

Iwaasa Lectures on Urban Theology

“Am I my Sister’s or Brother’s Keeper?

Finding Our Roots in the Ancient Scriptures”

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This is a lecture series which is Christian. With that in mind, I want us to take a journey back several thousands of years to a time which is foreign to us but upon which our society is built. I want to start that journey with the very first chapters of the bible. Questions such as what is home? What does loss of home mean? are immediately addressed in the first few chapters. Second, I want to take a brief look at who are the poor in ancient Israel. Students who are here tonight from Ambrose University College will have to forgive me as I tested some of these ideas on them last week. As we look at the question of who is poor, I will treat the material not as theological but as sociological. That, as you all know, will give us different answers than what you might hear from a pulpit on Sunday. Third, we will move forward by looking at the Israelite concept of household. This material fascinates me. Sometime I want to do a full rethink of this material and when I do, I will look not only at what we will address tonight, but also at the King David material which uses the term house to mean dynasty. Fourth, I want to take us to the time of Jesus where I will make a few comments that tie up, at least for me, some of the concepts which we find in the First Testament. And unless Dr. Shantz is giving me the signal to sit down, I want to bring all of that to our world to examine its relevance for how we might address poverty and homelessness today.

That might seem a bit ambitious but I think we can do it.

Now a word about tomorrow's lecture. Tomorrow will be quite different as I intend to look more closely at how we shelter people today. While the talks are stand alone, all of us are influenced by what we have experience, examined and integrated into our person world view. What I say tomorrow then is built on the foundation of some of my thinking which I will share tonight.

As I said earlier, my study of the ancient texts has significantly shaped how I view the world and the issue of poverty today. For today, we will journey back 2500 years to look at a world that often seems very distant, culturally different, irrelevant but a world which on the basic human level is not that different from ours. It too is a world with much poverty and people who are called "poor."

Genesis 3:23 reads, "So the Lord God banished Adam out of the Garden of Eden." Can you believe it?! The very first man in the biblical text becomes homeless. If you know the story, you know that eating from the fruit of the tree of good and evil causes him to lose his Shangri-La. Due to his unacceptable actions, he loses his place. This story is so important because it resonates with us. We all need place. Most of us here tonight have it. We know where the bed is that we will sleep in after we leave here. We know it is the same bed that we will sleep in the night after and the night after that. We have *place*. Unlike this Adam, or teenagers who are living with chaos and get kicked out of their parent's home, we have the security of place. And place is more than physical space. As in the Adam story, it is also about *relationship*. The relationship between Adam and God is broken so Adam loses place. The relationship between the teenager and parent is broken so the teen loses place. Enough of that depressing stuff!

To set the context of where we need to go next, I want to look at the time before 1000BC. This is before King David and is called the pre-monarchic area. I want to look at the legal texts so you will want to pull out the pew bible that should be in front of you. We will look at three words used in the legal texts which are translated into English by our word poor.

Second, I want us to examine the legal position of widows, orphans and aliens. They are not directly called poor, but they are often oppressed and are certainly on the margins of ancient Israelite society. This should give us a good sense of a pre-BC legal position concerning the poor.

Now, let's decide on a definition of poor. I would define it as "a person who is stripped of all human dignity, oppressed by the social system of which (s)he is a member, forced by present conditions to exist with fewer resources than are generally considered by society for health and happiness."¹

The United Nation Charter of Rights **Article 25** states:

- ⊙ Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, *housing* and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.²

As we look at the pre 1000 BC era, I want to make a suggestion: It is a bit bold, but it is this: I believe that there were in fact very few if any poor in pre-monarchic Israel. Now if you agree with my conclusion, we will need to answer the question of why this is true. That will occupy the second half of our time tonight. So here we go!

Finding the Poor in the Law Codes

There are three main Hebrew words which we find in the law codes: ani, dal, ebyon. Rash is also a word for poor, but it never appears in a law code.

These three words occur over 200 times in the OT but only 20 times in the law codes. Let's see how they are used:

¹ A.M.C. Waterman, ed. *Poverty in Canada: A Christian Perspective*. Toronto 1978

² See, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a25>

My position about these texts is similar to the scholar Brevard Childs³ who believes that while the texts are presented as a unity, the Pentateuch has a long and important transmission history and the material was finally collected and edited into its present form during the Babylonian exile. These texts contain much older material extending back to the time of Moses. This material from the legal codes is in force from the time of the conquest of Canaan right down to the emergence of the monarchy, or the period we call the Period of the Judges. The parameters of the period are from 1250-1000 BC. This is the period of the development of the nation of Israel, the period of the tribal coalition. We are talking about the period immediately before this when the laws were developed.

Here is a minor word of caution. I am going to work with the material as though it came from the pre-monarchic area. However, we must be conscious of the fact that the work is edited much later.

Another point of note: The Book of Exodus makes it quite clear that the descendants of Jacob who entered Egypt during the great famine are an oppressed people. Following their exodus, we find that many of their texts note that they are not to oppress people. They definitely know what that means. They know full well what it is to have one's dignity stripped away. Not surprisingly, dignity and worth become legislated. And now we turn to the legal codes.

Ani in the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21-23)

This is the word that is most frequently used for the poor and it occurs approximately 74 times in the OT. It is most frequent in the Psalms, Prophets and Wisdom Literature. Surprisingly, it only occurs once in the Book of the Covenant at Exodus 22:25. It reads,

“If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest.”

³ Brevard Childs, [The Book of Exodus](#) [Old Testament Library Series] Philadelphia: 1974

This text suggests that when money is lent to a poor fellow Israelite, one of God's people, the money should be lent interest free. Here, the poor one is not completely destitute but simply is in need of a loan. The fact that it is a loan, albeit interest free, suggests that through some means the borrower will be able to repay the debt. Notice that the person who is poor is given some dignity by being allowed to escape from the usual responsibility of interest payments. In the ANE these could be as high as 33%. Sounds like our modern credit card rates doesn't it?! This text makes it clear that one who is connected to Israel is not to be oppressed by a financial burden and so is allowed to escape what might otherwise lead to financial disaster.

There is a relational dynamic operating in this text which will become important in the second part of tonight's talk. Here we see the notion of *extended family* functioning. Since they are both Israelites they must look after each other. In this instance, the rich is to consider the poor.

Ani in Leviticus 19:10

“Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.”

The social status of the poor is similar to the position of an alien. They are to be allowed to gather the grain along the borders of the fields and to glean the grapes that have fallen as the pickers move through the vines. This suggests that the ani are not farmers and do not work in the fields in the regular harvests as a slave would. The same can be said of the parallel text Leviticus 23:22, “When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the LORD your God.”

Ani in Deuteronomy 24:10-15

“If he is a poor man, you shall not sleep with his pledge” (12)

In this text, the poor one has given his coat as a pledge to the loaner as collateral. Without going into the legal aspects of the pledge, the significant fact is that it is the only coat the poor man owns. If it is returned to him by the loaner, then they both will have a warm garment for the night. The poor person has only one coat. He is materially poor. As I see it, the legislation is not only about being charitable when you are owed something, but it also is designed to give the indebted person dignity. This is quite remarkable! He paid out his coat as a pledge and it is returned to him for the night. He is poor and his brother recognizes his humanity and returns the coat to supply a very basic human need: protection/shelter from the night elements.

Continuing on to verse 14 we read, “You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns.” (14)

Here the poor one is paralleled with the alien. The actual status of the person is that of a hired labourer (Shakir) who is both poor and needy. Once again, this legislation is most charitable to the poor one as he is to receive his wages daily before sunset. In true Deuteronomic style an injunction is given that the employer will be held accountable if he does not see to the needs of his hired labourers.

These passages present a picture of the ani who is not to be oppressed or abused but rather is to be viewed with a humanitarian concern. The rich are not to oppress the poor. To do so will bring judgement: to do so makes the oppressor guilty of sin.

These texts are consistent over the period of about 1000 years. The ani are not completely destitute even though they are extremely poor. They borrow money, make pledges, and gather food from the borders of the fields. And most important, they are Israelites. Because they are poor, the rich do not have the right to oppress them. In fact, it is shown in the passage from Deuteronomy that it is the intention of God to protect the poor from the rich by counting any oppressive act as a sin against them. The ani in the legal codes are poor, and they are to be protected, they are to be provided for with shelter and food and above all else, they are to be granted dignity.

The Ebyon in Exodus 23:10-12

“For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops,¹¹ but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.¹² Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed.”

This text is similar to the food text we just examined except the word is not ani but ebyon. Here, the ebyon is contrasted with the property owner just as before. This passage deals with the Shmittah (seventh year) land release. The legislation states that farmers are not to plow, plant or harvest their fields in the seventh year. Whatever springs up as wild foliage is to be left for the ebyon and what they leave is to be left for the wild animals. It appears that at least in the seventh year poor people are able to eat to sufficiency.

The Ebyon in Deuteronomy 15:1-11

This also deals with Sabbath release. The situation is as follows: people in Israel have been borrowing money and now are indebted. In effect, two classes have emerged and have become sociologically distinct. Borrowing has caused the rich to be richer and the poor have become poorer.

A changing economic situation has forced an unwanted class system on Israel. But notice what happens in the year of release. A person, for whatever reason, has become indebted to an Israelite brother. The law is clear... in the seventh year a creditor is to cancel the loan made with his fellow Israelite. The debt is cleared. The ebyon has no further obligation to his brother.

But is the workable? Under this system the value of things is completely dependent on the duration of time remaining to the next seventh year release and not on monetary value. Here's an example of how it works:

Scenario 1:

- I loan money to a person in the year after a release year, or year one
- He is indebted to me for six years or until the next release year when the debt is cancelled
- For the six intervening years he is completely responsible for the debt and has an obligation to repay it
- There is an assumption that he is a responsible citizen and will strive to repay the debt
- In the year of release the debt is cancelled and he owes me nothing

Scenario 2:

- I loan money to a person in the year before the seventh release year, or year six
- He is indebted to me for only one year and the following year his debt is cancelled
- Deuteronomy 15:7 says that I can't deny him the loan if he is a truly needy individual
- It is my responsibility to loan him the money with no thought of recovering my property
- If I refuse, he will appeal to God and my act of refusal will be counted against me as sin

This sounds crazy to us! So what is behind it? I think it is because of the fact that the Israelite believes that everything is God's property. God has entrusted him with what he has and it is actually owned by God. In the system of release, there is a sociological, and maybe an economic, rebalancing effect. In the release year, things get back to normal and indebtedness is eliminated. It is a bit like our bankruptcy laws in Canada. When debts are cancelled, people can get back on their feet and there is a socio-economic rebalancing. The poor are still poor, but they no longer are indebted to another human. They will not be enslaved to debt forever. Once again, this ancient legal system has protected the poor by ensuring that they are cared for and are able to retain their dignity.

This helps us to understand the seemingly conflicting statements in Deuteronomy 15:4 and 11. They read,

“However, there will be no poor among you, since the LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess”
(4)

“There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.”(11)

People will borrow and become indebted but the release year solves it. The creditor does not own the property taken as debt payment. It is only loaned by God. This must have created havoc within the socio-economic structure of the Israelite society but for the poor, it provided a very necessary legal escape from economic oppression and poverty.

Dal in Exodus 23:3

This word for poor is also found in the Book of the Covenant at Exodus 23:3. Some commentators change the text from dal (poor man) to gadol (great man). They make this change on the basis of Leviticus 19:15, “... do not show partiality to the poor one, nor favouritism to the great one.” I am inclined to agree with the scholar Cazelles⁴ who says that there is no need or reason to emend the text here. The content of Exodus 23:3 suggests a parallel to verse 2: when considering a case, don’t side with the majority or the underdog. Remain neutral. The same idea is expressed in verse 6 where the word for poor is ebyon not dal. These texts suggest that there is to be no distinction made in the legal decisions handed down in the courts between the rich and the poor. Once again, the poor are given dignity as they are to be treated equally with the rich in the court system.

Dal in Exodus 30:15

It seems to me that there is good reason to suggest that the dal is much better off than the ebyon. The dal is not mentioned in the year release legislation. Neither is

⁴ Cited in Childs, 450 and 481.

a dal regarded as a piece of property as are male slaves, female slaves, hired labourers and sojourners. We have already seen earlier that the hired labourer (shakir) is classed as poor and needy. The dal seems to be better off than all of these.

Notice that in Exodus 30:15 the dal who is contrasted with the rich (ashir) pays an equal atonement tax to the rich. The dal is not destitute but is a person of meager means.

Dal in Leviticus 14:21

“But if he is poor and his means are insufficient, then he is to take one male lamb for a guilt offering as a wave offering to make atonement for him, and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and a log of oil...”

This text is the clearest example of the relative wealth of the dal as he is clearly able to afford a lamb for a guilt offering. He can also afford several other things as listed in the text. Thus, a dal is a free, full citizen with a small amount of property which he has likely worked hard to obtain and for which he will have to work hard if he is to keep it. Fabry in the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (218) suggests that he is a poor farmer and I agree with this. The dal has dignity and certainly is not destitute.

These eight brief texts are those which deal with the semantic field of words translated “poor” in the legal codes.

So let’s pull all of this together...

In our consideration of ani, it was seen that the poor person, if an Israelite, should be lent money without interest. The kinship bond is so strong that a rich Israelite cannot stand by and withhold compassion from a kinsman.

Even though the ani can receive a loan from a fellow Israelite, they are generally economically quite poor. They do not hold even a small piece of property as they glean the borders of fields for sustenance. Even in the Book of Deuteronomy which was discovered in the Temple in 622 BC, which is more than 600 years after the writing of the first law codes, the ani is still seen as propertyless and having

only one coat to shield him from the night. Even though poor, they are not to be oppressed. The law protects them and grants them a dignity they might not otherwise have.

In the early texts, the ebyon were also seen as landless but their need for food was recognized and the legislation once again protected them. And in Deuteronomy we saw through the program called “year of release” that the poor are again looked after by the law. The ebyon also have their needs supplied because they are Israelites. They too have dignity.

Finally, we considered the dal who has property, is protected in the courts and also is given dignity.

If we consider our definition of the poor once again, it appears as though our analysis of the texts relating to the semantic field of words for “poor” in the Law Codes has upheld our proposal. By our working definition, the poor are those who are stripped of dignity which these people certainly are not. The poor are those oppressed by a political or social system and we have seen that in the period of the formation of the nation of Israel, these legal codes protect people from being oppressed. Basic needs of food and shelter are met.

Now before we declare this position substantiated, there are other words that describe poor people which we need to examine. These words are outside the semantic field for poor. They are Almanah (widow), yathom (orphan), shakir (hired labourer) and ebed (slave).

Widow

In the pre-monarchic period words for widow are very infrequent. Exodus 22:22-24 declares that by law widows and orphans are to receive full protection from their fellow Israelites. This is fully understandable as the law says that if a man takes advantage of a widow or orphan, his wife will become a widow!

It is interesting that the laws which deal with the marriage of priests forbid a priest from marrying a widow. This suggests something about sexual taboos but we don't need to go into that! We also have texts like Leviticus 22:13 which

permit a widowed or divorced and childless woman of a priest to return to her father's house and to eat his food. Numbers 30:9 says, "But the vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, everything by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her" which gives her equal status to a man. She is to be completely bound by any vow she makes. This is quite unlike her previous married position in which her husband could veto any agreement she has made.⁵

Orphan

The only text in the ancient codes which deals with orphans has already been mentioned (Exodus 22:22-24). Why might this be? I'll suggest an answer in a few minutes.

Hired Labourer

While it is possible for a hired labourer to be an Israelite or alien, people classed this way have various rights. In the Deuteronomic Codes they are "poor and needy." In Leviticus 24:6 the produce from the seven year release is to be shared with them. And look at Leviticus 25:39: "If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and is forced to sell himself to you, do not treat him as a slave." He is to be paid wages.

Look at two sociological factors in Leviticus 25. The poor Israelite is only a hired labourer until he is released in the year of the Jubilee. He himself, or a relative, can redeem him by paying off the debt in the year of Jubilee. Here is how it works:

- A Jubilee is 50 years
- I become indebted and hire myself out in year 20
- Ten years later, an uncle of mine gains some money and buys my release
- There are 20 years left to the redemption year which would cancel my debt
- My uncle would pay 20 times the value of a hired labourer to repay my debt

⁵ I have reflected previously on the word Almanah. See John Rook, "Making Widows: The Patriarchal Guardian at Work" [Biblical Theology Bulletin](#) (27/1) 1997, 10-15 and "When is a Widow Not a Widow" [Biblical Theology Bulletin](#) (28/1) 1998, 4-6.

- He would pay this amount no matter what year I indentured myself
- The price of redemption is fixed: 50 years minus the number remaining to the next jubilee
- By this method no one could be bound for more than 49 years

These three classes of people present a perplexing situation for us as we examine the legislative material. Why are the widow and orphan almost ignored? Why are certain Israelites given the status of hired labourer and not that of slave?

A Class of Israelite Slaves

In the ancient world slaves were common and Israel was no exception. Abraham received slaves in Egypt (Genesis 12:16) and his descendants became slaves in Egypt.

Let's read Genesis 47:13-26.

Here we see that Egyptians voluntarily become slaves to the Pharaoh for purely economic reasons. They would rather lose all and work for the Pharaoh than die.

A similar situation is found in the legal codes. The Hebrew slaves are not foreigners who have been captured in battle. Rather, due to economic loss, they have been forced to sell themselves or their children to a master.

Exodus 21: 7-11 deals with the law of selling a daughter. The law is designed to protect the girl as much as possible:

- she cannot be sold to a foreigner by her master
- she is to be freed if her master does not marry her off to his son and cannot afford to clothe her
- the law of redemption stands but she has no say in the matter

Would you agree with me that her dignity as a person has been taken from her? There are some scholars who say that this law might never have been practised as there is no evidence of it in the later laws of Deuteronomy. I do hope they are right.

A man could also enslave himself. See the texts:

- Exodus 21: 2-6
- Leviticus 25: 39-43
- Deuteronomy 15: 16-17

The law in Exodus and Deuteronomy says that the debt is cleared in seven years but Leviticus states that he must work to the next Jubilee. In Leviticus, after his release, he returns to the land of his forefathers. He is not to be considered a slave but a hired labourer.

In Exodus and Deuteronomy he is not to be sent to the land of his fathers and in Deuteronomy he is to be sent away with gifts of property.

The Exodus law sets a man free with his wife if he was married before his period of servitude. However, if he was married while in slavery, his wife is not freed with him as she is the property of the master. He is permitted to declare his love for master, wife and children and remain a slave forever. If he chooses this fate, his earlobe is pierced with an awl as a sign that he has chosen slavery forever.

There are other strange slavery laws:

- Exodus 21: 20-21 states that a master may beat his property. If he hurts him/her, the slave is to be given freedom. So slaves are to be treated with respect.
- Exodus 20: 10 tells us that slaves have food, clothing, shelter and a day off once a week

Thus we see that Israelite slaves have dignity and are to be treated fairly well. Food, shelter, clothing and rest days are to be provided.

Can we say then that there are no poor in ancient Israel? I think we can conclude that Israelites are to care for their own and the economic level of people in pre-monarchic Israel seems “satisfactory.”

The next question for me and for us to think about tonight is the societal structure of ancient Israel. I believe this is important and I’ll try to be brief.

Sociologists agree that there are four main types of societies. There are those based on economics like in the USA and Canada which are called Market Societies. There are those based on political structure like the old USSR or Cuba. There are those based on religion like Iran and there are those based on kinship like ancient Israel or modern Arab Bedouins. So if we say “she is a poor widow” we are likely making an economic statement while in ancient Israel that would likely be a woman who has no male protector. A widow has no man. She has no protector. She has lost her identity because her kinship bond is broken.

We live in a market economy society. It is assumed that I can finish my education, find employment and live a relatively happy life. If there is a bump along the way, like a divorce, or my house burns down without insurance, I should be able to figure it out and eventually move on. In many ways, after my teen years, I am assumed to be independent enough so that I don’t need much if any parental support.

Ancient Israel was a kinship society. There is some carry over from this in the modern world in Judaism where you find that modern Jews still feel a direct connectedness to things like the flight from Egypt. There is a strong sense of corporate personality and individualism is far less important.

In Israelite society, the nation is made up of 12 tribes and within the tribes are clans. Then there is a smaller unit which is the *household*. In Hebrew it is called a Beth Ab, which is translated as “Father’s House.” This is the core of the system. Within the Beth Ab there are a lot of people. Some scholars say that a Beth Ab could be as many as 100 people. It is also intriguing to note that there are no words for grandfather or uncle as in these units all senior men were patriarchs. Patriarchs who benevolently protect.

Let’s connect this to what we said earlier about poor people. While it would be extremely easy to abuse widows and orphans, laws are designed to protect them. If you lost your husband or your father you have lost your male protector and are now vulnerable. Yet in a kinship society, all males in your Beth Ab would have responsibility for your care. It is the responsibility of the Beth Ab to protect vulnerable members. By the law of the Levirate (which some people say is a

marriage like contract), if a woman's husband dies, she becomes the partner of his brother and any children who are produced give the dead man "name."

There is a fascinating story in Genesis 38 which seems strange and offensive to us until we see it in this light. Tamar's husband dies and she is passed on to her father-in-law's second son. While this makes no sense to us today, in Tamar's world, for her husband to die without a son was the worst possible fate. The story is entwined as she tricks her father-in-law into getting her pregnant. Belonging, kinship and producing offspring for her husband from his lineage is more important than what appears to us to be an immoral act. Her poverty is not understood in economic terms but in kinship terms. For her and her dead husband, there is no honour in returning to her father's home and remaining chaste. For her and her dead husband, honour can only be achieved through producing kin.

We have been talking about the period of Israel's history before 1000BC. If I had time, I would argue that with the introduction of the monarchy and the shift in thinking to urbanization which happened with King David, significant social chaos began. Let me just say that at this time, the kinship structure seems to break down as people have left their Beth Abs so that they can live in the city. If a man dies, his woman has no kin to support her and for the first time Israel has serious economic poverty. She fits the poverty definition with which we began, "... stripped of human dignity, oppressed by the social system, forced to exist without the resources necessary for health and happiness."

Before I conclude tonight, I want to move to the New Testament and briefly touch on two stories and look at them not as theological but as sociological texts. The first is found in the Gospel of Mark chapter 5: 21-43. It is too long to read but here is a brief synopsis. A synagogue ruler comes to Jesus and tells him that his 12 year old daughter is dying. He asks Jesus to follow him and put his hands on her to heal her. Jesus complies and on the way in the press of the crowd, Jesus feels someone touch his garment. The story says that he felt power leave him and we are told that the woman who has been bleeding for 12 years is healed. Jesus says to her "Daughter, your faith has healed you." When they get to the home of the

synagogue ruler, the professional mourners are there as she has died. Jesus says, "The child is not dead but asleep" and people laugh. Then he goes to her room, says "Little girl arise" and she gets up and walks around.

This is an amazing sociological text! The woman was bleeding, likely from cancer of the uterus, for 12 years. The little girl is 12 years old. Jesus calls the woman "Daughter" but the girl, he calls "little girl." This is about kinship. The little girl is already in a family unit. She has parents. She is 12 which is right at the time of the beginning off menstruation. Her bleeding will be normal and Jesus has restored her to her family. Now she can now grow up and produce children!

And what did he call the woman? She has been unclean for 12 years and he calls her "Daughter." Not only does he heal her from her bleeding but he takes her into his Beth Ab, into his family! She is called *daughter*. She is now protected. She has kin.

The other scripture I want to look at briefly is John 14: 1-4. My NIV bible says, "In my Father's house are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you." Amazing! We often hear sermons that this is about heaven and via the Latin Vulgate, some translations say mansions rather than rooms so it sounds regal and heavenly directed.

I see it differently. In my Father's house as I see it is about Jesus' Beth Ab. He is inviting people to become part of his personal household. So people without status, without a male protector, without kin to care for them are invited to join his Beth Ab.

For me, the question is this: What are the new Beth Abs? Where do we find places of care that transcend economics and provide kinship like protection? Perry Stroud was 50 when I met him in the Salvation Army's addiction program. He had a pretty troubled life but for some reason we seemed to hit it off. I had the pleasure of giving Minister Jason Kenney, MP a tour of the Centre of Hope in 2009 and I introduced him to my friend Perry. Jason was fixated on the collage posters that surrounded Perry's room. They told the story of ups and downs of his love affair with a bottle, of his desire to be free. On April 29th, just a few weeks

after that wonderful visit, the program manager sent this note in an all staff email:

Our hearts in the ARP are saddened today as we have lost one of our clients. Perry Stroud (age 51) was a client of ours up to a week ago when he had a relapse. He died in a field drinking with his friends.

I still miss Perry and as he struggled with his demons the demons finally won. Perry was a poet and so am I. When I told him I was writing a book about homeless people's shoes one day, the next day he handed this to me,

THE SHOE (February 2, 2009)

There are so many sayings

That are related to a shoe.

Just like the old lady,

Who knew not what to do.

"These shoes were made for walking,"

Made Nancy a buck or two.

And there's the saying,

"If the shoe fits..."

You may be what you presume,

If its adequate.

And they say, no

to judge just what one might do

Before you have the chance

To walk in the other's shoes

A man was found complaining,
“I have no shoes to wear.”
But then along his journey
He saw a man
No feet he had to bear.
So the moral of my story,
That I have come to tell,
Be grateful for what you have,
Some don’t do as well.
So trust in “God” and love Him,
And pray for what you need.
You may end up greatly surprised,
That in life you will succeed.

Perry Stroud, June 28, 1958 – April 29, 2009

My office at that time was in a homeless shelter. An eight story institution in downtown Calgary with hundreds of beds, a dining room, an addictions program, street nurses, a Laundromat, employment centre, gymnasium, university nursing and social work practicum students, SA officers, people with AIDS and possibly Swine Flu, dozens of volunteers, huge government grants, and on and on. We live in a city of over 1,000,000 people with over 2,000 sleeping in shelter beds each night. I used to check the statistics daily. On April 29th, 2273 people slept in Calgary shelter beds. It should have been 2274. If you want to see an example of everything that is wrong with our world, visit a shelter. You will see drug deals going on in a park nearby, prostitutes selling their bodies a block away, people who are so sick that they should be hospitalized, crack parties at 3am and the disconnect of a brand new red Ferrari driving by. I could show you Derek’s room

on the 6th floor of one of the shelters where he has lived for months and spoken to no one. His 10x10 space is his shelter from the world which he doesn't understand and which doesn't care to understand him. We could drive only a few kilometres and see homes that are more than 10,000 sq. ft. where childless couples live. And Calgary is not much different from any city in the Western world where we find that we are all overrun with crime, moral decay and helplessness.

There isn't a poverty gene, but poverty is most often an acquired birth defect. In our world, pick the wrong parents and you are in it. Just look at Regent's Park Toronto, Roxbury and Jamaica Plains, Boston, Harlem in NY, or Darfur. It is a pandemic, a disaster in our world that most of us like the priest and Levite in the Good Samaritan story simply walk by. Poverty doesn't really affect most of us, so we treat it as someone else's inconvenience.

A friend of mine, Dr. Kelly Ernst from the Chumir Foundation, told me this week that it would have cost \$1.3 billion to give 400,000 Albertans living in poverty enough money to live above the poverty line in 2007.

Instead, Albertans spent at least 7 times that amount of money dealing with the consequences of poverty that year...

Both of these statistics should make us mad.

Our 10 year plans to end homelessness are all about housing. Homelessness is not solely about housing. It is about meaning, belonging, economic independence, education, employment and counselling. It is about domestic violence, mental illness, disability, drug abuse, family breakdown and escalating rent and mortgage costs. It is about innate worth. It is about being and knowing and believing that we are all God's children. It is finding a way to become kin for each other and inviting people into our Beth Ab.

Like Adam and Eve who were banished from the Garden of Eden, I don't want anyone without a place. Yet in Canada we tolerate shelters that are full to overflowing with no clear framework for ending this nonsense. On any given night, our largest Canadian shelter (which happens to be in Calgary) has over

1,000 people crammed into it. This is lunacy! This is dangerous. This is unhealthy. This is unethical. We should be appalled. How did we allow this to happen?

I believe we need crisis shelters. I also believe we need clear exit plans. But how we have allowed short-term crisis shelters to become long-term housing is beyond me. Some blame it on the closures of the mental institutions while others blame it on other symptoms and dysfunction.

We should be mad today. We live in a city where a baby's first night can be spent on the floor in the basement of a church, where young runaway (or throwaway) girls give their bodies to strange men so they can have a place to sleep and so they don't have to return to the chaos of their family home. We live in a city where Asian youth are aligned in gangs, the FOB and the FOBK, where gangs provide place, belonging, kinship and a sense of power and self-worth.

I was really frustrated when Chrysler received almost \$3.8B in bailout money from our government. Just think what we could do with \$3.8B in the social sector. For simplification, if that money were given to bail out Canadians living in poverty, if you take a high amount, say at \$380,000 per single family home, that would equal exactly 10,000 homes! So if we say there are 150,000 homeless, and 10,000 homes would have at least 30,000 bedrooms, the dollars from the Chrysler bailout could solve a huge piece of the problem.

Such a concept does not have to use new construction. In Calgary, we are using rent supplements and rental acquisitions. Capital expenditures are being used to purchase existing properties. And the province has kept over 3,500 people housed through its Housing Eviction Prevention program which is a rent top-up program. This is good prevention.

And think about this. If we had created 10,000 homes from that \$3.8B, that creates jobs for hundreds of construction workers who could then buy new Chryslers. It provides homes for people and these folk would then pay property taxes and through their new mortgage or rental agreement with the government, the \$3.8B housing fund could be replenished.

We should be mad today because people, including the government, are more willing to give me money for a capital building project rather than for additional staff who can work with people in poverty. We know that In-home support works. Case Management works. We need to build relationships not more buildings. Unless of course the buildings are appropriate homes. And while we are building them, let's find ways to build in equity options so people can find a way out of poverty through simple things like home ownership. It is all possible if we work a little bit different.

Yet there are glimmers of hope here and there. In London England, street homelessness has been reduced from 14,000 a decade ago to around 500. They have used a scattered site model. Agencies like ThamesReach put their significant budgets into hiring competent Case Managers. ThamesReach takes homeless folk and rather than put them into large shelters, they take them to their new home. A new home with a worker. Brilliant. Affordable. And it works.

And in Sao Paulo Brazil, Senador Eduardo Suplicy through the Bolsa Familia has reduced poverty significantly. Sao Paulo is poor. There is not enough work. Families receive a Basic Income every month with only two conditions: they must ensure that their children are in school for at least 75% of the time and they must be checked by a doctor at a medical facility annually. Basic Income or Guaranteed Annual Income is a concept which deserves a better look.

In Iraq, in Namibia, in Turkey, in Ireland, in the UK, in South Africa and beyond, governments are beginning to look at ways to deal with income in a world where there is no longer enough work. I'm glad today because people are beginning to think about Income Imbalance.

In New York last year, I had a conversation with Prof Dr Aziz Akgul, a member of parliament from Turkey. He has recently introduced a bill for a Basic Income into the Turkish parliament. I'm glad today because the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has said that his government will commit an additional \$150M to crisis shelter, but not just to provide a bed... workers will be trained to connect people to education, employment and counselling.

So what should our role be in all of this? We need to rethink our mandate. A hot and a cot had its place but it doesn't cut it anymore. We need to do careful community scans and needs assessments. We need to put our limited and precious resources into efforts that lead people to transformation and wholeness and not to support the dysfunction we see in much of society and its shelter system for example. We cannot in good conscience throw good dollars into a shelter system that is ineffective and inhumane. To use a health metaphor, emergency rooms are overflowing. Adding more emergency rooms is not the answer. Treat people in the ones we have, move people through and out as fast as possible. We must provide alternatives to emergency health care so people aren't forced to default to the emergency room for care they should be receiving elsewhere.

I'm sad today. Perry is gone. His hopes for a pain-free life on earth have ended. I'm sad because the system failed Perry. For him there was no prevention, there was only ineffective intervention, and limited care. And certainly, at least for Perry, no cure.

I leave you tonight in anticipation of talking tomorrow about some solutions, with a poem I wrote about a pair of shoes. It was Perry's favourite:

Dustbin Treasures

Where have they been,
Divorced and now reclaimed.
Have they danced?
Have they paired?
Were they once well-heeled?
They stick out their tongues
Exposing their souls(sp).

Once fresh and new
They ran and danced
Oblivious to their own decay.
Tiptoeing through meadows
Now crawling through minefields

Of needles and pain.

No safe rest...

Removal means Re-move-all

Loss

Regained by another. Wanting

Relief

From the pain of life.

Death brings relief

But the dustbin is once again stirred

By one who hopes

For a moment of life

Never to be found.

Written as I watched a homeless man looking for a pair of shoes in a dustbin

John Rook

October 15, 1992

Manchester, England