

Session 2: "Love thy neighbour": poverty and inequality

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Opening prayer:

Creator God, support us to see our neighbours as ourselves, as people of dignity and equal worth. In Jesus' name, Amen

2min

Now reflect on what you've just watched:

The animation shows three different responses by Christians to poverty by Notting Hill Methodist Church, the organisation Power the Fight, and Hodge Hill Church. What are your reflections on these different responses?

5min



Introduction:

This week's session is based around Jesus' commandment to "love thy neighbour". Who is our neighbour? How does this change how we as Christians should respond to people's experiences of poverty? Is it as simple as giving food to a person who is hungry?

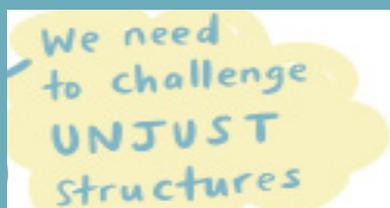
To respond to these questions, this week we'll look at the relationship between poverty and inequality in the UK: poverty does not affect each of us in society equally.

Before getting into this session, how did you progress with the take-away actions from the first session?

3min

Watch this video:

Visit the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/lent-course/> and watch the week 2 video:



5min

Bible passage:

Luke 10:25-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.

Teacher, he said, what must I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, What is written in the law? What do you read there? He answered, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.

And he said to him, You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, And who is my neighbour? Jesus replied,

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? He said, The one who showed him mercy. Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.

5min

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Guided reflection:

Read aloud then have quiet time to reflect

The parable of the Good Samaritan is well-known. It is easy to leave Jesus' answer to the question of "who is my neighbour?" as the neighbour is the person who helped the person in need. However, one of our Life on the Breadline participants questioned this:

"I think there's still a prevalence of an attitude that is about rescuing people and fixing people that exists when they think about poverty. So what they think about is - it's like the Good Samaritan story - here's the person lying at the side of the road and I am the rescuer that has come to rescue them from their dire situation which I think is a historical thing that the Church has often adopted that attitude... I think what there isn't an understanding about is how disempowering poverty is and how poverty removes your innate sense of self-worth and your capacity, and your sense of capacity." (Tim, Hodge Hill, 2020)

Whilst Jesus makes it clear that we should love our neighbour and help anyone in need, **how we help** is also important. If our response is to "rescue" people or to "do to" people, rather than trying to change the causes of poverty then this can be disempowering and add to the inequality that a person is already experiencing. At Church Action on Poverty, (another of our case studies) this means an approach that builds dignity, agency, and addresses power.

Despite claims by senior UK politicians that "We're all in this together", austerity has not affected people in the UK equally. For example austerity has affected the poorest in society more than the richest; women more than men; people of ethnic and racial minorities more than others; children and single parents more than others; and disabled people more than people who are not disabled. In the same way, poverty is experienced unequally: the UK is one of the richest countries in the world, and yet more than 15 million people are living in poverty in the UK.

If we are truly to love our neighbour, then inequality itself needs to be addressed.

10min

Questions for discussion:

1. Why might it be a problem to be "a rescuer" to someone experiencing poverty?
2. Do you think there is inequality in your local community?
3. How can we sensitively help people experiencing poverty and avoid creating a divide of helper/giver and receiver?

15min

Take-away actions:

Visit the Church Action on Poverty website <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/> to engage with their 40 actions during Lent. Church Action on Poverty has been the Life on the Breadline research project partner, and they are celebrating their 40th anniversary in 2022.

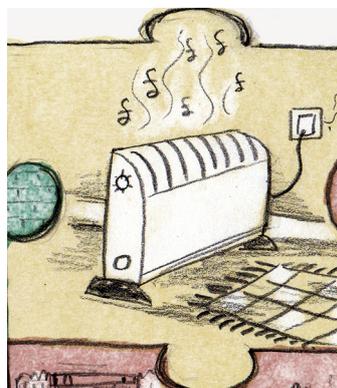
Now add your reflections and actions to a time of prayer before the closing prayer.

10min

Closing prayer:

Holy Spirit, help us to love our neighbour and show mercy in our work against poverty and inequality. In Jesus' name, Amen

5min



What did you think?

We'd love to hear your feedback on a short form - scan the QR code:



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