

## 2019 08 25 – Adding Generosity

Luke 12:49-56

As I mentioned during the Community Learning Time there was a project that took place in Saskatoon in 2006 where women in poverty were given cameras and asked to take pictures. It was called the Photovoice Project and it allowed low income women to go behind the lens and to share their lives from their perspective. So I want to begin by sharing some more of their photos. You are going to hear different voices in our congregation reading the words that these women have written to explain each photo.



### **It's Like You're Handicapped**

Elaine Gamble, 2006

This is a picture of my daughter's prosthetic limb. It helps her overcome her limitations. When you're living in poverty it is like you are handicapped because there are so many restrictions, so many limitations.

Someone can go in the store and buy a magazine or a shirt that they need for their kid. They can go ahead and buy it, but you can't, because you have to think about other things. You have to think, 'Well, if I buy that, then I can't pay my phone bill. If I buy that, then I can't get this for my kid.' You're always shortchanging. Sometimes my daughter needs something at school—a book fair or school function. She can't go or participate because I had to buy Pampers or wipes for the baby instead.



### **Vacation?!**

Genevieve Jones\*, 2006

Places like this—McNally Robinson, the public libraries, the Mendel and other art galleries, the University Geology Building—are my usual vacation spots. And closer to home when I'm not feeling well. Out of city, or province, or country are not things I have money for, unless I choose not to eat properly, or make other such sacrifices.

\*Some of the women have chosen pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.



**Fifty Miles Away**  
Butterfly Russell\*, 2006

These are all the things that I can get for nothing at the library—the tapes, the books, the movies. But the bus fare costs me \$4.50 and I am living on a budget of \$6 a day. It feels like the library might as well be fifty miles away when you don't have

enough money for bus fare to get there. I sit on the Get on the Bus Coalition. We're trying to make some changes so that people who are on assistance will be able to get a discounted bus pass for \$15.



**Suicide Prevention**  
Lynn\*, 2006

I live alone and often suffer from depression and yet I am not allowed enough money to feed and care for my cat. She is my 'antidepressant.' If I commit suicide, who will take care of her?



**Being in Poverty Hurts!**  
Genevieve Jones\*, 2006

The pain and stress affect all areas of one's life. It is often acted out in destructive ways including: inability to trust and build support—friends or community programs, etc.—through addictions, child abuse of all kinds, and/or spouse abuse.

\*Some of the women have chosen pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

These are the stories of real women in Saskatchewan. They are stories of women who in 2006 were struggling to survive on low incomes. We know that poverty is not something new. It has existed for centuries and it will continue to exist. It even existed in the days of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah lived over 2500 years ago and his words, his prophecies, were meant for the Israelites, the descendants of Leah and Rachel and Jacob. Isaiah says of the Israelites, "They ask me for laws that are just, they long for God to draw near." And then Isaiah starts a long discussion about fasting: whether it is necessary, how it should be done, whether this ritualized form of penance is really pleasing to God. He asks, "If the Israelites are still oppressing their workers, if they are still quarrelling and fighting, if they are still striking the poor with their fists, is fasting going to make a difference? Is fasting going to make their lives acceptable to God?"

It's kind of like us asking, "How important is it that we sing a particular hymn, or say the Lord's Prayer, or even come to worship on Sunday?" If we go home Sunday afternoon and yell at our families, if we provide low wages for our employees, if we ignore the people in our community who are hurting then how meaningful is the hour that we spend here on Sunday morning? Will saying our prayers, singing our hymns or even listening to the sermon make our lives acceptable to God?

The prophet, Isaiah, answers his own question, saying, "On the contrary! This is the sort of fast that pleases me: Remove the chains of injustice! Undo the ropes

of the yoke! Let those who are oppressed go free, and break every yoke you encounter! Share your bread with those who are hungry, and shelter homeless poor people! Clothe those who are naked and don't hide from the needs of your own flesh and blood. Isaiah is very clear that God's not that interested in ritual or in worship. The God of Love, the Ground of our Being wants us to be generous, to be compassionate and to be just.

So what is it that we are called to do about poverty? Well, the first thing we have to do is understand the issue. So let's take a moment to look at a real-life scenario.

Your name is Tim. You're 16 years old and your family is homeless in Saskatoon. Your mom works at a part-time job while you and your little brother Alex are at school. You usually sleep in your mom's car and sometimes save enough money to get a hotel room. You used to live in a nice house, but after your dad left your family it was hard for your mom to find full-time work. You've been thinking about getting a job and saving money for your family for a deposit on an apartment, as winter is coming and it's getting cold. However, that would mean you'd have to drop out of high school. Your school counsellors tell you you're a good student but they don't understand what is going on. You can't tell them your situation or they will take you away from your mom and possibly separate you from your brother. You could always finish high school later; your family needs you now. What should you do?

[\*There's More to Poverty Than Meets the Eye\*](#), Saskatoon Health Region, 2014, pg. 30.

Break into groups of 2 or 3 and ask yourself this question: If you were Tim what would you do? You have 5 minutes to talk about it... I'll let you know when you've only got 1 minute left. *(leave time for discussion)*

I'm not going to ask what solutions you came up with, if any. But I will ask, "How did you feel as you put yourself in Tim's place? What would you tell others about the situations experienced by people living in poverty?"

People with low incomes are living in very difficult and often impossible circumstances. We are called to generously give of what we have so that they can eat, clothe themselves and find places to live. But we are also called to break the yokes of oppression. We are called to fight for better housing opportunities, for more affordable transportation, for a higher minimum wage, and for social services that allow families to stay together. In order to "break that yoke" we have to move from charity to justice, we have to be willing to share not only our wealth, but also our time and our talent. Isaiah said,

If you give yourself to the hungry  
And satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
Then your light will rise in the darkness,  
And your shadows will become like noon...  
...You will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,  
And Restorer of Ruined Neighbourhoods.