



## NEW JERSEY ADVOCACY NETWORK TO END HOMELESSNESS

### Lectionary Guide - Fourth Sunday in Advent Homelessness Memorial Sabbath

Advent is a time of deep longing and waiting. It is a season in which we as individuals and as a community, can dwell on hope in a broken world. All children of God have deep hopes, especially those who on this day are without a safe, decent place to live.

Every December the shortest day/longest night of the year is remembered as Homeless Memorial Day. In 2009 this falls on December 21. For Christians this closely follows the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent. The longest night is symbolic of the struggle of the chronically homeless, many of whom live out their lives on the cold streets or in dangerous abandoned building or Tent Cities. Tragically, some of our brothers and sister die on the street each year for lack of a home.

On this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, we turn our attention to the lectionary texts and how they related to our poorest and most vulnerable neighbors.

#### **Micah**

#### Textual Notes:

The prophet speaks to Bethlehem, a place and people labeled insignificant to the rest of the world. Anyone who comes from such a people is not expected to amount to much. Yet from this place, God will bring forth One who will rule in peace, and whose kingdom is marked by a place where all people live securely.

In this text we see again the reoccurring theme that is woven throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. The youngest, the least, the most insignificant ones by the world's standards are used and exalted by God. David, the least of his brothers, was summoned from the fields outside of Bethlehem and anointed king. A descendant of David will bring about God's long-awaited promise, not just for Israel but for the all world. And all this from a little backwater location where no one expects God to work in such marvelous ways!

On this Homeless Persons Memorial Sunday we see that like Bethlehem, those who live on the streets are seen as people from whom not much good can come. We remember the least of our brothers and sisters by the world's standards as well, especially those who lost their lives on the street during this past year. We remember that God is always working, always transforming this world through the lowest and least of places and people.

#### Questions:

What does it mean to you to live securely?

Where in our community are their insecure places to live?

How can this community of faith help to change those insecure places to ones that mirror the kingdom of God?

## **Luke**

### Textual notes:

Mary's *Magnificat* highlights the situation of the powerless and not the powerful. The hymn of this woman on the fringe of society is an invitation to all people to recognize that the Good News of Jesus Christ is that God stands on the side of the socially ostracized and oppressed. Those who lack recognition, appreciation and voice in the larger society and religious world are assured that God is with them first and foremost because God is Savior. Isolation from human institutions is not separation from God's mercy and compassion. Those who are forgotten by society are not forgotten to God.

Mary's song also reminds us that God hears the cries of oppressed people. The lowly and powerless in the world, such as those who are homeless, may be more likely to be open to hearing, seeing and experiencing God's work in the world. The church today is called to nothing less than to view the world in terms of that potential of God's ordering of worth and value, not in terms of our own ordering of worth and value. Where the world sees beggars and drifters, God calls us to see brothers and sisters.

On this Homeless Persons Memorial Sunday, we are only days away from Christmas, from celebrating and welcoming the Incarnate One into our messy world. Just as Elizabeth and the child in her womb welcomed Mary and her Christ-child into their home, the church prepares to welcome Emmanuel into our midst. At the same time, there are so many in our communities who are without homes, without a welcome into a safe place, without a celebration of their being in the world. On Christmas Eve we will hear the story of how the Christ child had no place to lay his newborn head but in a place not meant for human habitation.

### Questions:

What is your prayer and the prayer of your own faith community for those who are stigmatized?

How can you and your community of faith reach out to those in your community who face socially imposed stigmas associated with homelessness?

How can we join God in valuing all persons and lifting up the lowly in our brothers and sisters who are homeless?