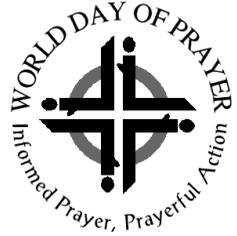


Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017

## WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

‘Am I being unfair to you?’

## BIBLE STUDIES



### BIBLE STUDY 1 - MATTHEW 20:1-16

**The social context of the Bible story** is an agricultural based economy. If there is ample rain plants grow, thrive and bear fruit. Improper care, including pests and insects, bad weather or accidents, natural or human, will expose crops and lessen produce, possibly wipe it out totally. Palestine is stony and hilly. Preparing the ground and tending the plants is exhausting work. Weather conditions (hot, humid, or cold) will add to the discomfort of the labourers. (Matt 20:12)

Work is seasonal and intense. Harvesting crops, such as grapes, has a strict timeline in order to reap the fruits in prime condition. When harvest comes, the master of the vineyard starts to recruit people. When there is a good harvest, more labourers are needed. People wait in hope that they will get work and earn enough to feed their family. The labourers are hired hands for a certain period of time.

**Similarity with the Philippine context:** In Negros Occidental, where the economy is driven by the production of sugar, there are workers who reside in the plantations. They are given a modest place for shelter with their families. During the off season, they hoe, weed and do other work to tend the crops. So they are the first ones to be hired during harvest time. One very outstanding feature of the hiring is the inclusion of women and children. Sometimes the baby is also brought to the field, with a minimum of shade and some prepared food.

For the more intense job of harvesting however, where there is a time limit for a certain produce like sugarcane or rice, the workers are recruited by agents or contractors. They bring a large number of men from another place to do the harvesting. The labourers have to leave their families for a number of months, so they usually ask for a portion of the wage in advance to take care of basic family needs. These monies are considered loans with interest. One can imagine that after harvest season, the interest will eat up

their wages with very little to bring home to their families. One can also infer that the wages are far below the standard for a decent life. It can only feed one or two persons at most. The income of a typical labourer is not enough for the average Filipino family of six. The economic injustice is evident - the landowner has a big house and enough food on the table, while the families of the labourers live below the poverty line.

### **Agricultural economy in both contexts:**

1. High unemployment, both urban and rural - at the time of the writing, 12 million Filipinos were unemployed. Most in the agricultural sector.
2. Seasonal work - in an agricultural economy there is work during planting and harvest time. In an industrial economy there is work when there is an increase in demand for goods and services.
3. Contractual work - daily, *pakyaw*, or working on a project for a specific amount of time for an agreed amount, usually 5 months for every contract to avoid hiring the person permanently.
4. No work, no pay, no weekend work, so no wages either. No paid time off, holidays, sick pay, or absences, and no access to health benefits.
5. In an agricultural economy, one hectare of rice land can only produce 24,000 pesos annually. Water is essential for rice fields. The irrigation system, rain at harvest, and wells are essential to a good production.

*It is harvest time.*

Harvest time is a time of plenty; a time to celebrate. That is why so many churches celebrate thanksgiving and bring to the altar the first fruits of the field as an offering.

Work is not just a means to buy the basic needs for the family, but also a contribution to a just economy. Labour dignifies the person and the community, and should be a source of social equality and a decent life where basic rights are accessible. However, in the Bible story, Jesus used the landowner's generosity of paying the workers equally, though they laboured different hours, as a gesture to understand what the kingdom of heaven is like. Why are the ones who spent most of the day not working, paid the same amount as the ones who worked all day? What was the need of Matthews' community to have Jesus telling a story such as this? What does it say to us today? What does the kingdom of heaven look like today?

### **Exercise for group conversation:**

Swap shop:

Divide into small groups to facilitate conversation.

Discuss how churches, and especially women, can plant and nurture the seeds of economic justice, which include food, education, and better living conditions for all.

Present a new idea of planting and nurturing economic justice. Each idea should be written on a flash card.

Ask some of the participants to form a panel of “experts” to rate the ideas from 1-10. The idea with the highest grade is chosen and discussed further for implementation.

Informed prayer and prayerful action.

Use the ideas discussed to motivate the local WDP community and churches to support and engage in the continuing struggle for justice for all of God’s creation.

### **BIBLE STUDY 2 - NUMBERS 27:1-11**

This is the story of a family during the time of the Exodus. On the journey to Israel Zelophehad died, leaving his five daughters alone. They became as good as non-existent, as no law provided for women to inherit. The sisters were no longer part of the tribe of Manasseh.

They faced physical and social exclusion. They had no home, no family, and no means to support themselves. Poverty meant hunger and homelessness. Furthermore, this situation made them possible victims from opportunists because they were women. The need to find a solution was real and urgent. They needed to claim their rightful place in the community, and sustain themselves without being a burden to anyone else.

*They decided to approach the tent of Moses to raise two legal issues:* (Numbers 27:4a)

To reinstate their father and themselves back into the tribe Manasseh.

Not be left without their father’s possession.

*The daughters’ demand from Moses:* (Numbers 27:4b)

Give us a possession among our father’s brothers so that we can provide for ourselves. They needed to inherit as women.

Reinstate the name of our father in the tribes of Israel.

*Moses’ response:* (Numbers 27:5-7)

Moses took the case to the Lord and the Lord confirmed the rightness of the demand. The answer therefore was:

“Give them a possession among their uncles and cause the inheritance of their father to pass onto them.”

This would be extended to others in similar situations, (Numbers 27:8) so they helped change the law for all of Israel.

All over the world women live on the periphery of society. In this case, five brave women faced the legal issues and presented the problem to the elders. This action gives us an example of taking hold of our own lives so that the future looks brighter, not only for the present but for generations to come. It is refreshing to know that a group of women can change the laws for the benefit of women in the community.

**Exercise for group conversation:**

Swapping ideas:

Use this exercise to motivate the group to find an advocacy action to support women in the community as an expression of faith, witness, and service.

On a piece of paper ask the participants to share their ideas on how women might be able to equip themselves and others to fight for their rights.

Discuss each idea; consider how WDP and church women's organisations can be helpful.

Get the group to agree on one advocacy idea which they might take on.

Draw up a practical action plan, with a time frame, to engage in WDP's motto: informed prayer and prayerful action.

Everywhere in the world women are left excluded, in the home, at work, even at church: but women, when given their rightful place, will double their capabilities. It makes a more productive and happier home, a more responsive church, an active women's group, and a progressive community.

The question that begs to be answered everywhere is: Am I being unfair to you? Is the family fair to its mothers and daughters? Is the church being fair to her women members? Are women sitting as decision makers in churches? More importantly, do women know that they have such rights? How do women's rights impact economic justice?

Is the community fair to women? We do not need to prove that women can be influencers and decision makers. All around us women have proved to the world that they are leaders in their own right. It is time that women claim their rightful place as provided for by the Creator.

**Other materials are available** – for details see the Resource Book or go to the website at [www.wdpScotland.org.uk](http://www.wdpScotland.org.uk)

**For other enquiries, contact:-**

Mrs Marjorie Paton: Muldoanich, Stirling Street, Blackford. PH4 1QG.

Tel: 07780 007022

Email: [marjoriepaton.wdp@btinternet.com](mailto:marjoriepaton.wdp@btinternet.com)

World Day of Prayer Scottish Committee – SC 020446