

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

PRAYERS

for a

PRIVILEGED

PEOPLE

PRAYERS FOR A PRIVILEGED PEOPLE

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The Collect from *The Book of Common Prayer*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

"This City . . . of God," "Prayer of Illumination," and "Blown by God toward Newness" were given at Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago.

Page 35: "All Good Gifts," Rev. Matthias Claudius, 1782.

Page 90: "No man works like him," from "Ride On, King Jesus," a traditional spiritual.

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Prayer of Illumination

Truth-telling, wind-blowing, life-giving spirit—
we present ourselves now
for our instruction and guidance;
breathe your truth among us,
breathe your truth of deep Friday loss,
your truth of awesome Sunday joy.

Breathe your story of death and life
that our story may be submitted to your will for life.
We pray in the name of Jesus risen to new life—
and him crucified.



A Prayer of Protest

Since our mothers and fathers cried out,
since you heard their cries and noticed,
since we left the brick production of Egypt,
since you foiled the production schedules of Pharaoh,
 we have known your name,
 we have sensed your passion,
 we have treasured your vision of justice.

And now we turn to you again,
 whose precious name we know.
We turn to you because there are
 still impossible production schedules,
 still exploitative systems,
 still cries of pain at injustice,
 still cheap labor that yields misery.

We turn to you in impatience and exasperation,
 wondering, "How long?" before you answer
 our pleading question,
hear our petition,
 since you are not a labor boss and do not set wages.

We bid you, stir up those who can change things;
do your stirring in the jaded halls of government;
do your stirring in the cynical offices of the corporations;
do your stirring amid the voting public too anxious to care;
do your stirring in the church that thinks too much about
 purity and not enough about wages.

Move, as you moved in ancient Egyptian days.
Move the waters and the flocks and the herds

toward new statutes and regulations,
new equity and good health care,
new dignity that cannot be given on the cheap.

We have known now long since,
that you reject *cheap grace*;
even as we now know that you reject *cheap labor*.

You, God of justice and dignity and equity,
keep the promises you bodied in Jesus,
that the poor may be first-class members of society,
that the needy may have good care and respect,
that the poor earth may rejoice in well-being,
that we may all come to Sabbath rest together,
the owner and the worker,
the leisure class and the labor class,
all at peace in dignity and justice,
not on the cheap, but good measure,
pressed down,
running over . . . forgiven.



Waves of Well-Being Subverted

In your Holy Presence,
we confess that something strange and ominous
is happening among us,
so strange that we cannot understand,
so ominous that we cannot control.

We are like Dazzling David and Smooth Solomon
who presided over social transformations
that soon were out of hand.

We are like them as we watch wave after wave
of new power and new money,
while our infrastructure disintegrates,
and the poor grow more desperate
amid our surpluses.

We are like them as we participate in social differentiation
of class and mass—
we the educated, the privileged, the entitled,
and we scarcely know or notice
the lesser ones who remain unnamed
and nearly invisible.

We are like them as we sort out tasks and assignments;
we sit in our air conditioning and move paper
but sweat only a little—
except at leisure.

And they sweat and work and sometimes seethe,
fearing the paper we move that disenfranchises them.

We are like Dazzling David and Smooth Solomon
on the way in this great economy and this great church.

We are like them, grateful, but unnoticing. Sometimes we wonder
if we will learn anything soon enough.

Good, hard, demanding, generous God:
we do not ask to be dazzled;
we do not ask to be made smooth in success.
We ask rather for courage to be faithful,
to submit our privilege and entitlement to you,
before it is too late.

It is your holiness that subverts our best convictions,
and so we submit to your haunting as best we can,
haunted as was Jesus by purposes beyond his own.



Giver of All Good Gifts

On reading 1 & 2 Kings

You are the God who feeds and nourishes.
You are the God who assures that we have more than enough,
and we do not doubt that
you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Even in such an assurance, however,
we scramble for more food.
After we have filled all our baskets
with manna,
we seek a surplus—
enough education to plan ahead,
enough power to protect our supply,
enough oil to assure that protection.

And in the midst of that
comes your word,
that we share bread and feed the hungry,
even to the least and so to you.
We mostly keep our bread for ourselves,
our neighbors,
and our friends.

It does not occur to us often,
to feed our enemies,
to share your bounty with
those who threaten us.

We do not often remember to break vicious cycles
of hostility
by free bread,
by free water,
by free wine,
by free milk.

Until we remember that you are the giver of all good gifts,
ours to enjoy,
ours to share.

Stir us by your spirit beyond fearful accumulation
toward outrageous generosity,
that giving bread to others
makes for peace,
that giving drink to others
makes for justice,
that giving and sharing opens the world
and assures abundance for all.

We pray this even as we ponder the gift of your Son
whom we ingest as bread and wine,
and tasting, find ourselves
forgiven and renewed.
Feed us till we want no more!



Epiphany

The wise ones hurried from the East.
They are the wise of the world.
They are the ones wise in science,
for they read the “intelligent design” of the stars.
They are the wise ones of the economy,
for they come with gold.
They are the wise ones of politics,
for they sought a king.
They are our delegates, as we stand
carrying all the learning of the academy,
of the market,
of the laboratory,
of the halls of power.

They came, tenaciously and eagerly and regally.
They came and bowed down before your foolishness.
They sensed the contradiction
between his vulnerability and their sagacity,
between his innocence and their calculation,
between his exposure and their many concealing
robes of power.

They worshiped him!
They recognized that he called into question
all that they treasured,
so they yielded their best to him,
their preciousness,
their secret potions,
their rich perfumes.

And we stand alongside them with
our wealth,
our control,
our smarts,
our sophistication,
our affluence.

Give us freedom like theirs
to yield,
to worship,
to adore,
to have our lives contradicted.

Give us grace like theirs
to embrace the foolishness of the child,
that the first will be last and the last first,
that the humble will be exalted and the exalted humbled,
that we may lose the world and gain our lives.

Give us the imagination like theirs
to go home by another route
on the path where foolishness is wisdom
and weakness is strength
and poverty is wealth.

Make our new foolishness specific
that the world might become—
through us—new.



A Habitat of Newness and Goodness

Through this day we have named your name in gladness,
we have pondered the world you have
called “good,”
we have relished your gift and your task,
and we have marveled in amazement,
yet one more time,
at the wonder of this Easter Jesus,
who has died and is alive among us.

Now we are homeward;
And when we arrive there,
it will be as it was this morning,
with anxiety and demand and conflict
and inconvenience.
Except that all things will be—
yet again—made new.
Make new by your spirit;
make new the church where we live;
make new the public reality of justice among us;
make new the practice of compassion in our
neighborhood;
make new the surge of peace in our violent
world;
make new the policies of our government
and the workings of the church.

Make new, and we will be in Easter joy
unafraid and unwearied,
your glad people,
carrying among us the marks of the death
and the new life of Jesus in whose name we pray.



“You” beyond Our “Wearry Selves”

You God, Lord and Sovereign,
you God, lover and partner.

You are God of all our possibilities.

You preside over all our comings and goings,
all our wealth and all our poverty,
all our sickness and all our health,
all our despair and all our hope,
all our living and all our dying.
And we are grateful.

You are God of all of our impossibilities.

You have presided over the emancipations
and healings of our mothers and fathers;
you have presided over the wondrous transformations in our
own lives.
you have and will preside over those parts of our lives that
we imagine to be closed.
And we are grateful.

So be your true self, enacting the things impossible for us,
that we might yet be whole among the blind who see and
the dead who are raised;
that we may yet witness your will for peace,
your vision for justice,
your vetoing all our killing fields.

At the outset of this day,
we place our lives in your strong hands.
Before the end of this day,
do newness among us in the very places where
we are tired in fear,
we are exhausted in guilt,
we are spent in anxiety.

Make all things new, we pray in the new-making name of Jesus.

