

Session 5: Housing (in)justice

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Opening prayer:

Creator God, as when Mary gave birth to her son, be with those who have no safe place of their own. In Jesus' name, Amen

2min

Now reflect on what you've just watched:

How does this track make you feel? What does it suggest about the link between poverty, politics and poor housing? What challenges does it pose for Christian social action?

5min



Introduction:

When we think about poverty the image of a foodbank or a soup kitchen often comes to mind. However, Life on the Breadline reminds us that poverty is multidimensional – It touches every part of our lives.

In this week's session we think about the link between poverty, housing and inequality. We invite you to reflect on the story of the birth of Jesus into poverty and homelessness and the call to solidarity with the hungry, the homeless and the naked in Matthew 25. How might a reflection on the link between poverty and the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 help us to think afresh about housing justice?

3min

Watch this video:

Visit the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/lent-course/> and watch the week 5 video:



5min

Bible passage:

Luke 2:1-20 - The Birth of Jesus

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Matthew 25:31-36

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say,

'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

5min

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Guided reflection:

Read aloud then have quiet time to reflect

On the night of 14th June 2017 Grenfell Tower in North Kensington was engulfed in flames, leaving 72 people dead and shattering the lives of thousands of others in the local community. The poet Ben Okri said, "If you want to see how the poor die today come to Grenfell Tower". The Grenfell tragedy challenges us not to reduce Christian social action to foodbanks, breakfast clubs or campaigns for a living wage. Martin Luther King compared poverty to an octopus whose tentacles reach into every corner of our lives. Within Life on the Breadline we use the image of a jigsaw to illustrate the interconnectedness of low wages, debt, food poverty, fuel poverty, insecure employment and poor quality housing. Each piece of the jigsaw presents us with an image of one form of social exclusion but it's only when we see the whole picture that we appreciate the ways in which these different problems feed into one another to create the perfect storm of structural poverty.

Grenfell Tower sits in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea – home to some of the wealthiest people in the UK and one of the most unequal places in Britain. The Grenfell tragedy illustrates the structural injustice Churches committed themselves to challenge in the Marks of Mission. The fire was possible because it was considered acceptable to house people living in poverty in poor quality, unsafe accommodation. The tragedy fragmented an entire community, which is still grappling with the collective trauma unleashed by the tragedy.

Christian action on poverty across the UK needs to include a clear commitment to housing justice. This is a Gospel imperative because, as this week's Bible readings remind us, Jesus was born into the precariousness of temporary accommodation – a borrowed room. The birth of Jesus reminds us that God stands in solidarity with all who are denied a safe and decent home to live in. As Matthew 25 reminds us the Grenfell tragedy and the birth of Jesus in a Bethlehem stable challenge Christians everywhere not just to feed the hungry but to welcome the stranger and clothe the naked – to stand with all who are denied housing justice.

10min

Questions for discussion:

1. How can the Church respond to the trauma and community fragmentation caused by/ examples of structural injustice like the Grenfell Tower fire?
2. What implications do poor housing and housing injustice have for the ways in which we think about Christian mission?
3. What challenges do this week's two Bible readings pose for local churches who want to understand and respond to housing injustice?

15min

Take-away actions:

1. Include prayers in worship for all those affected by the Grenfell Tower fire, people who live in poor quality housing or have recently been made homeless.
2. Meet with people from local churches, faith groups and community organisations to draw up a list of actions needed in your community to improve social housing and address homelessness.
3. Write a letter to your MP asking them to meet with you to tell you how they are going to improve social housing, especially in poor neighbourhoods.

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

10min

Closing prayer:

Holy Spirit, lead us into solidarity with those who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation. 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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