our neighbors.

**Prayer:** Loving God, Great Weaver, use our gifts as the threads to make our world a great tapestry of justice and peace. Amen.

Deaconess Rhoda Schuler, St. Paul, MN

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## #12: We Are Called

Listen to track 12 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in ELW 720. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)

### Scripture:

"For once you were in darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as a child of light — for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true." Ephesians 5:8-9

### Devotions:

It was raw that spring day: cold, wet and windy. We wondered how many would attend our forum. We planned to promote justice in training and employment opportunities, resulting from major construction projects slated for our area.

I sat at the registration table. A few people trickled in, singly and in pairs. And we fretted. But as minutes ticked by, the trickle became a flood. In they came, shaking off the weather, filling the room and then some. We had hoped for 50; more than 70 came, a cross section of our community, drawn together by the quest for justice. We scurried to put up additional seating, assuring all were fed and provided with materials.

The presentation began: the story of others who stood for economic justice and won a victory which forever changed the lives of entire communities. A flame was kindled. . . .we can do this, too. . . it burned brighter. . . will you join us. . . the light was passed. . . stand with us for justice. The assembly got on their feet, ready to bear the light out of that room and into their community.

It will take more than good intentions to keep the flame kindled that day from being snuffed out. We will need to plan, to strategize and to invite others to join us. It will not be easy: the darkness doesn't like to be exposed for what it is. But once you have lived in the light, for even a moment, there is no turning back; only forging ahead, together, toward the day when justice will roll down like that afternoon's driving rain. And then some!

### Prayer:

God whose Spirit stirs up the water, who made us children of light, grant us the passion, the courage and the energy to bear your light into dark places, where injustice and oppression thrive. Make us strong for the fight. Unite us in purpose. Fill us with the vision of the Kingdom announced by Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

### Reflection:

*Gather a small bowl of water, a clay pot filled with sand, 4 candles, and a lighter or matches.*

- Dip your hand into the water, remembering your Baptism, which made you a Child of Light.
- Light a candle, place it in the sand; pray for the victims of the situation.
- Light another candle; pray for the oppressors.
- Light a third candle; ask God for a vision of what can be.
- Light a final candle; ask God to show you how you might help bring that vision to reality.

Deaconess Nancy Walter, Schererville, IN

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## #13: By Gracious Powers

Listen to track 13 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in ELW 626. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*)



### Belonging

Have the group listen to the song, "By Gracious Powers," as a whole or even sing along. Notice the dark heaviness of this prison song. Notice, by contrast, the words of hope and certainty of belonging to God in all of life. Share the scripture readings among the group.

### Devotion and Scripture:

The life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was brief. He lived in Germany, from 1906 to 1945. He belonged to his family, his church, and the seminary students he taught and nurtured. In time, he belonged to a very different setting -- behind the walls of Tegel Prison, because he belonged to a group whose mission was to bring down Adolf Hitler for his heinous crimes as leader of Nazi Germany.

During that time in prison he wrote the poem, *By Gracious Powers So Wonderfully Sheltered*.

Bonhoeffer's words, along with the Scripture verses, describe belonging to God and affirm the presence of God in our lives.

### Read/sing verse 1.

Being sheltered night and morning -- being greeted by God each new day confirms for us that we belong to God.

*Lamentations 3:22-23*

### Read/sing verse 2.

Protected from the torment of the evil foe and confident in the certainty of our salvation, we know that we belong to God.

*Romans 8:38-39*

### Read/sing verse 3.

Because we belong to God we can even endure the cup of suffering -- the tough times -- that enter our lives. While we may not be able to understand, we still know that we belong to God, and that even our suffering comes from a beloved hand.

*Romans 8:18*

Deaconess Bonita Fredel, Lake Mills, WI

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### Read/sing verse 4.

In the good days, we also remember to whom we belong and it's easy to be grateful. In that gratitude we commend or give our whole life to God.

*Psalms 23:5-6*

### Read/sing verse 5.

We can live with hope -- yes, with certainty that we belong to God -- that's forever -- that's what matters in life and in death.

### Prayer:

Loving God, to whom we belong, we thank you for being our Life giver and Protector.

- Teach us to listen well and rejoice in your words of ownership.
- Teach us to listen well for the pain and distress of those who search for belonging.
- Teach us to share your love with those who have never known it.
- Teach us to share the life blessings you give us with those in need.

Thank you for all the areas in our lives where we belong and all the persons who claim us in their love. Amen.

### Reflection:

1. What does it mean to belong? What feelings do you have when you know you belong?
2. Not all people have a sense or feeling of belonging, because they are trapped in prisons of poverty, discrimination or disability. How would you imagine that might feel?
3. What words could you say to someone who has no sense of belonging?

## #14: Creation will be at Peace

Listen to track 14 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.



LDA

### Scripture:

"What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." John 1:3b-5

### Devotion:

In May 2011, Joplin, Missouri was the site of a devastating tornado. A few months later I had occasion to drive through Joplin. The path of destruction was both visible and visceral. Entire city blocks were nothing but piles of rubble and stripped, sagging stumps of what were once trees. It was heart-wrenching to see, but impossible to look away. And yet, in the midst of despair and destruction, there was something else. There were signs -- signs on businesses vowing to rebuild; signs from well-wishers sharing encouragement; signs pointing the way for volunteers and supplies to come into the community; signs of new construction slowly emerging with the promise of more to come.

Sometimes moments of grace and peace intersect the dark times and point the way to new life.

So it is with our God. I think of the moment of Jesus' birth, when the bright star overhead intersected the dark quiet night and revealed God's grace, not only in the birth of a baby, but also in the birth of a plan for the redemption of the world.

I think of the moment of Jesus' death, when the dark, empty tomb was intersected by the startling brightness of the angel bearing good news. I think of how the cross became a sign, not of death and sin, but of the unfathomable goodness of our God.

I think of the volunteers helping in Joplin, or wherever there is darkness or pain, offering a ray of hope in the midst of turmoil, bringing a sign of God's peace to those who need it most.

### Prayer:

Gracious God, even in the midst of darkness, you are light and life. Help us to be light in the lives of others, to be a sign of your peace. Amen.

### Reflection:

If possible, darken your devotion space and light a single candle. Notice the way the light spreads through the room. Where have you noticed moments of darkness? Where have you seen signs of light? How have you been a sign of light and God's peace for others?

Deaconess Debbie Speer, Lisle, IL

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## **#15: Herra Kädelläsi Asua ma Saan: God, Your Hands Enfold Me**

Listen to track 15 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

### **Scripture:**

"Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I am your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady -- keep a firm grip on you." Isaiah 41:18 (*The Message*)

### **Devotions:**

Finnish is not a language typically heard outside of Finland, with unfamiliar, yet intriguing, sounds to our ears. My grandmother, Ina, would speak Finnish to her sister, and I learned how to say "Merry Christmas." Every year I would proudly wish that greeting in Finnish and make both of us smile.

"God your hands enfold me/ Herra Kädelläsi" is haunting music for me. At International Deaconess Assembly (Diakonia) in 2009, I was part of a group that led the congregation in this song, on what would have been my grandmother's 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. The haunting melody and warm words melted me, but I kept my emotions in check. However, the next hymn we sang, "It Is Well with My Soul," opened me. I saw my mom tearing up. We sat together and embraced with silent tears.

It is hard to find peace when we feel deep painful emotions. In Finnish there is something called *sisu*. It is an inner strength to face the challenges in life and still find love and peace. My grandmother had *sisu*, and this showed in her love to everyone. I think there can be painful tears that feel good, that bring us inner strength – *sisu* – and that connect us to each other.

Our God brings the gifts of peace and love unconditionally to all. Words in any language may never be an adequate expression of peace. When words fail, sometimes listening to music is the best way for us to allow ourselves to be in God's hands and rest.

### **Prayer:**

God, your hands enfold me; help me to trust in You. You are always with me, God of rest and peace, God of rest and peace. Amen.

### **Reflection:**

Is there a song or hymn that particularly touches you? One that takes you to a place of God's rest and peace?

Listen to "God Your Hands Enfold Me/Herra Kädelläsi," or another song that brings a sense of calm to you. Let thoughts come and go as they will. Rest knowing you are in God's hands, now and always.

Deaconess Ann Maki, Longmont, CO

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## **#16: Make Me a Channel of Your Peace**

Listen to track 16 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in RW 279. (Renewing Worship)

**Scripture:** Matt. 19:16-22

*"Go... sell... give... follow..."*

*"Be the change you want to see in the world." Mahatma Gandhi*

St. Francis of Assisi lived hundreds of years before Gandhi made this statement, yet St. Francis embodied this sentiment as few others have. Born into a family of wealth and privilege, the young Francis lived a life of self-indulgent pleasure. A serious illness and a vision from God helped him see that his self-centered lifestyle served no one, honored no one, and would eventually lead to his demise. Francis became a changed man, giving his wealth to the poor and preaching the love of God to all who would listen – including the birds of the fields!

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Francis became the change he saw that the world needed. Could that same Spirit be speaking to you?

### **Reflection:**

Does a person have to be poor to serve God? What other physical obstacles or personal concerns can hold one back from seeing needs and seeking God?

How do the words of the song reflect Francis' changed attitude and life-style?

Why do you suppose both Jesus and Gandhi advocated personal change?

### **Prayer:**

Spirit of God, grant me the vision to see the changes I need to make in myself to help bring about the justice and peace you so want for our world. Grant me the courage to follow through in Jesus' name. Amen.

Deaconess Eva Schindhelm, Mukwonago, WI

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## **#17: Grant Peace We Pray / Ososo: Come Now, O Prince of Peace**

Listen to track 17 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in ELW 778. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)



### **Scripture:**

"...Pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us." Psalm 62:8

### **Devotions:**

She was weeping inconsolably. "Don't send me back there! They beat on me! Please, give me another chance!"

But the bridges were burned behind her. She already had many chances and all of them had ended in broken relationships, injury to self and others and frustration to those who had thought they could make it better. There was no option left to try -- at least none anyone knew about. One more hope dashed. One more dream shattered. Why couldn't she make better choices? Why did she seem to do the exact opposite of what she needed to do? If there were any more chances hidden in the future, her weeping seemed to make them less attainable.

"No, we can't deal with her."

"No, her mother never wants to see her again. Don't let her call. Certainly do not visit!"

"No, we don't have the services she needs."

"No, our program is not designed for people like her."

"No, we have nothing to offer."

"No, our funding does not cover that."

"No, we can't try her again. Not after what happened last time."

She is like a leaning wall, a tottering fence about to be broken down, overrun without hope. One and only one fortress remains -- God. O Prince of Peace, come now to help! There is no other. Please hurry.

### **Prayer:**

God of Peace, only You can change us when we can not change ourselves. Only You can grant peace where there is no peace. Only You can change situations over which we have no control. Fit us in to Your good plans. Change us as You see we need to change. Help us to be agents of Your peace in places where chaos rules. Be our refuge and strong fortress. Defend us. Fight for us. Come. Amen.

### **Reflection:**

Talk with your group, or take time to write in a journal about these things. Where do you see relationships broken? How might reconciliation happen? Where do you see the need to be set free? How can you discern God's peace in the chaos of this world?

Deaconess Linda Schaefer, Atlanta, IL

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## #18: Peace, Perfect Peace

Listen to track 18 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

### Scripture:

"Those of steadfast mind, you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you." Isaiah 26:3

### Devotion: Perfect Peace?!

Peace is a pretty elusive commodity in our world today. Wars, unemployment, or destruction brought on in the aftermath of natural disaster, all seem to be mushrooming across the globe. The subsequent upset and upheaval of such events, whether large or small, brings unexpected change and undesired times of transition. When one's life is in transition – whether due to the loss of a loved one, the loss of house and possessions by hurricane, tornado or flood, or the loss of employment – one's security is gone, and the future seems so very uncertain. Where in the world does one find peace, let alone perfect peace?

The author of this old gospel hymn directs us back to the One who walks with us through the upheaval and stands by us as we reorient ourselves. Jesus Christ is our constant companion, in good times and bad, in secure and insecure times. Christ is there to offer comfort and love, to give strength and hope.

### Prayer

Faithful God, thank you for your presence in times of upheaval and transition. Enable us to be instruments of your peace through our words, actions and presence. Grant your perfect peace. Amen.

### Reflection

Take a moment to consider people you know who need peace. Lift them in prayer. What phrase in the hymn speaks to your need for peace in life?

Deaconess Juanita Ebert, Seward, NE

Christ carries the burden of our prayers to his heavenly Father and offers himself to us in the bread and wine. And Christ very concretely offers support and encouragement to us through his body, the Church.

In my own time of transition (unemployment/ seeking a new call), the little gifts offered by sisters and brothers in Christ have helped to carry me along: an unexpected note from a deaconess sister, coffee/tea with a friend who listens with her head and heart, a phone call from an old church friend and the promise of prayers lifted up by new church friends. Small kindnesses remind me that God has not forgotten me, nor is God hidden from view.

So whether "sorrows surge around," "loved ones (are) far away," or our "future all unknown," we can have peace within as we receive the gifts of God's people and trust the One who has promised to always be with us, the One who has shown faithfulness through the ages.

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## #19: *Confitemini Domino*

Listen to track 19 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in ELW 528. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)

### **Scripture:**

"Peace I leave with you: my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." John 14:27

### **Devotion:**

There is a difference between the understanding of peace as the world interprets, and the holy peace that comes from God.

Nations send military troops to keep peace, but killing continues. Nearly every week, a new conflict erupts. Seeking honor and peace for the common good often seems connected to fighting.

People in churches, in families and in our neighborhoods, talk about the value of honoring each other, and may even get involved in acts of reconciliation, but dysfunction continues. I try to stay connected to God through prayer, study, worship and service, but it seems I can only feel at peace when things are going well in my life. The minute life begins to have bumps, my sense of peace dissipates.

Why, in spite of our best efforts, does peace remain elusive? Maybe it is because our endeavors for peace come from a worldly understanding of peace. When people depend on themselves to create peace, it is as if they are building on unstable ground. Sooner or later, the ground will shift and whatever has been built on it will tilt and eventually topple.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you: my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Through the guiding of the Holy Spirit, we are led to trust in the promise of Jesus' peace. When we trust in Jesus' promise of peace, then the inner desires of our soul are met, our anxieties and fears are calmed, and we are anchored amid the uncertainties of life.

### **Reflection:**

Find a quiet place. Light a candle. Be silent for 5 minutes. Breathe slowly. Reflect on the words found in John 14:27. Sing or hum the words to *Confitemini Domini*. Allow your heart to pray for you, without words, without even a conscious thought of what to pray for. See what thoughts or feelings rise in you. When the time is complete, if you are with a group of people, share about your experience.

### **Prayer:**

Come and fill our hearts with your peace, good and gracious God. You alone are holy. Amen.

Deaconess Judy Whaley, Sandspit,  
British Columbia

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## #20: *Jesu Bleibet Meine Freude (Jesu, Joy of Our Desiring)*

Listen to track 20 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

### Scripture:

"[Jesus] is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being; he sustains all things by his powerful word." Hebrews 1:3

### Devotions:

This hymn is often sung in German, but there are two English translations. Read each of them out loud.

Jesu, joy of our desiring,  
Holy wisdom, love most bright;  
Drawn by Thee, our souls aspiring  
Soar to uncreated light.  
Word of God, our flesh that fashioned,  
With the fire of life impassioned,  
Striving still to truth unknown,  
Soaring, dying round Thy throne.  
*(by poet Robert Bridges)*

Jesus remains my joy,  
The comfort and essence of my heart.  
Jesus resists all suffering,  
He is my life's strength,  
The desire and sun of my eyes,  
My soul's treasure and delight.  
That's why I won't leave Jesus  
Out of my heart and face.  
*(by Dcs Amanda Spangler)*

Look closely at the two versions. In Bridges' version, we experience with the poet a transcendental encounter with God. He describes a mystical union with God through the Second Person of the Trinity. The piece is beautiful, enticing souls to soar along with word and music to highest heaven.

While considerably simpler in wording, Spangler's translation is more literal, and captures the intimacy of the relationship between Jesus and us. The German speaks of how Jesus is embedded within our very bodies: our hearts, eyes and faces.

While the words of Bridges encapsulate a moment of mystical union with God, Spangler's translation describes a relationship that resides in every beat of our hearts. Though difficult to hear, if we listen carefully, we can perhaps uncover what the original text really says. Too often, we forget to listen deeply to what's really being said. Sometimes the simple, obvious message is beautiful, but the treasure that lies beneath is worth listening for as well.

### Prayer:

Jesus, our joy, help us to find peace in you through every breath and every heartbeat. Open our ears to listen deeply to your children, and to share ourselves with them, as you have shared yourself with us. Amen.

### Reflection:

Recall someone you spent time with today. How might you have heard Jesus speaking in their longings, suffering, or joy? How would your caring change if you imagined Jesus in each person you met?

Deaconess Amanda Spangler, Athens, GA

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## #21: *Dona Nobis Pacem* (Grant to us peace)

Listen to track 21 of *Songs of Justice and Peace*.

You can find the words in ELW 753. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)



### Scripture:

The Lord bless you and keep you:

The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you:

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,

And give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

### Devotion and Reflection:

The Hebrew term for peace is "shalom." It is a peace that brings into harmony body, mind, spirit, society, creation, God. Such peace we all long for; such peace only God can give.

Listen to this song. As the music begins to play, close your eyes. Relax your body. Settle your breathing. Clear your mind. Feel your body, mind and spirit become as one. Lay yourself open to God. Feel God's shalom wash over you, bathing you in his peace. Notice how you feel. Bask in those feelings as long as you can. When the music ends, slowly become more aware of your surroundings. Share your experience with others in your group; or, if you are alone, write of your experience in a journal.

### Prayer:

God of Shalom –

...at the end of a project,	more than success,
...at the end of a contest,	more than a prize,
...at the end of the growing season,	more than a bountiful harvest,
...at the end of a journey,	more than a homecoming,
-grant us your peace.	-grant us your peace.
...at the end of a storm,	more than calm,
...at the end of a disagreement,	more than reconciliation,
...at the end of a relationship,	more than a fond farewell,
...at the end of a career,	more than a new beginning,
-grant us your peace.	-grant us your peace.
...at the end of the day,	more than restful sleep,
...at the end of life,	more than resurrection,
-grant us your peace.	-grant us your peace. Amen.

### Reflection II:

How might your efforts have brought God's "shalom" to the people and place you served? What can you take home from this experience to further God's "shalom" among the people there?

Deaconess Eva Schindhelm, Mukwonago, WI

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