

“Slavery Today” - Luke 4:14-21 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

Today we begin a sermon series on the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church. This weekend we pause and remember the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and what he said and did for the Civil Rights Movement. I particularly remember his “I Have a Dream” speech at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial. And I remember President Lincoln and his passion and dream for freeing the slaves. With that as the backdrop I want to look at the issue of what today is called Human Trafficking or what I call Slavery Today. To help us look at this issue, I begin with a scripture we have used before. Jesus offers his dream speech of a day when Jesus will call all people to him and offer appreciation to some who helped him without even knowing it: *Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’* (Matthew 25:40 CEB) Here Jesus had referenced people who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and imprisoned. When we have helped someone - we have helped Jesus!

Last week I spoke about “believing in Jesus who believes in us,” and in the coming weeks as we talk about the Social Principles of the church we will look at how we might faithfully act on our beliefs. For those of you wishing to take the time to read the principles you can find them here: <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124> Last year I shared the Social Creed based on the principles and as we are asked to do that regularly here it is again:

OUR SOCIAL CREED

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God’s gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God’s handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress. We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God’s Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

This morning's scripture reading of Jesus' first sermon helps us understand what Jesus believed of his own mission here on earth as he reads it to the people in the synagogue from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he proclaims: *the year of the Lord's favor*. (Luke 4:19) Here at the beginning of this new year, I wonder if this might be a year of the Lord's favor, and what we might do to make it so. In a couple weeks we will say more about this – Preview of coming attractions!

Since 1908 the United Methodist Church has had a set of Social Principles to guide the church in our ministry in the world. Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery and is the second largest criminal industry in the world after drug trade. Estimated numbers of people caught up in human trafficking vary wildly with global numbers ranging as high of 50 million. Reports indicate that more people are victims of labor in N. Korea, China, areas in the Middle East and Africa in mining, fishing, and manufacturing. Women and children represent 80 percent of those affected by this complex web of bondage that robs them of their youth and dignity. Human trafficking is a crime fueled by global poverty, inadequate education and opportunity, ethnic discrimination and societal inequity between men and women and by the demand for cheap labor.

In 2011, Justin Dillon a modern-day abolitionist and founder of *Slavery Footprint* launched a website <http://slaveryfootprint.org> that asked a single haunting question: "How Many Slaves Work For You?" Based on a simple online tool to analyze what you own and then by factoring in where components come from, a "number" can be calculated. My score was 34 a few years ago – it has now grown to 40. They have a design of a chain on their website linking us as consumers back through the brand name companies to the manufacturer/suppliers and down to the raw materials and the slaves that mined it or worked on it in a sweat shop. We may feel overwhelmed with the enormity of the world's problems.

Do you know the old story of the starfish on the beach? I have heard slight variations of it, but basically: A child was observed bending over picking them up one by one and throwing them into the sea. Seeing the futility of it all when the beach was covered with thousands of them, the observer asks, "What difference does all your effort make?" The child once again picks up a starfish and remarks, "It makes a difference to this one!" And throws it back into the sea. You may not change the world, but you can make a world of difference to someone! And by so doing we may begin to see 2025 as "The Year of the Lord's Favor"! Alleluia and Amen.

Give Us Peace, O Lord

Jeffrey B. Childs 1/7/2025

Give us peace, O Lord.
Give us peace, O Lord.
Give us peace, O Lord, today.
The world needs your peace,
To make wars cease.
Give us peace, O Lord, today.