



Special Commission for the Just Rebuilding of the Gulf

www.nccusa.org/justrebuilding

Seven Day Prayer Resource for the 2009 Hurricane Season

Day 1

Equitable Re-development of the Gulf

But let justice roll down like waters (Amos 5:24)

Amos 5:21-24

But let justice roll down like waters...

Ps 119:149

O Lord in your justice preserve my life.

Acts 2:43-45

They would distribute...to all...as any had need.

James 2:17

So faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Commentary

None of us will ever forget the thunderous rolling waters. But these were not the waters of justice. Our poor stewardship of the earth, human negligence, very likely set these waters raging. The world could only watch as hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters in the one family of God scrambled for their lives as their possessions were swept away by the ever rising waters. We named the waters Katrina and Rita.

Our government failed to lead an intelligent and compassionate relief effort even as citizens around the nation and strangers from afar offered food, money, clothing, shelter, and ironically, fresh water to those who survived the floods and wondered where the next meal would come from and where to spend the next night and the many nights to come. Nearly four years later the wondering persists as the volunteers have moved on to other disasters and the trailers and the subsidized apartments are being taken away from thousands who have had no other place to lay their heads.

Where is the justice, the just rebuilding? Who is watching the lower Ninth Ward for signs of recovery, of hope, of housing that can provide shelter from the next storm? Who is demanding that the rebuilding place priority for displaced persons over the development of ports and the creation of new commercial and residential communities far beyond the reach of those who lost their homes and who cannot afford the inflated rent, increased insurance rates and construction costs? Who cares about the disarray of the school systems, the lack of equal access to quality health care?

The scriptures of the Hebrew bible and the New Testament bear consistent witness to a God on the side of the oppressed. God demands justice and compassion toward those who are at the bottom of the social order. Our God would invert the order so that the last are first and the first are last. The prophets shouted for justice and mercy, the early Christian communities were models of compassionate sharing, faith in action. It's still not too late for us to see in the faces of the least among us—those hardest hit by the tragedies of life—the very image of God. It's not too late for us work for the just rebuilding of the gulf coast.



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Prayer

God of grace, giver of life: hear our prayers for our brothers and sisters in deepest need. Move us to act for justice alongside those who survived the raging waters only to be overwhelmed by inadequate systems of support. Help us to see Jesus in the least of these among us. Stir us by your Spirit to love and good works, lest we prove our faith to be no more than an empty vessel. In Christ we pray, Amen.

Day 2

Psalm 24:1-2

Psalm 8

Job 38-41

Mark 16:15

Marvel at God's Work

It all belongs to God

Marvel

Can You Answer?

All of Creation

Commentary

The Psalmist sings of the wholeness of everything on the Earth as belonging to God. We marvel at the majesty of God's work from the heavens to everything on land and in the seas. That 'marvel' is to wonder in astonishment! To be amazed at everything that God has created, including how it all works in perfect harmony, if we allow it to do so. To be excited that in God's plan there is sustainability. After all, look how long Creation has been here. We are the ones passing through. In our 'passing through' we too make a mark in this great plan. What does that mark look like? Is our marvel at Creation evidenced by our mark on Creation? How do we care for all of God's Creation? How do we wonder in awe at God's work? If we indeed marvel at all that God has done, then what is our responsibility for caring for Creation?

Tiring of the pity party thrown by Job's friends, God spoke (Job 38-41). God addresses what we cannot fathom the workings of Creation, and puts our role in Creation into perspective. We simply cannot know the depth of God's love for all of Creation. Just like Job, we too have no answer for the complexity of Creation; yet we do have a responsibility to care for Creation. We continue in mourning after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; yet now we must join the celebration of life by caring for a Creation that still cries out for help. All of Creation brings honor to God by celebrating what God has done. We too must get in on the celebration. If everything that God has created brings honor, then are we humans the ones out of order? How many chances have we missed to celebrate the glory of God's majesty? Can we celebrate while others are suffering? Cleanup after these two events has not come swiftly or thoroughly and many still suffer. Our strategy should be to love and care for the community that has suffered health, social, economic, ecological, and racial trials. We proclaim the good news through not only word but deeds of loving one another as Jesus has commanded.



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God of all that you have created, allow us to see you in the simple falling of a leaf to the ground, allow us to hear you in the hum of a hummingbird. And when the stars shine, allow us to beam with joy at the wonder of their light. Let us move with the joys of the clouds as we watch our day unfold. Grant us an appreciation for each part of your Creation and how we all are a part of your grand plan. Show us your majesty and grant us guidance as we proceed to share by loving one another.

DAY 3: Homeless

Luke 9:57-58 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you where you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

Commentary

Some years ago, Habitat for Humanity was in St Louis, Missouri to share its vision and invite pastors in and around that city to become partners. Although Habitat wanted to partner with disposed communities, the leadership had skipped an important aspect of developing that partnership. During that visit, one pastor, asked the question; "What are we going to do for Jesus?" A response to him was a recitation of Luke 9:58 where Jesus declared to the would be follower, "Foxes have holes..." and that my intent was to build him a house.

When we reflect on the situation in New Orleans and the Gulf, we are reminded that, even though there are many churches, Jesus, who lives in and among the poor remains homeless. What then is the responsibility of the church? Are we to continue building monuments to Jesus where we gather to worship or, do we build him a house? Matthew challenges the entire church with what is referred to as the last examination. "When I was hungry, thirsty, destitute..." you responded to me. That is essentially our call as the Christian Church today; to respond to those who are homeless by providing decent and affordable housing for all God's created people. May we take courage and be guided by the Spirit of the Lord as this need is addressed.

PRAYER

Loving and blessed God, you who made all humankind in your likeness and image, open our eyes that we may see you in all your need in those we encounter daily. Give us the wisdom and knowledge to respond to those who are homeless and those who live in



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substandard conditions that you no longer need to say you have nowhere to lay your head. We pray this in the name of Jesus the Christ. AMEN

Day 4 Pray for Organizations Still Working to Rebuild the Region

*You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.
(Is 58:12b)*

Matthew 25:31-46	Attend to the needs of others
Amos 5:4-24	Seek good and not evil
Isaiah 58	Choose the fast of justice
Micah 6:6-8	Come before God in faithfulness

Commentary

Jesus paints a strange picture of judgment, with all nations gathered before the throne of the Son of Man. What is most striking is the manner in which he does not judge: there is no loyalty test; no recitation of creed or affirmation of faith; there is no review of past misdeeds. Instead, he lifts up actions of compassion, and chastises those who have ignored the needs of others. Jesus' words are reminiscent of the prophets and the message they carry to their communities of faith.

The prophets' message is often a call to faithfulness and a rebuke for ways in which their people had strayed. Often, the prophets' message is a powerful warning of rejection delivered to those who had rejected their faith and didn't even know it. Amos and Isaiah have strong words for those whose faith-fulness included worship, praise, and public displays of affection toward God but ignored the needs of their neighbors. God despises their worship, refuses their sacrifices, and turns a deaf ear to the melody of their praise music. Fasting and other acts of piety performed for self-serving reasons are also rejected. Micah gets straight to the point by asking, "With what shall I come before the Lord?" Again and again, God's message is to put an end to self-serving attitudes that have corrupted the faith. Instead, the faithful are called to live and work for justice and to serve God by caring for and taking care of others.

In the fall of 2005, the nation and much of the world could not take its eyes from the Gulf Coast. Two terrible storms slammed the coast flooding some communities for weeks, nearly wiping others off the map. To stand on a street-corner in any devastated town across the Gulf Coast and survey the destruction was disheartening. Yet the call to faithfulness was issued and people of faith answered. The call to respond, to meet needs, alleviate suffering, and restore community was heard loud and clear. The way forward was not always clear, but millions of people took action. Order was brought into the chaos as organizations old and new began to work, often together, to offer what help they could.



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Much progress was made as love and grace moved in unimaginable, unpredictable ways. Volunteers brought gifts, skills, and hope and set to work partnering with neighbors in need.

Across the Gulf Coast, there is much to celebrate and much for which to give thanks. The breaches are being repaired and the streets are being restored. Unfortunately, too many needs remain; the work is not complete. Response organizations are straining to continue their vital mission as resources dwindle and attention shifts. Until the work is complete, continue to support those who are issuing the call to justice and opening the way to help. Volunteer. Make a gift. Find a way to share your skills or experience. Advocate on behalf of so many storm survivors who are still in need, especially of a place to call home. And pray for God's love and grace to continue to be made known through the actions of each one who hears the call to live justice and meet a neighbor in need.

Prayer

Holy God, we give thanks for organizations who respond to survivors of storms. As they continue to keep the needs of others before us, guide us to partner in mission with neighbors in need. Help us not to turn inward; rather, lead us in answering your call to justice, compassion, and love.

Day 5:

Exodus 22:25

Psalms 14: 1-6

Matthew 19: 16-2

2Corinthians 8: 8-12

Poor

Lending to the poor without interest

The Godless do not counsel the poor

Eternity or hold on to temporal riches

Christ became poor by choice

Commentary:

The Institute for Research on Poverty reports that eighteen (18) percent of Americans under eighteen (18) live in poverty. Of that number approximately thirty five (35) percent of African American and approximately thirty (30) percent of Hispanic children comprise that number. To our collective chagrin, we live in the richest nation in the world with these devastating figures.

Globally, twenty five thousand (25,000) children under the age of five (5) die each day due to their impoverished conditions, according to UNICEF. In their 2009 report it is painfully noted that: "(these children) die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world. Being meek and weak in life makes these dying multitudes even more invisible in death." I pray we hear the Gospel message that tells us: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5) The question bodes; will our children who are impoverished inherit the earth? The answer quite simply lies with us who follow the living Christ.



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I contend it is time that we, as followers of the living Christ, stand up and begin to live out the mandate: "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." (Luke 9:48a) It is time to extend the extravagant welcome to our children. It is time to welcome them into the family of hope, life and oneness. It is time to lift up the children of this world to the light of the living Christ. We must not continue to hide this light or continue to look beyond what is evident. Our children are not invisible nor should our faith be.

With faith and action we can put an end to poverty and homelessness that is prevalent in this world. We must never ever forget we serve "The One" who was born homeless and chose to live in poverty. We owe it to our children, the least of thee, to transform this world into a world of life, liberty and happiness. Not a world of poverty and homelessness. In faith, I speak the word that we can and will, for God has called us and empowered us for a time such as this.

Prayer:

Our living, most loving, most forgiving and most awesome God, we thank you for each soul that took the time to read this commentary. We now humbly beseech that these words spring forth life so that all who have read them will step forward and transform this world to allow the meek to inherit it. We claim that in Your unconditional love and in Your omnipotence this shall be. Our children of the world will know this world is a world of abundance, hope and life. It is so. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Day 6: Prayers for Residents Still Displaced

Psalm 46 God is our refuge & strength.
Psalm 121 Where help comes from.
John 14 Jesus provides comfort
Rev 21: 3-5 God will be with you & be their God.

Commentary

The 2005 Hurricanes caused over 6 million people to evacuate from their cities. Hurricanes Katrina & Rita caused over 1.3 million people to be displaced from their residents for at least a month or longer. Three years after Hurricane Katrina, over 40,000 people are still displaced and living in other cities because they don't have the money to rebuild their homes or return.



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How do the people keep the endurance to move forward? Where do the displaced get protection from the distress? Where do the displaced ease their discomfort because they haven't been able to return?

Psalm 46 gives comfort and hope for the displaced. It's a personal testimony to trust God no matter what should happen and gives insight into God's faithfulness to humanity. The Psalmist describes God as being a refuge, strength, & help in trouble. And through Christ, we shall conquer all things.

Psalm 46 also speaks of God's faithfulness during two types of disorders. God stood firm as cosmic disorder of the earth and mountains were crumbling and falling. And God's presence remained in the city even though there was political disorder.

PRAYER

Faithful God, thank you for being the displaced residents refuge, strength, & help in trouble. Sustain them with bodily strength and calmness of mind when in distress. This is our prayer through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit. Amen

DAY 7: Housing

Nehemiah 1:1-4 *The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped captivity, and about Jerusalem. They replied, the survivors the survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*

Commentary

The story of Jerusalem after being sacked by Babylon where many of the inhabitants were taken into exile is a reminder to me of what happened to the Gulf following the recent hurricanes. Although Gulf residents were not taken away as slaves by a foreign nation, they were nevertheless forced to leave devastation as a result of flooding and wind destroyed their homes.

In the case of Jerusalem, Nehemiah's love for the people and the city moved his to tears, fasting and prayer upon hearing about the plight of the people and their



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condition. But more important, Nehemiah was also moved to action. He not only sought to restore the walls of the city, he sought to restore the lives of the inhabitants of the city. The story informs us that following a complete survey of the walls, Nehemiah organized the people to re-build the walls of the city and to rebuild their homes as well. In other words, no one was left out. Even the poorest of the citizens were encouraged and helped to re-build their homes and their lives so they could become contributors towards the future of Jerusalem.

Perhaps the Gulf region can use the story of Israel's return from devastation and the inclusive effort to make sure all of its citizens would have a decent and affordable home to live out their lives in.

Prayer:

Loving God, open our eyes, ears and hearts that when we here of the plight of those less fortunate than us, we might weep, fast, pray and respond as you have responded to us with loving kindness. We pray this in the name of your Son and our savior, Jesus the Christ. AMEN