

Let me first of all say that preaching the week after Peter Breeze preached last week here has me feeling a little intimidated. If you were not here last week you missed a real blessing to our congregation. Rev. Peter Breeze from Liberia in Africa preached here.

Rev. Breeze preached here after visiting our congregation because he had heard that our congregation had restored a historic African-American cemetery on the church grounds. He was able to come here from Africa and identify descendants of people who live in his community. Many slaves after they were released from human bondage were able to move to Africa where they established the country of Liberia. A name which means liberation.

Many slaves that were held here in York County were ones able to move to Liberia so many Liberians trace their roots to this area and to that cemetery over there in those woods. Rev. Breeze was also able to connect with our computer repair ministry here and we will now be sending computers to the school in Liberia which his church operates. A school which does not have any computers. In fact, he will have two laptops in his possession on his return home thanks to the ministry of this church.

In addition, some of you approached me about sending soccer balls and others about Bibles. He is also requesting choir robes. So far, we have raised almost enough to send at least two 55 gallon barrels with computers and other items to Liberia. A new bridge between this community and Duala, Liberia has begun. And I bet a couple of weeks ago many of us had never even heard of Liberia or thought Liberia and Libya were the same place. Never underestimate what God can do.

Rev. Breeze met with the Senior Highs and a few adults in our Christian Education time last week and then he came to our home for lunch. I thought about one particular part of my continued conversation with Rev. Breeze that I am drawn to because of the first part of this morning's Scripture lesson.

We have been reading through the letter from James over the last few weeks before taking a break last week for Rev. Breeze to bring the message. We have learned that James is believed to be the brother of Jesus and a leader in the early church. He writes this letter to a group of churches about how they should behave as Christians. Today's Scripture is one which I find very challenging and convicting. I am going to read the first 6 verses of chapter 5 and next week I am going to read the conclusion to this letter.

Read James 5:1-6

One of the interesting things that Rev. Breeze shared with us who gathered with him after worship was the relationship in Liberia between the people who came from the US and those that were already present in Africa. The freed African-American slaves who went to Liberia were called Americoliberians and the ones who were natives were called Congolese.

I don't need to remind people that the African-American slaves were held in bondage and suffered terribly at the hands of others. Some of these slaveholders were members of my own family. Some of my McGregor ancestors held other human beings in bondage.

You would think, that if you were held in bondage, you would learn how awful that is and how wrong that is. You would think that folks held in bondage would never treat others as less than them. But Rev. Breeze was telling us that an interesting thing happened when these former slaves went to Liberia. The oppressed became the oppressors.

The freed African-Americans in Liberia, called Americoliberians, treated the native Africans whom they called Congolese, as less than them. The former slaves built the nice homes and took the nice paying positions in the country. The native Africans were considered inferior by the returning slaves and were shut out of the nice paying jobs.

I found that interesting in light of this week's lesson. A scripture where James condemns the rich people for the way they were treating the poor. A scripture which condemns the low wages paid by the homeowners and landowners. A scripture which says that the cries of the lower class claiming injustice have been heard by God.

As I was working on this sermon, I saw an article from Sarasota, Florida about Rev. Clay Thomas being escorted out of a Publix Supermarket. He was escorted out because he had been seen by management in a peaceful protest against the supermarket. He, and many others, were protesting the supermarket chain for refusing to join the Fair Food Program.

The Fair Food Program seeks to provide fair wages to tomato pickers in Florida. The Fair Food Program is supported by many companies including McDonalds, Whole Foods, Trader Joes, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, Subway, Burger King, and Chipotle. Our denomination, the PCUSA, has been very active in trying to help these tomato pickers get a fairer wage.

Many Christians would say that we Christians have no business being involved in trying to help laborers get fair wages. Many Christians, including some of us who may be in worship today, would say that caring about what people get paid for their work is none of our business. Many Christians would say that our concern should only be focused on our individual salvation and helping others come to a saving relationship with Christ.

But it is clear that the writer James would say something quite different. James says very clearly that the cries of the underemployed and the under paid are heard by God. James says very clearly that God cares about what people are paid for the work that they do.

Today we are taking up the peacemaking offering. As Kaaren shared last week, part of this offering goes to address issues related to human trafficking. As Presbyterian Christians, we care about the plight of the worker and the ones forced into human trafficking. We have a responsibility, according to James, to not just buy products with a blind eye.

We are to find out how the people are treated and how they are paid that make our shoes, harvest our food, and serve us a meal. Being a Christian, according to James, means correcting the wrongs and making sure that people are treated fairly and that the ones with money do not take advantage of the ones who do not have money and power and influence.

And why do we believe this? Because James says that God has heard the cries of the laborer. And James says if we treat people unfairly in our society, we have condemned and murdered the righteous one.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are supposed to care about wages paid the Chinese worker putting together our iPhone, the Hispanic tomato picker in Florida, the salary of the waiter in South Park, the salary of the person making our pizza in our favorite restaurant, and the salary of the janitor at a high school in York County. We are not to turn a blind eye and say that it does not matter. Followers of Jesus Christ are told that it does matter. It does matter what people are paid for the work they do because James says that God hears the cry of the laborer.

And if we want to be involved in what God is doing, then we will invest in buying products where people are paid fairly and demanding that workers should be paid fairly if they are not. If we work for companies that are treating workers unfairly, then we have a responsibility to change the practices of our company. Changing company policy is not easy to do. But working to change company policy so that workers are treated fairly is what we are called by God to do, according to James.

As we join together in Holy Communion today with people around the world, I invite you to join in solidarity for all, rich and poor.

Those that are in corporate boardrooms making decisions and those in hot fields in Florida.

Together, we worship the one God who cares for us all and who desires for all to be treated fairly.

What are you doing to correct the injustice in our world? AMEN.

-Chorba, George, "Clergy Protest Publix Action," Herald Tribune of Sarasota, <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20120927/COLUMNIST/309279996/2080/OPINION?p=1&tc=ar>

-Given: Oct. 7, 2012 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)