

LAMENT and HOPE

LAMENTATIONS 3:19-23

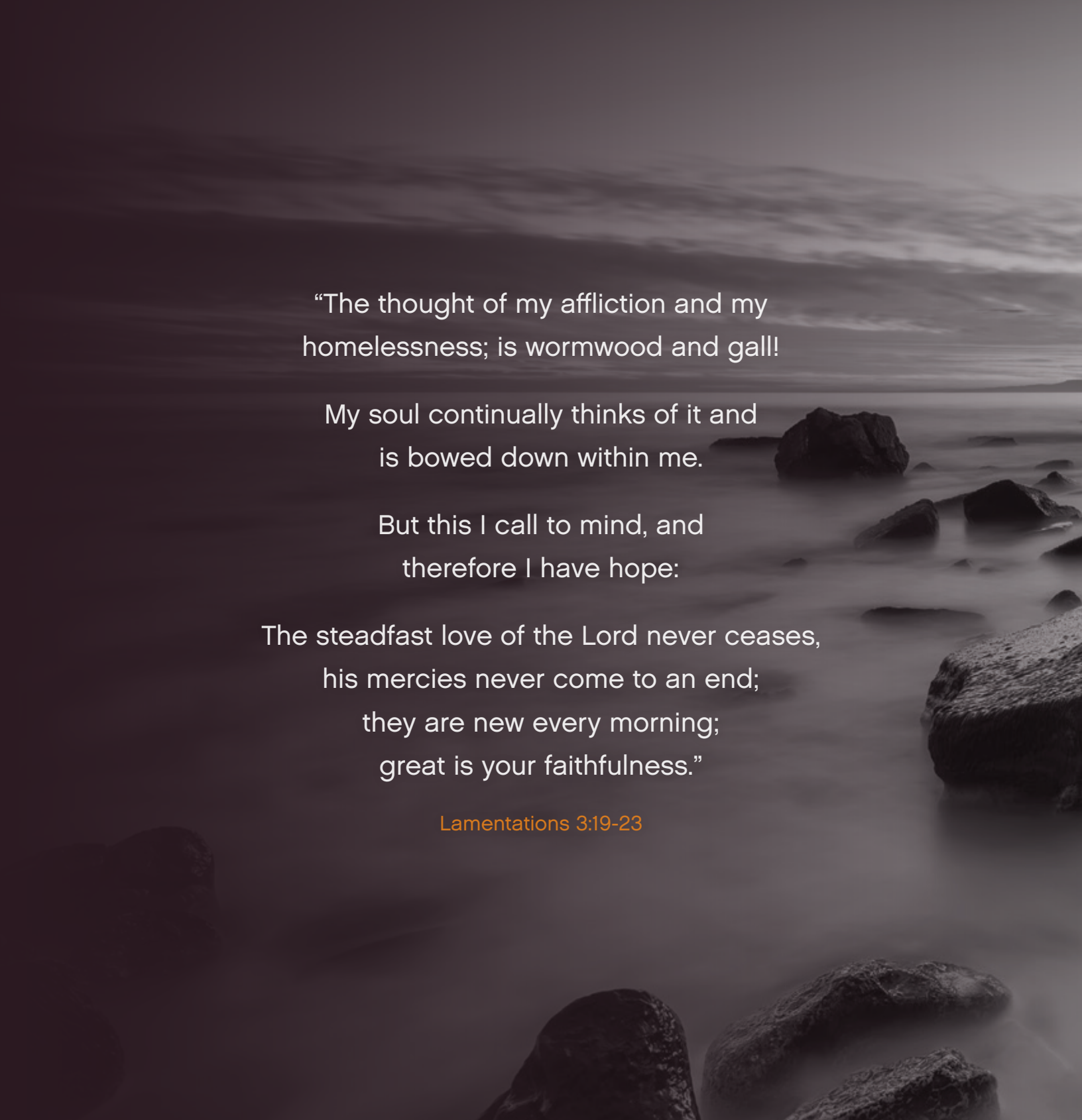
A PAN-AFRICAN DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

COMMEMORATING

THE 2019 QUAD-CENTENNIAL

OF THE FORCED TRANSATLANTIC VOYAGE OF ENSLAVED
AFRICAN PEOPLES TO JAMESTOWN, VIRGINIA (USA)

REV. DR. ANGELIQUE WALKER-SMITH, EDITOR



“The thought of my affliction and my
homelessness; is wormwood and gall!

My soul continually thinks of it and
is bowed down within me.

But this I call to mind, and
therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.”

Lamentations 3:19-23

The devotional guide is dedicated to my mother, Rev. Elder Geneva Willis Walker, who encouraged me to write both the paper that framed the devotional and the devotional itself but who passed before either was completed.

—Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith

PARTNERS



United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands



Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. By changing policies, programs, and conditions that allow hunger and poverty to persist, we provide help and opportunity far beyond the communities where we live.

PREFACE

Greetings from the African Union Representational Mission to the United States of America. We are the first bilateral diplomatic mission of the African Union, officially launched on July 11, 2007 in Washington, D.C. Our mandate is to undertake, develop, and maintain constructive and productive institutional relationships between the African Union and the executive and legislative branches of the United States government, the African Diplomatic Corps, Africans in the Diaspora, and the Bretton Woods institutions.

We mobilize support for Africa's development and adopt common positions on key issues; build, sustain, and nurture the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and the African Union; establish working relationships with the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization of American States; and build constituencies for Africa, including Diaspora engagement.

The Vision of the African Union is to become an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena. Our Aspirations from Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want strategic framework are:

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
2. An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.
3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.
4. A peaceful and secure Africa.
5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics.
6. An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women, youth, and children.
7. Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.

Africa's Diaspora, the Sixth Region of the AU, whether displaced through slavery and colonialism or part of modern-day migration are part of Africa's history and future. The African Diaspora has a reservoir of skills, resources and passion that must be harnessed and integrated into our Pan-African movement (African Union, Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want).

Therefore, I am pleased to see this book of meditations and devotions centered on this 2019 Quad-Centennial moment that is one of the historic links of the African Union to the African Diaspora in the United States. The hopes, dreams, aspirations, challenges, and opportunities for the vast international Pan-African community are intimately tied together.

The 2019 Quad-Centennial is another season to demonstrate our unity against racism, inequitable domestic and global laws, hunger and poverty. This devotional captures this moment of lament and hope for all of us. Our story is the story of not only the U.S. but of all Africans, the African Diaspora and the world.

This devotional allows us to hear our story anew and implores us to act against the consequences of the legacy of slavery of African peoples, racism, hunger, and poverty today.

Her Excellency (H.E.) Dr. Arikana Chihombori-Quao is the African Union ambassador and permanent representative to the United States.



African Union Ambassador
Arikana Chihombori-Quao

FOREWORD

“... and what doth the LORD require of thee...?” (Micah 6:8)

Calls to advocacy and action move us beyond personal, pietistic salvation or a limited God-me relationship to the faith commitment that is involved with and for the wholeness of the world around us. Advocacy, social action, and social justice ministries are not new words to Christians. While they do not mean the same things, they convey the need to focus on goals and actions that will bring abundant life to those who have little or no piece in the world’s pie.

My Black American Church heritage always challenged and resisted injustices through social actions, which included speeches, written declarations, litanies and other calls to action. The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) annual conferences of that time almost always had a “State of the Country” message or a “Committee on Social Concerns” report. Granted, it was an era that was primarily focused on the United States and the need for racial justice, societal equality and financial empowerment of African American people; but it can be seen, looking back, as a blossoming of the awareness within “Church” that God’s “righteousness” was more than pietistic, self-focused, or only about personal improvement.

That blossoming has become a call to know the interconnectedness of global issues and to join with others to set goals and alleviate unjust actions and crippling deeds (even our own subconscious ones).

**This...devotional
for public policy
engagement
stretches and
strengthens
our faith...**

In my own development, I have grown to understand that Christians beyond the African American church denominations also know God’s call to justice issues. (I did not always know or believe that.) And while, in the context of my denominational culture, we had “State of the Country” messages and “Committee on Social Concerns” reports, or participated in protests or marches, other Christians in other faith groups taught and used language challenging people to advocate for issues of justice and empowerment.

Today, I hear the word “advocacy” much more clearly, but when I first heard it in the context of what was being called (in my cultural upbringing) “social concerns” and “social action,” I thought the word “advocacy” had strange overtones (or even suspicious, covert undertones). Now I realize the calls for advocacy, social action and social justice all broaden and strengthen us and help us hear God’s will for the wholeness of all of God’s creation from different idiomatic and societal perspectives.

This Pan-African Christian devotional for public policy engagement stretches and strengthens our faith as it brings us through weekly meditations on “the word of God for the people of God.” This devotional also prods us to reflect, consider, focus, and act. I am grateful to Bread for the World and the Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith for weaving together so much from so many.

Senior Bishop Lawrence L Reddick III, of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, is also chair of the Organizing and Constituency Committee of the Board of Directors at Bread for the World.



Senior Bishop
Lawrence L. Reddick III

INTRODUCTION

In 2019, after centuries of structural change, protests, and policy reforms most often led by Africans and people of African descent, why do these groups still experience such disproportionately high percentages of hunger and poverty today? And why is there still such a wide wealth and income gap between these groups and individuals of European and Asian descent?

An essential part of the answer lies in the history of the Quad-Centennial of the transatlantic voyage of African peoples from the country of Angola in 1619 to Jamestown, Virginia. The practice, and later policy, of enslaving African peoples before, during, and after this time are the foundation on which inequitable policies were established. Additionally, these policies have informed a practice and culture of colonization, racism, and Afrophobia around the world.

Although scholars, like Dr. Michael Guasco, from Davidson College, point out that Africans had previously been enslaved in English Atlantic colonies in other parts of the globe, Dr. Tim Hashaw, author of “Birth of Black America,” notes that “absolutely vital to the formation of English-speaking America was in 1619 in Jamestown, Virginia when some sixty Africans were stolen from a Spanish slave ship [by the English] and were brought to the young struggling colony of Jamestown...”

This is where the origins of the process for the codification of legalized enslavement of Africans and African descended peoples in the United States began.

Bread for the World recognizes that the 2019 Quad-Centennial is a global historic moment to acknowledge how the practice of slavery in the United States led to the development of public policies sanctioning the enslavement of Africans and African-descended people.

Bread for the World also recognizes that this enslavement was followed by deliberate public policies and practices that have systematically disempowered and disenfranchised people of African descent for 400 years in the United States and around the world.

The devotional celebrates the hope, faith, and resistance of African and African-descended people...

Bread for the World therefore endorses the International Decade in Solidarity with People of African Descent as it seeks to address the residual impacts of slavery domestically and globally.

As a collective Christian voice, Bread for the World further recognizes and acknowledges the role many churches have played in supporting and perpetuating these horrific practices and policies. Many of these

same churches and denominations have since published official documents of confession and repentance regarding the same.

In light of this historic moment, Bread for the World is honored to produce and dedicate the new 2019 Quad-Centennial monthly devotional, “Lament and Hope: A Pan-African Devotional Guide Commemorating the 2019 Quad-Centennial of the Forced Transatlantic Voyage of Enslaved African Peoples to Jamestown, Virginia (USA).”

The devotional celebrates the hope, faith, and resistance of African and African-descended people, while also lamenting the evil and horror of the history of enslavement, racism, and inequitable policies, many of which are still present today.

In addition, this Christian devotional acknowledges and seeks to inspire readers to address the resulting consequences of hunger and poverty through advocacy.

Angelique Walker-Smith is senior associate for Pan African and Orthodox Church Engagement at Bread for the World.



Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith

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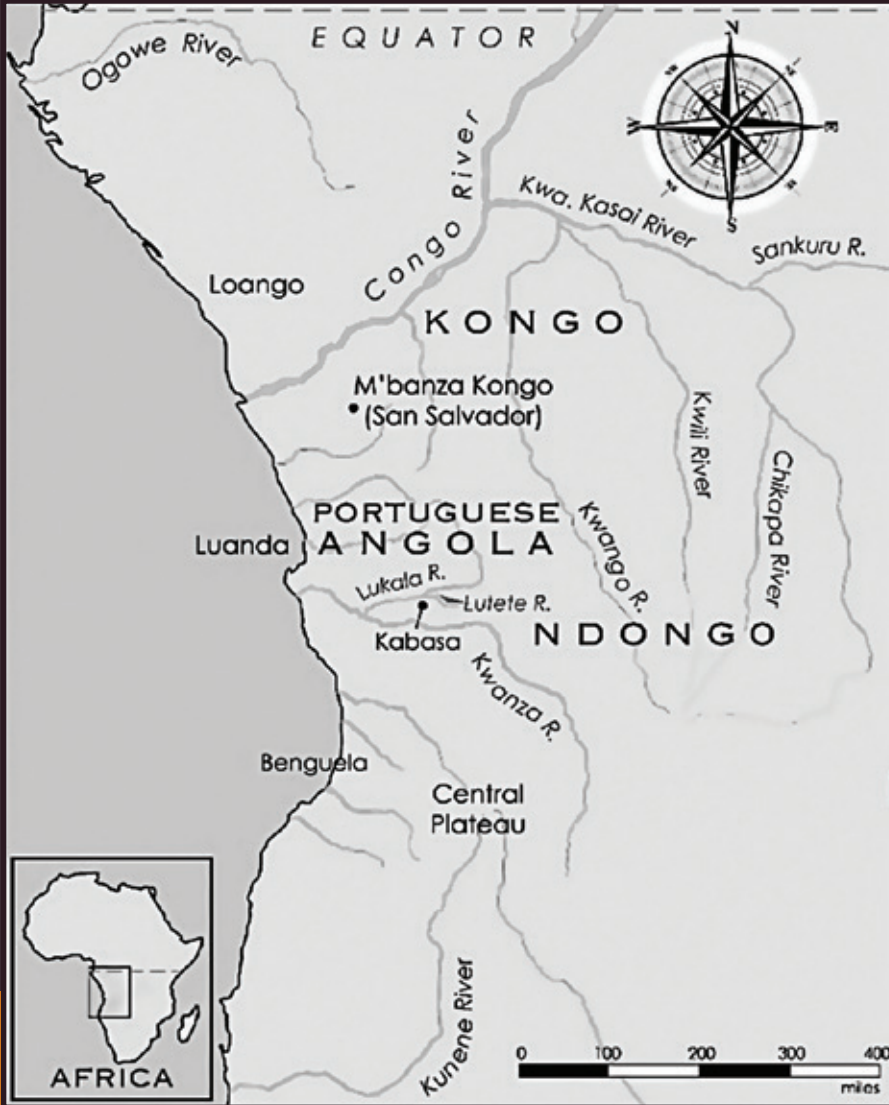
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JANUARY



Angola at the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade from Angola to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619*

From 1501 to 1867, more than 12.5 million Africans were captured, sold, and transported to the Americas. While Portugal and Spain were the first European powers engaged in this trade, eventually most of the European powers would join. It was as profitable as it was brutal. The Africans who came to Virginia in 1619 had been taken from Angola in West Central Africa. They were captured in a series of wars that were part of Portuguese hostilities against the Kongo and Ndongo kingdoms, and other states.*

*Source: <https://historicjamestowne.org/history/the-first-africans/>

LAMENT AND HOPE IN ANGOLA

A History of Migration, Immigration, and Enslavement

Weekly Scriptures Lessons:

First Sunday: “Lamenting in Distressed Communities” (Psalm 102:1-2)

Second Sunday: “Migration and Immigration May Lead to Suffering” (Matthew 2:18)

Third Sunday: “Migration and Immigration May Lead to Mourning” (Acts 8:2)

Fourth Sunday: “Fasting and Prayer Empowers an Immigrated People” (Nehemiah 1:4)

Biblical Reflection:

Angola has a long history of migration and immigration. This includes a season of forced migration of at least 5 million enslaved Angolans between 1500 and 1850. From 1618 to 1619, a combined force of Portuguese and Imbangala soldiers attacked and conquered the Kingdom of Ndongo, laying siege to the Ndongo capital of Kabasa. The Portuguese sold thousands of Kabasa residents into slavery carrying them in 36 ships leaving the port of Luanda in 1619 destined for slave plantations in the Americas, primarily Brazil (Dr. Nell Elizabeth Irvin). This season also included enslaved Angolans who were diverted to Jamestown, Virginia on August 20, 1619 and for whom we also lament.

The period of forced migration of enslaved Angolans to the Americas was a prelude to significant immigration patterns that followed. Most recently, during the period of modern armed conflict (1975-2002), Angolans immigrated to neighboring countries and overseas. Many of them, despite having immigrated to developed and semi-developed countries, were still attentive to the environment of their land of origin and hoped to return to their home country. Many worried about their families and their belongings.

The world is still filled with lamentation for immigrants and those who live with hunger, lack of employment, shelter, medical care, and conflict.

Nehemiah 1:4 brings us the example of a model man who, despite living comfortably and prominently in the royal palace, loved his people, for his heart was broken when he learned that his people were suffering. Upon acknowledging his people’s infidelity to God as the cause of their suffering, Nehemiah also humbly regarded himself as among the guilty even though he personally remained loyal in his walk with God.

Nehemiah wept, prayed, and fasted to God for four months on behalf of his people. He hoped for and worked to attain faith, a rehabilitated Jerusalem and prosperity for his people. God expects us to do the same. Boasting and squandering resources as millions of people suffer is a gross sin against God and humanity. George Bernard Shaw wrote:

“The worst sin we can commit against other human beings is not to hate them but to be indifferent to them: this is the essence of humanity.”

Prayer:

O God of mercy and love, teach us, like Nehemiah and the disciples of Christ, to love our neighbor. Give us the strength to work with and for those who suffer from the “strange fruits” (Abel Meeropol) of wars, conflicts, hunger and social injustices.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: Why does the world continue to have people suffering unjustly?

Week 2: What should we as Christian disciples do, in addition to prayer, to transition from a state of lamentation to hope?

Week 3: What are the “strange fruits” in your community that compel you to be an advocate for justice?

Week 4: What are the immigration and migration patterns in your community that cause you to show hospitality and concern for those who are most impacted?

Rev. Dr. Deolinda Teca is the general secretary of the Angolan Council of Churches-Conselho de Igrejas Cristãs em Angola (CICA).

FEBRUARY



Depiction of the *San Juan Bautista's* battle against the two English corsairs, the *Treasurer* and the *White Lion*. Painting by Richard C. Moore

“In the summer of 1619, after the war of resistance in Angola, 350 enslaved Angolans were robbed. They were put on a ship called the *Juan Bautista*, which was bound for Vera Cruz, on the coast of Mexico. Their spiritual resilience kept some of them alive despite horrific torture while others perished at sea. While at sea, two English ship privateers, the *White Lion* and the *Treasurer*, attacked the *San Juan Bautista* and robbed 50-60 enslaved Angolans from the ship. The two privateers then sailed to Virginia where the *White Lion* arrived at Point Comfort, or present-day Hampton, Virginia in August. John Rolfe, a prominent planter and merchant (and formerly the husband of Pocahontas), reported that ‘20 and odd Negroes’ were ‘bought for victuals.’ The majority of the Angolans were acquired by wealthy and well-connected English planters... The Africans were sold into bondage despite Virginia having no clear-cut laws sanctioning slavery until 1705. From 1619 to 1705, the records show that Africans fought and resisted enslavement primarily through the courts.”

Source: <https://historicjamestowne.org/history/the-first-africans/>

LAMENT AND HOPE

The Survival and Spiritual Resistance of African Peoples to Enslavement and Forced Immigration

Weekly Scripture Lessons:

First Sunday: “Let My People Go” (Exodus 9:1)

Second Sunday: “He Set Me Free” (Psalm 118:5)

Third Sunday: “To Preach Deliverance to the Captives” (Luke 4:18)

Fourth Sunday: “Live as Free People” (1 Peter 2:16)

Biblical Reflection:

The history of African and African-descended people did not begin on the ships of the transatlantic slave trade. Long before we were shackled for servitude, we were a rich people on the continent of Africa. Yet, kidnapped Africans were shipped for more than 200 years to the Americas. Some of the first survivors of this voyage arrived in the United States in Virginia. Enslaved Africans and African-descended people took assets from their past and reinterpreted them in a new context. One of these assets was their faith that reinterpreted Christianity and resulted in the establishment of Black Churches and spirituals theologically centered in a vision of freedom. These churches and sacred art, which have inspired a vision and fight for freedom, kept them and their descendants fighting for just policies that contributed to the goal of ending hunger and poverty.

Biblically, salvation is freedom from the shackles that bind us. It is won not by atonement but by the blood of Jesus that makes us free, even as the blood of the martyred ancestors makes Black Americans resilient. As a nation with growing inequality related to hunger and poverty—that is divided by suspicions, hatreds, fears, and oppression—we need policies that rectify social disparities and inequalities in wealth, health, education, and justice.

Prayer:

We remember our ancestors, O God. You created them in your image; they suffered and bled like your Son, Jesus Christ. We give thanks, dear God that we are the living testament to their resistance and resilience. May we follow their example and seek what they sought, which was you! Help us now Eternal God to guide the next generations to end the injustices of poverty, and hunger and oppressions in any form. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: When we consider the Bible, is the end result domination or liberation?

Week 2: How can churches in partnership with social entrepreneurships turn the light of truth upon the present and past wrongs?

Week 3: Given the 400-year history of racial wealth inequality, how are you advancing an advocacy agenda that supports wealth creation?

Week 4: How can we create policy and economic solutions that empower communities affected by hunger and poverty?

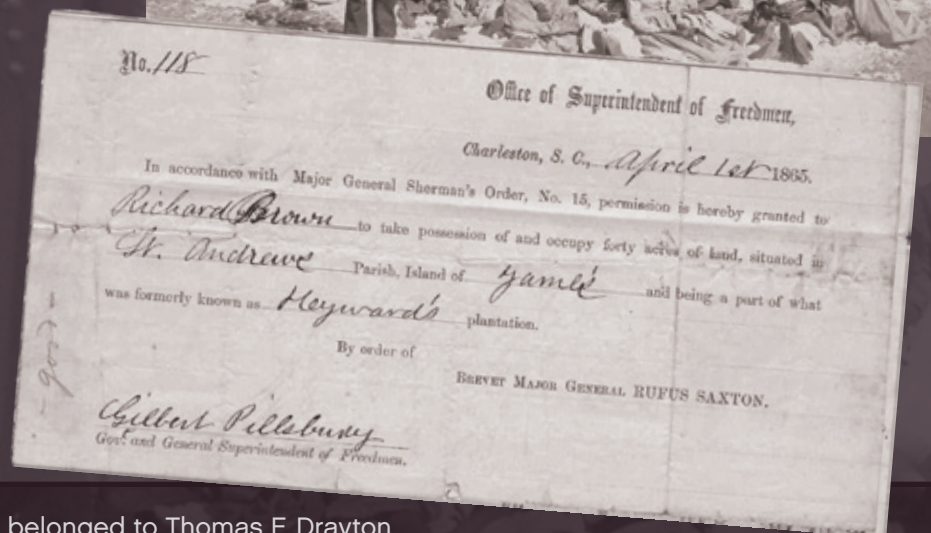
Reverend (Professor) Quardricos Bernard Driskell is an adjunct professor of religion and politics at The George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management, pastor of the historic Beulah Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, and a member of the Pan-African Young Adult Network (PAYAN) at Bread for the World.

MARCH

U.S. Land Dispossession

1865 40,000 freed Africans were settled on some 400,000 acres of land in GA and SC. Later that summer, President Andrew Johnson reverses the policy and orders the land be returned to the confederate planter oligarchy.

1865 Congress established the Freedmen's Bureau providing for the redistribution of abandoned or confiscated lands to freedmen (up to 40 acres). The Freedmen's Bureau never controlled more than two tenths of 1% of the land in the South and President Johnson's amnesty proclamation forced restoration of much of that land. Congress shut the Bureau in 1872.



Top: Recently liberated slaves, who had belonged to Thomas F. Drayton, on the Magnolia Plantation in South Carolina. Photo by Henry P. Moore / Library of Congress

Bottom: Land Order for Richard Brown, April 1, 1865: "permission is hereby granted to Richard Brown to take possession of and occupy forty acres of land," situated in St. Andrews Parish, Island of James, South Carolina, Berkley District. Source: National Archives

Rescinding the 40-acre promise to those who were recently enslaved and fought for their country prevented them from becoming fully independent from their former owners. They were legally free, but they were prevented from becoming financially free. If the 4 million people forced into sharecropping had owned their land, they could have started earning income and eventually would have been able to put aside assets for the future. But sharecropping's continual debt cycle made it nearly impossible to get enough to eat, let alone earn money. Sharecropping continued for three generations. These families were often hungry and/or poorly nourished, far more likely to live in poverty than white people, and far less able to accumulate wealth.

Source: Bread for the World's Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet (<http://files.bread.org/institute/simulation/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Policy-Packet.pdf>)

LAMENT AND HOPE

President Andrew Johnson's Land Policies

Weekly Scripture Lessons:

First Sunday: "The Promise of Land and Community" (Genesis 15:1-15)

Second Sunday: "Wise Women and Stewardship of God's Creation" (Proverbs 14:1)

Third Sunday: "Land, Liberty and Hope for God's People" (Luke 4:18-19)

Fourth Sunday: "Advocating for Land Justice and Women's Empowerment" (Hebrews 11:8-16)

Fifth Sunday: "Advocating for Equitable Policies and Dignified Work" (Psalm 27:1-14) and (Proverbs 30:5)

Biblical Reflection:

The importance of land is a recurrent theme throughout the Bible. The relationship between the descendants of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar and the land became central to the covenant God forms with Abram and the Israelite people. God first promises the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants in Genesis 12:1-17 and later it was codified through the covenant in Genesis 15 and 17.

Later, a shift occurred from the nomadic traditional life of Abraham and Sarah to the creation of a stationary homeland. It took generations for Abraham's descendants to inherit the land they were promised. The journey was long and violent—including the experience of slavery in Egypt. Yet even when the promise of land was fulfilled, the Bible tells us that the descendants of Abraham would be separated from the land and forced to live in diaspora.

There are parallels in the African-American experience. Like the Ancient Israelites, African Americans were promised 40-acres of land, but this was rescinded under President Andrew Johnson's land policies despite the contributions of African Americans in the Civil War. This intensified the status of living in diaspora without the ownership of land since the forced transport of enslaved Africans during the transatlantic slave trade. Since that time, African Americans have longed for a place to call home and have had to make home wherever they have been. Enslaved foremothers had a primary role of doing this in the fields and at kitchen tables. In the face of family separation policies that attempted to remove black men from community life, women weaved together a collective understanding of home from the fields to church fellowship halls to community centers ensuring a sense of belonging. Now we must imagine a sense of home that is no longer bound by unjust public policies and take action to make that vision a reality.

Prayer:

God, open the eyes of our hearts to hear the cries of those who long for a place to call home. Grant us the courage to move beyond our discomfort and accompany those who are suffering by challenging the systems and policies that would keep them in bondage. In so doing, allow us to become ambassadors of your love. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: What vision of community and home do you long for?

Week 2: As we celebrate Women's History Month, what unique role do women play in God's vision of creating beloved community?

Week 3: Jesus proclaims his purpose in Luke 4. How might that purpose inspire hope for those who are without land and home?

Week 4: How can we faithfully advocate for just policies with a gender lens of empowerment?

Week 5: What should be included in policies that advocate dignified work and goodness for men and women?

Rev. Jennifer Bailey is the executive director of Faith Matters Network and an African Methodist Episcopal Minister.

APRIL



Sharecropping and Tenant Farming. Source: Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System

As the post-slavery decades passed, the practice of sharecropping and tenant farming became another form of slavery. But some farmers succeeded in breaking out of the sharecropping cycle and bought land. Between 1870 and 1910, more than one million African Americans became farmers on their own land. But they were still at risk of having their land seized and losing out on a main source of wealth. White landowners could arbitrarily accuse them of being in debt and take their land or property. African Americans often could not fight these allegations since they were legally barred from bringing white Americans to court. The African-American community continues to suffer economically from this. Today, African-American farmers also face the effects of globalization, technology, racially inequitable lending policies, and corporate farm buyouts. Today, less than 1 percent of the nation's farmers are African American and own and operate less than 2 percent of the farmland they did in 1920.*

The Land Reform Process in South Africa is focused on three areas: restitution, land tenure reform, and land redistribution. Restitution is the government compensating (monetary) individuals who were forcefully removed. This policy has now shifted to redistribution with secure land tenure. In this case, land is bought from its owners who are willing sellers by the government and redistributed, in order to maintain public confidence in the land market. Land tenure reform is a system of recognizing people's right to own land and therefore control of the land (Klaus Deininger and William Moseley).

*Source: Bread for the World's Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet (<http://files.bread.org/institute/simulation/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Policy-Packet.pdf>)

LAMENT AND HOPE

Land Seizures (1865-Present Day) and Common Ground in the US and South Africa

Weekly Scripture Lessons:

First Sunday: “Divine View” (Psalm 24)

Second Sunday: “Power, Envy, and Greed” (1 Kings 21:1-16)

Third Sunday: “Persecution and Promise of Restoration” (Jeremiah 38-40;32)

Fourth Sunday: “Justice Must Prevail” (Amos 5, Micah 6)

Fifth Sunday: “Breaking Bread in Your Community” (Luke 24:13-35)

Biblical Reflection:

Legal land dispossession compounded the dehumanisation of slavery in both the United States and South Africa.¹ These legal measures have contributed to multi-generational impoverishment on the one hand and multi-generational privilege for the beneficiaries.² These fundamental injustices have systematically perpetuated privilege at the cost of human dignity and *abundant life* (John 10:10) for major segments of the population.

The Psalmist (Psalm 24) adopts a different perspective: *The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it*. Abuse of power, envy, and greed motivate *some* individuals and institutions to pursue policies and practices, which dehumanise and exploit others. Those in opposition are often vilified, persecuted, and sometimes martyred.

And yet, as people of faith, we are also a people of hope. Oppression will not overwhelm us because we worship a God of justice and mercy. Our faith motivates us to remain engaged in the struggle³ for justice and the quest for restitution.

The mid-8th century Before Common Era (BCE)/Before Christ (BC) prophets in both Israel and Judah, Amos and Micah, imbue us with the courage to be persistent in our contemporary struggles for justice. In both the United States and South Africa, we have been able to celebrate moments of victory as people and movements witnessed to their faith by challenging injustice.

Prayer:

O God our help in ages past, we bring ourselves and our communities before you this day. Land dispossession and the inequitable distribution of nutritious food from the land disempower your people. And yet you call us to receive Jesus Christ into our lives. Today, we pray that the Holy Spirit may guide us beyond charity and into acts of justice and restitution and empower us to remain faithful to Him who has promised to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: What is our national land legacy?

Week 2: How has that legacy affected your family?

Week 3: What sacrifice(s) are we making to bring about justice?

Week 4: What victories have we celebrated in last year’s struggle for justice?

Week 5: Can you identify where Jesus is “breaking bread” in your community?

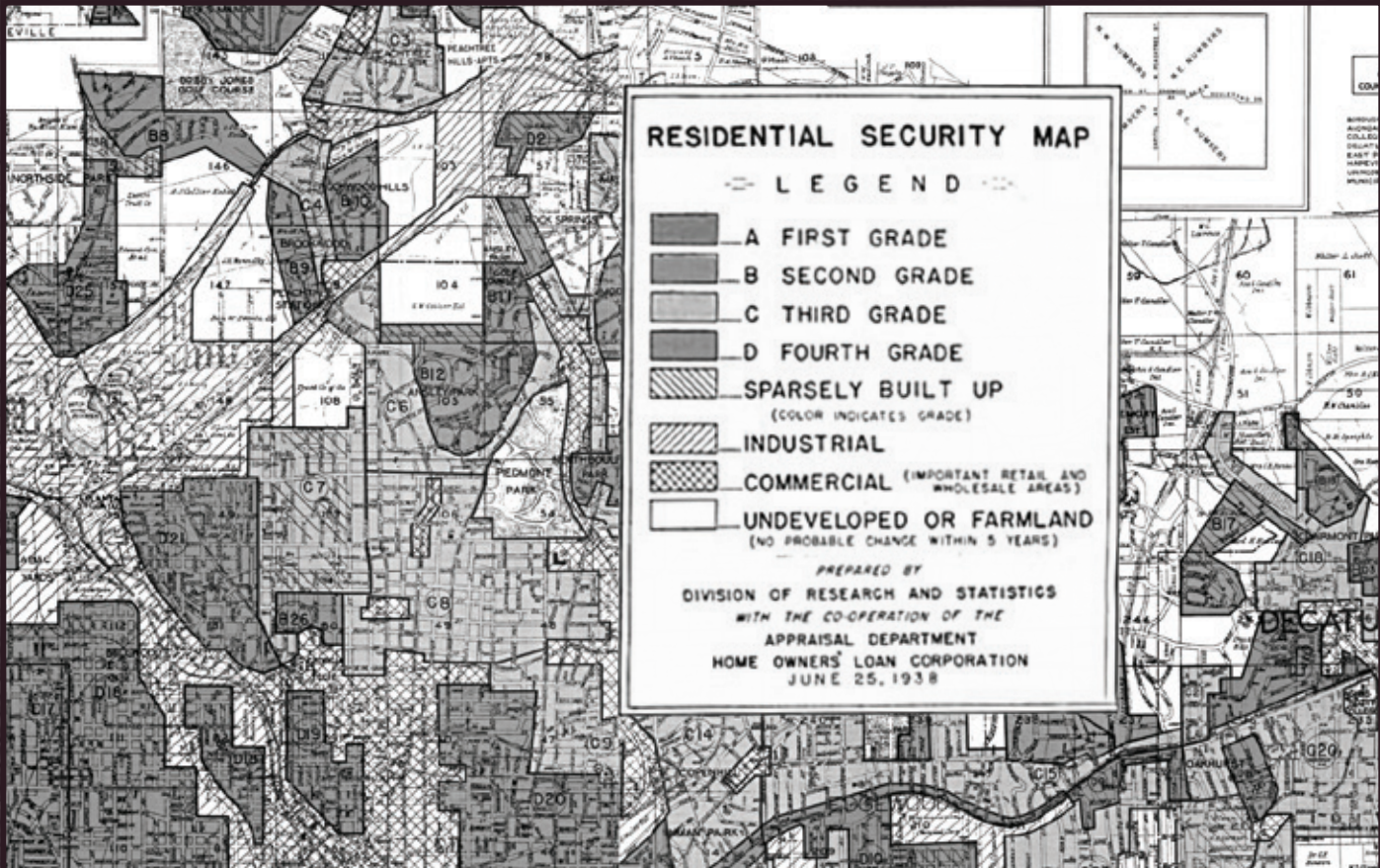
Rev. Dr. Lionel Louw is pastor emeritus of Community of Faith, a former chief of staff to the Premier of the Western Cape, and a former associate professor and head of the social development department, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

¹ In *Faith & Courage* South African Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba (2017:13-27) documents his clan’s land dispossession.

² Swartz calculated the financial loss to one South African family of R4.1m, while the loss in human dignity is incalculable. Swartz, Sharlene. *Another Country*. 2016:85. Human Sciences Research Council. Cape Town

³ Allan Boesak in *Dare we speak of hope* (2014:67-89) reminds us hope demands struggle.

MAY



Homeownership is the primary way American families build wealth. African Americans have been denied equitable access to mortgage loans, and therefore homeownership, for roughly the past four generations. In 1934, the National Housing Act established a new government agency, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), to regulate interest rates and mortgage terms after the banking crisis of the 1930s. Through the newly created FHA, the federal government began to insure mortgages issued by qualified lenders, thereby providing mortgage lenders with default protection. African Americans were inequitably segregated through mapping of neighborhoods and typically ineligible for these loans. Many African Americans resorted to “contract lending.” Contract lending involved discriminatory practices against African Americans by white real estate speculators. The practices included charging inflated amounts for houses, no accrual of equity in the home until all installment payments were paid, quickly evicting families for not making payments on time, and forcing them to forfeit previous house payments.

Source: Bread for the World's Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet (<http://files.bread.org/institute/simulation/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Policy-Packet.pdf>)

LAMENT AND HOPE

Housing Policies for Africans in Diaspora

Weekly Scripture Lessons:

First Sunday: “No Comfort for the People” (Jeremiah 31:15-22)

Second Sunday: “No Home in a Foreign Land” (Psalm 137)

Third Sunday: “Holding Leaders Accountable for Homelessness” (Matthew 23: 29-39)

Fourth Sunday: “New Life for Those Afflicted by Poverty” (Revelation 22:1-11)

Fifth Sunday: “A Just Inheritance for All People” (Numbers 27:1-11)

Biblical Reflection:

Instances of outcry because of injustice, oppression, and misfortune are experienced by human beings. People of faith have lamented, hoped for a better future, and acted to usher in that hope for the future. The book of Lamentations reminds us that in the wake of traumatic circumstances, communal and ritual lament helps in the journey to wholeness. Africans in Diaspora have practiced this for centuries. In Lamentations 3:1, the writer expresses deep distress that feels as if God has abandoned the writer, but then the writer expresses hope (Lamentations 3:21b-22).

In approximately 587 BCE, the Babylonians conquered Israel, destroyed Jerusalem and sent the people into exile. Other misfortunes followed, and the basis of Jewish religion and culture were questioned. Babylon was later conquered by Persia and the Persian King gave his Jewish servant, Nehemiah, permission to rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's response in the face of these challenges was to lament, pray, and act (Nehemiah 1:3-4).

Nehemiah took steps to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem physically and symbolically, persisting in the face of opposition by some of his own people.

Africans in Diaspora have also rebuilt their communities despite their lament over policies such as the National Housing Policy of 1934. It is in this rebuilding that hope is created for future generations.

Prayer:

We thank you God for creating a home for us on beautiful planet earth; for creating people who are families of kinship and companionship, faith and citizenry. We have failed to love God, others, ourselves and creation. Help those who lead in homes, and in religious, political, and humanitarian organizations. Have mercy upon us. Teach us to welcome and love family and strangers. Empower us to provide for those who are vulnerable, affected by hunger, lonely, homeless, poor, and oppressed. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: What are the arenas of lament and expressions of hope for ‘exiles’ in your community?

Week 2: If a person is cut off from joy and in enemy territory, can they sing?

Week 3: What can we learn from those who are oppressed but still find hope in their seasons of lament?

Week 4: Jesus denounces failed leadership in Matthew 23:29-39. How do we hold leaders who perpetuate or collude with abuse accountable? How can you help end the scandal of homelessness and poverty?

Week 5: How do we create training processes that promote just leadership in government?

Rev. Dr. Marjorie Lewis, is the Gordan Scholar at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia and former president of the United Theological College of the West Indies.

JUNE



African Americans were among the first to be fired and the first to be evicted. The photo above (Jan 1939) is titled, “Evicted sharecroppers along Highway 60, New Madrid County, Missouri.” Photo by Arthur Rothstein / Library of Congress

The Social Security Act, enacted in 1935, was intended to provide a safety net for workers, particularly those suffering during the Great Depression. During this time African Americans were barely able to get by whether they were seniors, working-age adults, or children. African Americans were more likely to be unemployed and paid less than whites, which made it far less likely for them to receive support from unemployment insurance. They also had no savings to draw upon or leave for later generations. Sixty-five percent of African Americans were ineligible for Social Security unemployment insurance at the time the law went into effect. The newly-created Social Security system also excluded farmworkers and domestic workers—who were predominantly black, Latino, and Asian—from receiving old age and unemployment insurance.

Source: Bread for the World's Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet (<http://files.bread.org/institute/simulation/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Policy-Packet.pdf>)

LAMENT AND HOPE

The Policy of the Social Security Act of 1935

Weekly Scripture Lessons:

First Sunday: “Pleading the Case for Just Policies for All” (Isaiah 1:17)

Second Sunday: “Partnering with the Most Affected Matters” (Proverbs 31:8-9)

Third Sunday: “Good News Despite Policy Denials and Discrimination” (Luke 4:18-19)

Fourth Sunday: “The Spirit of the Lord Is With Us” (2 Corinthians 3:17)

Biblical Reflection:

In the aftermath of the Great Depression and near the beginning of World War II, the United States witnessed rapid industrialization. With industrialization came immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. During this time, immigration and migration were viewed as positive for the country—although not for all. The United States afforded many people from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to pursue their dreams.

Drs. Charles Hirschman and Elizabeth Hogsford in their article about immigration stated: “The size and selectivity of the immigrant community, as well as their disproportionate residence in large cities, meant they were the mainstay of the American industrial workforce. Immigrants and their children comprised over half of manufacturing workers in 1920, and if the third generation (the grandchildren of immigrants) are included, then more than two-thirds of workers in the manufacturing sector were of recent immigrant stock.”

It is in this context that Congress passed, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed, the Social Security Act of 1935. The legislation codified many government initiatives that protected immigrants and others who were already in the United States. Today, however, immigrants and migrants with Hispanic and African heritages are being demeaned, demonized, and degraded. They, too, seek equitable work with dignity like the immigrants who came before them. Our federal government needs to protect the rights of immigrants and migrants. Need moves God to act. Today, let it move you to advocate for this.

Prayer:

Almighty God, there are great needs in our society today. Injustice abounds as poverty is on the rise, violence grips our neighborhoods, and racism and discrimination plague our lives. In a land of plenty, so many experience widening economic and social inequity wrought by bad policy and selfish desires on the part of a few. Empower us to show hope through acts of love towards all of your Creation. We pray this in the name of Christ and through Your Spirit. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: What is your church teaching you about seeking justice? Whose cause should we take up and whose case should we plead most often—our own or others?

Week 2: In your advocacy, are you speaking with and for those relegated to the margins? How are you partnering with those experiencing injustice?

Week 3: What motivates your advocacy—religion, tradition, the Spirit? And, what is some “good news” that should be shared?

Week 4: If there is freedom where the Spirit of the Lord is, why is there still so much bondage in our land? Where is the Spirit of the Lord?

Derick D. Dailey, Esq. is a corporate litigation attorney and national convener of the Pan-African Young Adult Network (PAYAN) at Bread for the World

JULY



Workers, many of them migrants, grading beans at a canning plant in Florida in 1937. The economic hardships of the Great Depression hit African American workers especially hard. Photo by Arthur Rothstein / Library of Congress

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938, a significant piece of New Deal legislation, established a national minimum wage and a maximum work week and prohibited most employment of children under 16. Although the bill was originally intended to help strengthen the economy and put an end to the Great Depression, various groups of workers were excluded. These included domestic workers, who were disproportionately African American women. In 1939, 60 percent of African-American women were domestic workers. In addition, workers in a number of tip-based professions were excluded, including servers, shoe shiners, and Pullman porters, who were primarily African American. Agricultural workers were also excluded, and they were disproportionately African-American men—in 1939, 41 percent of black men were employed as farmworkers. Thus, many African Americans did not have access to the country's first-ever minimum wage and work protections. This further widened the racial hunger, income, and wealth gaps, which were already large because of earlier policies and the Great Depression.

Source: Bread for the World's Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet (<http://files.bread.org/institute/simulation/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Policy-Packet.pdf>)

LAMENT AND HOPE

The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938

Weekly Scripture Lessons:

First Sunday: “Everyone Has a Right to Dignified Work” (Genesis 2:4-25)

Second Sunday: “Prosperity for All People” (Psalm 72)

Third Sunday: “Equitable Compensation Matters” (Matthew 20:1-16)

Fourth Sunday: “Inequitable Compensation Affects All of Us” (James 5:1-6)

Biblical Reflection:

When we read the biblical texts, we are often surprised by the number of references to justice for the poor and marginalized that are center to our living of the faith. The scriptures demand we work to ensure people who experience poverty are not left defenseless, and the oppressed are not left without an advocate. Jesus’ emphasis on worker justice and the poor is clearly stated in the book of James. James, like Jesus, is concerned for the least, the last, and the left out—and calls for those who confess Jesus as Lord to develop actionable concern for and with them.

James witnessed the wealthy refusing to extend wage justice to those who labored on their behalf. James tells us that the laborers and harvesters were being cheated out of their due wage, and employers who are only concerned with their own luxury and pleasure are guilty of wage injustice.

Today, the rightfully earned wages of the workers are being kept. People who have put in a fair, honest, and just day’s work are being held back. People of African descent don’t have to look far back in history to know and recall the experiences of working land that is not ours, and having our wages held back.

James reminds the faithful everywhere, as did Jesus, that there is vindication for the poor. There is hope for the oppressed. There is victory for the marginalized—because God hears their cries. God hears those who experience wage theft; the moans of the overworked; and the protests of the underpaid.

Prayer:

God of Love and Justice,

Because we know that you are faithful and just, we believe there is Good News for the poor and oppressed. Because we know that you love and care about the condition of our lives, we believe there is Good News for the marginalized and left out.

Because we know that you have known and overcome suffering, We believe the Good News of hope and liberation in you. God of Love and Justice, come quickly and secure our future.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: How does the Biblical text invite believers to share a belief in the dignity of work, the right to a living wage, and the right to a safe working environment?

Week 2: Does the Biblical text challenge believers to build a new socioeconomic system based on the idea of fairness?

Week 3: What kind of support can you offer to justice-oriented organizations and groups that work to improve the lives of workers and laborers around the globe?

Week 4: Can you listen to the story of a marginalized worker, and in so doing, show genuine empathy and consider an action-oriented compassionate response?

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AUGUST



The Tuskegee Army Airfield is the popular name of a group of African-American military fighter and bomber pilots who fought in World War II. Photo by Toni Frissell / Library of Congress

The G.I. Bill, formally known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, provided military veterans returning from World War II with many benefits, including low-cost mortgages, high school or vocational education, college tuition and living expenses, unemployment insurance, and low-interest loans to start businesses. It is credited with creating the American middle class by opening homeownership and higher education to millions of World War II veterans. African American veterans were denied many of its benefits because the legislation failed to take into account existing discriminatory laws and policies. This has contributed to many of the ongoing challenges in the African American community, including earning enough to support a family, putting food on the table, and saving for the future. The middle class would be larger, the racial wealth gap narrower, and rates of food insecurity among African Americans lower, if veterans, regardless of race, had benefitted from the legislation.

Source: Bread for the World's Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet (<http://files.bread.org/institute/simulation/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Policy-Packet.pdf>)

LAMENT AND HOPE

The Policy of the G.I. Bill

Weekly Scripture Lessons:

First Sunday: “We Are Made in the Image of God” (Genesis 1:24-30)

Second Sunday: “Caring for All God’s People Matters” (Psalm 33:12-22)

Third Sunday: “How Do We Care for Those Serving in the Military?” (Luke 12:22-34)

Fourth Sunday: “How Can We Advocate for Our Service Men and Women?” (Galatians 6:1-10)

Biblical Reflection:

Every day millions of people are suffering without food, shelter, and other basic needs. While there are national and international efforts to address these needs, advocacy for change must continue to end hunger and poverty. This advocacy must consider a myriad of intersectional issues of discrimination. Our call to advocacy is grounded in the scriptures that teach us that the poor are to be empowered and those affected by hunger are to be fed. This advocacy is for the common good (Galatians 6:10).

Discrimination is the opposite approach to living for the common good. The Bible says men and women are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This concept of the *imago dei* has not always been fully embraced by the churches. Some churches have opted to support the status quo rather than live out the tenets of the gospel of love and justice.

This happened in 1619. August 20, 2019 marks the Quad-Centennial of the arrival of enslaved Africans from Angola to Virginia. The commodification of African lives for labor was upheld by Christians who decried the humanity of Africans rendering African lives as inferior. The enslavement of African people globally, the colonization of the African continent, and the mass exportation of African people into the Americas yielded an unholy legacy of social ills, which continue to plague African and people of African descent.

The inequitable distribution of government resources for African-descended people who served in the military and their families was a social ill that hindered the structural and social development of the United States. It was another example of the on-going oppression of African and African-descended women, men, and children that continues to defy the biblical understanding of *humans made in the image of God* (Genesis 1:27). Churches must be present in the fight for justice through the advocacy of just policies for all.

Prayer:

Creator God, our hearts are broken with the devaluing of human life. Our souls ache with desire for a world where all are fed, and all live in dignity and with respect and freedom. Move us to be advocates for humanity, working to eradicate poverty, racism, and all social ills so that equity belongs to all. We live in hope for a world where all are free, and your image is seen in every face we encounter. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: How does a contemporary living of *imago dei* inform your actions with and on behalf of all people?

Week 2: In the face of increasing nationalism, what does the psalmist have to say about caring for God’s people?

Week 3: How do you experience the connection between Jesus’ teaching to let go of anxiety and the call to advocacy for and with the “least of these”?

Week 4: Our call to action on behalf of all people is affirmed. How can this motivate your advocacy?

Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson is Minister of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and the former Minister for Racial Justice with Justice and Witness Ministries at the United Church of Christ

SEPTEMBER



Mrs. Nettie Hunt, sitting on steps of Supreme Court, holding newspaper, explaining to her daughter Nikie the meaning of the Supreme Court's decision banning school segregation. Library of Congress

Both the concept and the phrase “separate but equal” came from an 1896 court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which held that it was constitutional for railway companies to provide “separate but equal” services for their customers. It validated the “Jim Crow” laws that southern states had begun to enact starting in the late 1870s. This legal racial segregation separated African Americans from whites in schools, housing, jobs, and public gathering places. Although the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the doctrine of “separate but equal” in 1954 and the specific segregation of children in public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the failure to end “separate but equal” in practice, rather than only in law, has led to today’s cycle of under-investment in many students of color. Higher school spending is associated with a significantly lower risk of students facing hunger and poverty as adults. In a rapidly changing information-based economy, education is more important than ever to students’ ability to compete for jobs that will support a family.

Source: Bread for the World’s Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet (<http://files.bread.org/institute/simulation/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Policy-Packet.pdf>)

LAMENT AND HOPE

The Impact of the 'Separate but Equal' Policy

Weekly Scriptures Lessons:

First Sunday: “Restore What the Locusts Have Eaten” (Joel: 2:25-32)

Second Sunday: “Act Justly and Love Mercy” (Micah 6:8)

Third Sunday: “With All Thy Getting, Get Understanding” (Proverbs 4:7)

Fourth Sunday: “Unified and Equitable” (Corinthians 12:12-27)

Fifth Sunday: “Love One Another” (John 13:35)

Biblical Reflection:

Our spirits cry out as we lament both the past and residual impacts of slavery and the locust known as racism that has deprived Africans and their descendants basic freedoms, such as the right to read and write. This disenfranchisement was done through a discriminatory legal system. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jim Crow laws of the south mandated racial segregation thereby laying the foundation for institutionalizing separate and drastically unequal public school facilities and other resources for Black Americans. This was true even after the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* that public facilities and services may remain separate but equal. The advocacy of our ancestors finally ended racial segregation in public schools in the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. A decade later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned racial segregation in all public spaces, as well as employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

As we lament our past and the residual impacts of slavery and segregation, we also acknowledge our nation’s progress in treating the infestation of racism in our public institutions. We embrace the hope of policies that will help ensure equal educational opportunities for all. Fair districting laws and equitable investments in public education are essential to addressing the racial imbalances that persist in our school systems. We advocate for this not merely for education’s sake, but also to increase the knowledge and earning potential of students of color and reduce their risk of experiencing hunger and poverty in their adult lives. Such affirms the talents and value of all God’s children.

Prayer:

Almighty God, our Liberator and Redeemer, we call upon your wisdom, love, and power to fulfill the words of your prophet Joel to heal, restore, and unify our land. Give us boldness and discernment to eliminate racial disparities in our public institutions and provide equal educational opportunities for all students to help ensure the success and prosperity of all generations. We recall our past of separate but equal, while endeavoring to create a world in which Your people and the opportunities set before us are unified and equitable. In the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: What vision is God delivering to us as the sons and daughters of enslaved Africans who are called to fulfill God’s promises in the modern day? How can you participate in this vision?

Week 2: What does it mean to show God’s love and mercy in an unjust world?

Week 3: What lessons from our past will enable us to create and implement policies that will transform our future?

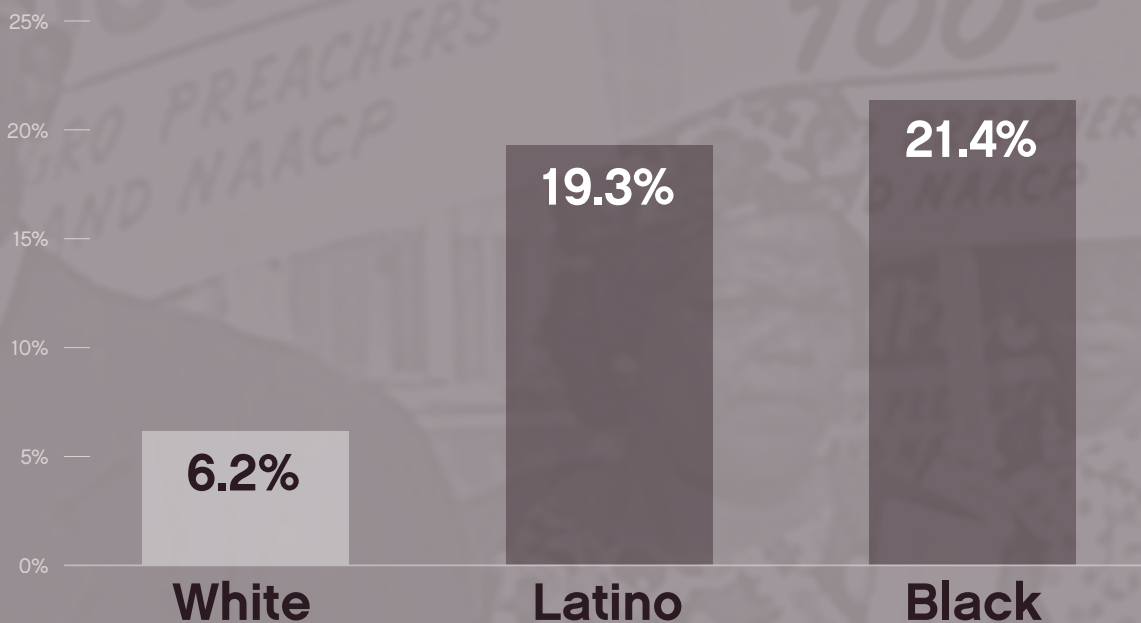
Week 4: What steps—large and small—must we take to promote unity within the body of Christ and equity in our public institutions?

Week 5: How might we grieve (lament) our past in such a way that uproots and releases all forms of bitterness and produces perfect love that casts out fear?

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OCTOBER

Percentage of higher-rate mortgages among borrowers with a FICO score of 660 or higher by race (2004-2008 originations)



Source: www.responsiblelending.org

Subprime loans are loans that carry higher interest rates than prime loans, which are more desirable since their interest rates are lower. Often, subprime loans are the only loans for which people considered at higher risk of defaulting can qualify. These “high risk” borrowers generally have low incomes and/or poor or limited credit histories. Borrowers with subprime loans ultimately pay more for their homes, since they pay higher interest rates throughout the mortgage period. The higher monthly interest rate also increases the risk of foreclosure.

Being approved disproportionately for subprime rather than prime loans means African Americans paid a higher percentage of their income toward their mortgages than their white counterparts, leaving them with less money for food, savings, and other needs. Subprime loans devastate African-American communities and eroded wealth that had been accumulating. Many gains that were being made have been eliminated.

Source: Bread for the World's Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet (<http://files.bread.org/institute/simulation/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Policy-Packet.pdf>)

LAMENT AND HOPE

Policies Related to Subprime Loans (1970s to Present)

Weekly Scriptures Lessons:

First Sunday: “Treating Those in Need with Dignity” (Exodus 22:25-27)

Second Sunday: “Thou Shall Not Treat the Poor Unjustly” (Proverbs 28:8-10)

Third Sunday: “Honorable Investing in People and Community Matters” (Luke 19:12-27)

Fourth Sunday: “Advocacy With Our Policy Leaders Can Make the Difference” (Ephesians 6:12)

Biblical Reflection:

I have a large extended family. When I was younger, we gathered every Sunday at my grandmother’s house for family dinner. It served as the place where our various identities as “Hammins,” Christians, and Black people were reinforced and refined. The history of capitalism, racism, and whiteness was also discussed. Our conversations were seasoned by our experiences of gentrification in historic Black neighborhoods, the systemic stealing of land, and denial of access to programs to acquire property.

While our dinner table was often a life-giving space, it also was a place where the challenges of vulnerable and low-wealth families were discussed. Sometimes our best responses were the wringing of hands, shouts of frustration, and prayer-filled tears.

Today all of us are wringing our hands as an astonishing number of families must confront bad financial actors in their own communities. These actors are poised to prey on the vulnerability of these families under the guise of helping them by putting them in cycles of debt. This is an economic vortex that devours financial independence and social hope. The desperation of many families prevents them from understanding that many quick, convenient financial “solutions” to their car or appliance repair needs are actually predatory lending schemes that can rob them of their ability to care for their loved ones.

Exodus presents God’s prohibition of charging excessive interest, usury, and predatory practices against the poor. Proverbs pronounces judgment on those who structure these practices in business. Luke envisions income that may be enhanced when invested wisely and justly. Ephesians warns of invisible systems that prohibit wealth-building among other life-giving measures. In sum, financial gain that exploits poor and vulnerable people is inconsistent with God’s values.

Our faith is life-giving! The Savior came to give full and abundant life. Just as loving parents would never offer poisonous food to their hungry children, we boldly demand that vulnerable families in need of credit not be offered poisonous predatory financial products or programs.

Prayer:

Creating, Sustaining, and Redeeming God, we thank you for meeting us at the intersection of suffering and hope to proclaim a future of hope and prosperity. Help us see the hidden institutions, policies, and powers that are barriers to the wealth-building of families. Give us hands to feed and clothe those caught in debt traps, minds that create policies to end systemic evil, and feet that do not grow weary as we advocate until it happens. Amen

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: How do we find solidarity with communities of color targeted by payday lenders? What voting and legislative strategies can eliminate this?

Week 2: How have you seen governmental leaders complicit with predatory lending? What other tactics can draw attention to this?

Week 3: What are barriers to strengthening the financial capacity of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and their students? Despite limited financial resources, what are their many returns on investment?

Week 4: What systemic realities affect affordable housing today? What are remedies to the uneven mortgage field?

Rev. Sekinah Hamlin is director of faith affairs at the Center for Responsible Lending and former director of the Ecumenical Poverty Initiative.

NOVEMBER



Source: Joseph Molieri for Bread for the World

Our country's state prison population has grown by more than 700 percent since the 1970s. Many people are in jail or prison because of harsh laws and minimum sentencing requirements for drug offenses. The so-called "War on Drugs," was first launched in 1971 by the Nixon administration. The people imprisoned, particularly for drug offenses, came disproportionately from the African American community and other communities of color. Incarceration directly and indirectly influences income and wealth. Today, 13 states have prison populations that are more than half African American. Mass incarceration costs taxpayers up to \$182 billion each year. Returnees who find jobs are usually very poorly paid. One in five people returning from prison or jail earns less than \$7,600 a year, which puts them and their families in "deep poverty," a formal term meaning that they live on less than half of the poverty-level income.

Source: Bread for the World's Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet (<http://files.bread.org/institute/simulation/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Policy-Packet.pdf>)

LAMENT AND HOPE

The War on Drugs and Still We Rise!

Weekly Scripture Lessons:

First Sunday: "...I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16)

Second Sunday: "For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction" (Psalm 1:6)

Third Sunday: "...but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" (Matthew 16:3)

Fourth Sunday: "Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison..." (Hebrews 13:3)

Biblical Reflection:

In 1971, the "War on Drugs" in the United States was declared by President Richard Nixon. This was the backdrop of his statement, which is in the diary of H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff: "you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the Blacks...The key is to devise a system that recognizes this, while not appearing to."

This "War" has resulted in intergenerational human devastation and trauma. As of today, it has cost over \$1 trillion and resulted in a system of mass incarceration that represents 5 percent of the world's population and holds 25 percent of the world's incarcerated in its jails and prisons. Thirteen percent of the U.S. population is African American but almost 50 percent of the more than 2 million people in prisons are black. One-third of black men between the ages of 18 and 28 are in prisons, jails, on parole or waiting for their day in court.

When a criminal justice system and its policies are designed with the intent of disempowering a group of people; when prisons become privatized for purposes of making profit and satisfying the spirit of greed, not rehabilitation and restorative justice; when policies fuel and influence other public policies from food security to immigration, surely human rights are violated, and the will of God is offended.

Yes, the "War on Drugs" was born in evil and has wrought evil. But God! Yes, the "War on Drugs" has devastated many families, "But Still We Rise!" Yes, the "War on Drugs," mass incarceration, mass criminalization, and demonization permeate the epicenter of the Quad-Centennial moment that has marked African-American millennials as the most incarcerated generation of Blacks in the U.S. But that's not the whole story.

An African-American president and first family served this nation most ably, with dignity and honor. A movement of resilience in and around Black Lives Matter has transfigured our country. God's Hand of Divine Grace and Mercy continues to win over evil and injustice. In the wake of Afrophobia, God's will for Reparatory Justice is in the air.

Prayer:

Most Sovereign God, they ask, "How can we sing a song of the Lord in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4). We answer, "By continuing to offer up to You, not man, our fervent prayers of lamentation and hope, and our actions toward the dismantling of systems of injustice, food insecurity, and impoverishment!" O Holy One, hear our prayer.

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: What risks will you take to engage in advocacy and activism to dismantle the intersecting systems, which contribute to unjust criminal justice policies and practices, hunger and poverty?

Week 2: How do you thoughtfully disengage from the noise of unrighteousness that lures us to accept evil as normal?

Week 3: When you see people who do not see the humanity in "the other," what will you do?

Week 4: What are you doing to support and affirm the humanity of those imprisoned and those returning to communities as having "served their time?"

Rev. Dr. Iva Carruthers is general secretary of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference and vice chair of Bread for the World Board of Directors.

DECEMBER



Sunrise on the shores of Angola, Africa. Photo by silvapinto, Adobe Stock

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-23)

LAMENT AND HOPE

From Lamentation to Liberation!

Weekly Scripture Lessons:

First Sunday: “A Call for No More Distress in the Land” (Isaiah 9:1-4)

Second Sunday: “Dawning of Light in the Deep Darkness” (Isaiah 9:2)

Third Sunday: “The Resurrection of the Righteous is Assured!” (Luke 4: 14-21)

Fourth Sunday: “Good News for the Poor” (Luke 4: 18)

Fifth Sunday: “Be Strong in the Lord and His Mighty Power” (Ephesians 6: 10)

Biblical Reflection:

The dark shadow of slavery and oppression has haunted Africa and Africans in the diaspora for hundreds of years. White supremacy laid the foundation and continues to perpetuate deep spiritual, political, and economic disparities in Africa and among her descendants throughout the world.

As racial rhetoric and actions by government officials and everyday citizens alike make the headlines, hate crimes, motivated primarily by race and ethnicity, rose 17 percent since 2016, marking a stark increase for the third consecutive year, according to a recent F.B.I. report.

Our past and present circumstances beg the question: where do we go from here? Will poverty and hunger continue to increase? Will global reactionary racism continue to attack and destabilize African nations and the descendants who live in the diaspora? We must heed the words of the prophet Isaiah and flip this oppressive script. The people who have walked in darkness, like our ancestors, will walk in the light of love, light, and liberation.

Prayer:

Almighty God, we thank you for this Advent Adventure that calls us to remember the past, struggle in the present and overcome in the future. Break the yoke of hunger and poverty that haunts our continent and people. Let the light of Jesus expose the policies and system that oppress African nations and her descendants. Show us the way to renew, restore, and rebuild broken nations and people. God of grace and God of glory, we hear your Divine voice asking: Who shall we send? Who will go for us? Set us free to declare and decree: “Here I am Lord, send me (Isaiah 6:8)!”

Reflection Questions:

Week 1: How can each one of us get actively involved in shining the light of liberation on the darkness of hunger and poverty?

Week 2: After his baptism, 40 days in the wilderness, and his three temptation battles with the devil, Jesus entered the synagogue and made a life-changing commitment to set the captives free. Today, four hundred years after the first enslaved Africans were mercilessly brought from Africa to America, are you ready to let the Holy Spirit lead you to a commitment to set the captives free?

Week 3: Are you ready to make a commitment to the least, the lost, and the left-out peoples in Africa and the African diaspora?

Week 4: Are you ready to make a commitment to the struggle for Christ-like love, light, life, and liberation?

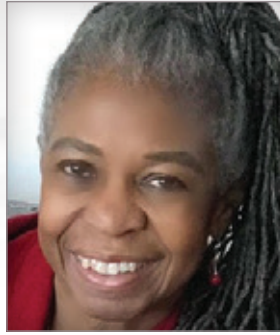
Week 5: Are you ready to be a blessing to those wounded in the battlefield of racism, economic inequality, and injustice?

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