Litany: What Does Our God Say?
We know that in our world,
Outside our door, around the corner, on the other side of town, in another country,
There are those whose most basic rights are denied daily.
Their right to freedom, to safety, to family, to expression,
Their very personhood, violated.

What does our God say to the one whose back is against the wall?
Our God says, I am already there.
I am standing with you, I am struggling alongside you.

We look around us and wonder,
Is it all too much?
Too much fear, too much anger, too much sadness, too much violence.
It is overwhelming simply to watch from afar.
We can only imagine what it is to live within the storm.

What does our God say to the one whose back is against the wall?
Our God says, I will never leave you or forsake you.
The Kingdom of God is within you.

We turn to one another and ask,
What is to be done?
For those who are silenced, for those who are downtrodden.
How are the systems that oppress to be changed?
We cry out to our God for justice, for peace, and we ask ...

What does our God say to the one whose back is against the wall?
Our God says, I am sending you.
I am already here ... will you join me?
Here am I, send me.
Here are we, to stand with those whose backs are against the wall.
To demand that the system of oppression change.
To remove ourselves from structures that harm.
To instead create a world of love.
As Christ our Lord himself came to do.
(The theme “What does our God say to one whose back is against the wall?” is adapted from stories Howard Thurman told about his time in India, referenced in Jesus and the Disinherited)


**Benediction**

Go now from this place remembering that we are called –
Called to give voice to the voiceless,
To give strength to the vulnerable,
Called to stand in defense of the needy and on the side of the poor.
May we whose positions are privileged be willing to join the struggles of those who are not,
As our God has already done. Amen.
*(referencing Proverbs 31:8-9, NRSV)*

**Responsive Reading for Lighting of the Advent Candle: Joy**

Today we light the third candle, the Joy candle;
We are another week closer in our anticipation of the coming –
Emanuel, God with us. Incarnate among us.

**God: the maker of heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them.**

Today, we also remember all those in our world who face violence and intolerance.
We bear responsibility for changing the systems that cause harm;
We recommit ourselves to protecting basic human rights for all God’s children.

**God: who gives justice to people who are oppressed.**

It is hard to find Joy when so many of our brothers and sisters are downtrodden,
When so much still must be made right.
And so we turn to the one who is our help –

**The Lord: who frees prisoners.**

**The Lord: who makes the blind see.**

We celebrate in the knowledge that this Lord was born among us,
Walked among us, lived and died and rose again among us;
That this Lord was born a refugee and lived his very human life among those who were oppressed.

**The Lord: who straightens up those who are bent low.**

**The Lord: who loves the righteous.**

We trust that God is with those whose rights to be safe, to be free, to simply be, are daily denied.
We rejoice that the turning of the world we celebrate in this season continues
To bring us closer to the Kingdom of God here on earth.

**The Lord: who protects immigrants.**

**The Lord: who helps orphans and widows.**

We respond to the life Jesus lived, the love God is, the call the Spirit gives,
By lighting this candle of Joy and promising to carry the Joy of God’s presence with us,
Committing to build the Kingdom of God here and now.

**The Lord will rule forever!**

*(congregational responses from RCL Advent 3A reading Psalm 146:5-10, Common English Bible)*

(Rev. Lauren McDuffie is associate pastor of First Baptist Church in Morehead, KY, in the USA)
**Creative Reading of Scripture: Proverbs 31:8-9 CEB**

Begin with entire group facing front, hands to the side

*Entire group:* (LOUD with hands at sides of mouth) **Speak out**

*Half the group:* (whisper with hands semi-covering mouth) **on behalf of the voiceless** (turn backwards after speaking)

*Entire group:* (LOUD with hands at sides of mouth) **Speak out**

*Other Half of the group:* (crouching down on knees) **for the rights of all who are vulnerable** (stand up, turn backwards)

*Entire group:* (LOUD with hands at sides of mouth) **Speak out**

*First half of the group:* (turn around with arms lifted high and hands spread out) **in order to judge with righteousness**

*Entire group:* (LOUD with hands at sides of mouth) **Speak out**

*Second half of the group:* (turn around with arms stretched out in front, palms up, hands cupped) **and to defend the needy and the poor**

*Entire group:* (LOUD with hands at sides of mouth) **Speak out**

**Responsive Reading: Proverbs 31:2, 8-9 NIV**

Leader: Listen, my son! Listen, my daughter!

*All:* **Speak up**

*Men & Boys:* **for those who cannot speak for themselves**

*All:* **Speak up**

*Women & Girls:* **for the rights of all who are destitute**

Leader: Listen, my son! Listen, my daughter!

*All:* **Speak up**

*Men & Boys:* **judge fairly**

*Women & Girls:* **defend the rights of the poor and needy**

*All:* **Speak up**

**Prayer of Confession:**

God of JOY, on this third Sunday of Advent we gather as your people realizing we have not always lived as people filled with joy. Last week we lit the candle of HOPE. Yet, we have not always lived as people of hope, either. We have not offered hope as you have called us to do. Sometimes our eyes are blinded by the anticipation of Christmas joy and we fail to see or acknowledge those around us for whom joy is a foreign notion. Sometimes we are so wrapped up in our own holiday preparations and frolicking that we forget the reason for the season. Sometimes, oh God, we are paralyzed by the needs of the world and we forget and we despair and we wonder how in the world you could use us. But it is exactly your coming to earth, living among us, dying and rising from the dead that empowers us to be people so filled with joy that your hope is offered to those who are unable speak, to those who are destitute, poor and needy; yes, even us! O Come, O Come Emmanuel! AMEN.

*(Rev. Dr. Trisha Miller Manarin is coordinator for the Baptist World Alliance Division on Mission, Evangelism and Justice)*
"Who Speaks for US?" Proverbs 31:8-9 and Jeremiah 18:1-10

Introduction:
This question must be asked by the larger audience of Christian Voices:
1) Globally
2) Locally
3) Nationally
4) Politically
5) Economically
6) Socially
7) Biblically
8) Ethically
9) Culturally
10) Spiritually

Move 1
Who really speaks for US in relation to our faith walk?:

1) Racism
2) Gender Bias
3) Regions of USA
4) Communities
5) Education Levels
6) Greek/Fraternal/Civic Organizations
7) Religious Denominations
8) Classism
9) Family Matters
10) Domestic Violence and Human Injustice

Move 2
Who speaks out for US through the courage of their heart?

The voiceless, oppressed, powerless, poor, needy, homeless, widow, helpless; the orphan, immigrant, single parent, veteran, unemployed, hungry, naked, mute, defenseless, unfortunate and the disinherited (Howard Thurman's view).

Someone's prophetic voice must be heard for US in these weary times.

Move 3
This lament, from the preaching genre known as the African American Jeremiad, kept faith in the promise of God's deliverance. By inverting the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success, Jeremiah realized the redemptive arm of justice and forgiveness through the compassionate eyes of the Almighty.

Jeremiah's prophecy brings hope in the midst of moral decay, cultural confusion and ethical ignorance. The victory of God through the resurrected Christ is more powerful than sin, neglect and evil. What did Jeremiah witness in chapter 18?

Text:
a) He went where God told him to go to - The Potter's House: "and there I will cause you to hear My words." There is delivering power in biblical prophecy (vv. 1-3).

b) He saw what God wanted him to see - The Remake of Flawed People: "so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make." So many of US have experienced the second chances of God (vs. 4).
c) He said what God wanted him to say - There's Hope for the Nation: "if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it." Regardless of the situation, God's people must never abandon hope (vv. 5-10).

**Conclusion:**
Who speaks for US?

Prophets and Prophetess, Pastors and Preachers, Visionaries and Missionaries, who will incorporate Love and Faith, Hope and Joy, Grace and Mercy through social justice.

God has spoken, is speaking, and ultimately will speak for US. Let those who have ears to hear be what is good: "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly before God".

*(Rev. Gerald Lamont Thomas, Ph.D., a retired pastor living in Seffner, FL, USA. He leads the global initiative, "4 Kingdom Causes, Inc." He can be contacted at revgltphd@gmail.com.)*