Theme: The Line Dividing Good and Evil
“Systemic Evil”
Sermon preached by Jeff Huber
January 18-19, 2014 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Scripture: Psalm 37:1-8, 27-28a, 37

1 Don’t worry about the wicked or envy those who do wrong. 2 For like grass, they soon fade away. Like spring flowers, they soon wither. 3 Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. 4 Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires. 5 Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you. 6 He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun. 7 Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act. Don’t worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. 8 Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper—it only leads to harm.

27 Turn from evil and do good, and you will live in the land forever. 28 For the Lord loves justice, and he will never abandon the godly.

37 Look at those who are honest and good, for a wonderful future awaits those who love peace.

VIDEO The Line Dividing Good and Evil Week 3 Sermon Starter

SLIDE Systemic Evil

One evening an old Apache Chief told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all.

"One is Evil – It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

"The other is The Spirit – It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?"

The old Apache Chief simply replied, "The one you feed..."

I would like to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. If you are new to our church we provide these
every week. You will find a Scripture passage we will be using listed on top with a place below that’s for you to write down anything you would like to remember from today's message. Every week I pray that something you experience during worship would speak to your heart and the Holy Spirit would use that to touch you. I encourage you to write these things down and that you might feel God speaking to just you today. Continued on that side and on the backside you will find daily Scripture readings. You'll have a chance to read the Bible on your own this week and each passage will tie back into what we are talking about today.

Today we continue in a series of sermons we have been doing on the line between good and evil. We began this series by talking about the struggle between good and evil and how it is each one of us has a struggle inside of ourselves choosing to follow the path that God longs for us to follow. We talked about the nature of our human condition in which we find ourselves broken and often making mistakes that we call sin. The biblical word for sin is hamartia, which literally means to, "miss the mark." We recognized that we miss the mark as humans and end up on the wrong path and how repentance is about coming back to the path, knowing that we have a God who longs to forgive us and help us to start over again, even when we have caused hurt to others or to God or to ourselves. The first week we really were simply trying to make the case that there is evil in the world and that we can participate in it as human beings.

Last week we talked about making sense of the devil. There is much talk about the devil or evil or Satan within our culture and we have to wrestle with that reality as people of faith. We talked about how whether you see the devil as a literal figure or as a personification of the evil inside of each of us, we rely upon the power of Christ and the power of other people to help push back those minions of darkness. It is sometimes easy to blame our struggles on the devil and so we recognized that we should not use that as an excuse but instead should put on the full armor of God and be willing to ask for help when we are struggling with the dark thoughts or evil temptations that we think might be coming from the devil.

This weekend is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. weekend in which we have a national holiday this coming Monday to remember his birth. This is a good weekend to talk about systemic evil and how evil can get hold of an entire culture. The year I was born, in 1963, there were a string of bombings in churches in Birmingham, Alabama. The bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church took the lives of four young girls attending Sunday school and that event among many
others during our nation’s civil rights movement remind us that systemic evil is a reality that can get hold of even great nations that proclaim Christianity as part of its makeup.

**SLIDE**  
What is Systemic Evil?

I was putting the finishing touches on this sermon this week and someone who was looking at the rough draft asked me a great question, “What is systemic evil anyway?” Systemic evil is that evil that lives in our culture or way of life, often times without us realizing it. We sometimes don’t even see the evil as evil, such as when slavery was part of our nation. Many people saw no problem with slavery, and even after slavery ended legally in our nation, many saw segregation as simply the way of life and had no issues with looking at those with darker skin as inferior to whites.

When thought of in those terms, what things would you put in the systemic evil category in today’s world? Some would say alcohol or drugs, especially when you consider what America’s drug habits mean to other nations who end up supplying the drugs. Some would say immigration. Some would say minimum wage. Some might argue that even our clothing industry has systemic evil when you consider that the places that produce our clothing use child labor, even enslaved child labor. Once again, we are often oblivious to how our actions can destroy others who are made in the image of God.

There are three ways we can respond to systemic evil in our world. The first is to acquiesce to the injustice. We can surrender to the problem by living with, adjusting to, and accepting the powerlessness of the reality of the injustice or the evil. In essence, we ignore it and we hope it will go away. When we respond in this way we live in a time of uneasiness and often fear. We allow the evil to become the norm and instead of dealing with the root cause, we simply turn our heads or throw up our hands.

I think of the latest school shooting which happened in neighboring Roswell, New Mexico, where a 12-year-old came to middle school with a sawed off shotgun and shot two of his schoolmates. I read that the young man may have been bullied and as they interviewed several parents and students at the school many of them said, “What are we supposed to do? How can we even go to school anymore? I feel so helpless and I don't want to go to school anymore.” I'm not sure what the solution is, myself, to these shootings that seem to be ever more prevalent in our schools, but clearly there is evil lurking within our culture that we need to figure out how to address. We sometimes hesitate to call it evil because
children are involved, but the truth is that we need to be willing to address issues like this head on.

A second response to systemic evil is to rise up and retaliate, which often leads to more hatred and violence. The problem with this response is that it often creates more problems than it solves. In the school shooting in Roswell, New Mexico, we have been told that the young boy who brought the gun to school was bullied by other kids. I continually hear about bullying in our schools and what a problem it has become. If we don't find ways to resolve the problem head on, my guess is that we will continue to find children who respond to that systemic evil with retaliation that involves extreme responses like bringing a gun to school.

A third response is to model what Dr. Martin Luther King taught, non-violent resistance. We saw this lived out in the seventh grade social studies teacher in Roswell, New Mexico, who stepped directly in front of the gun held by the middle school student and simply look him in the eye and said, "You need to put that gun down right now." I can’t imagine the strength and the courage it took to do that, but it was an act of sacrificial love which could lead to that man's death, but instead led to the end of the crisis and no more bloodshed than had already been spilled.

This assertive, but not aggressive method, makes a clear statement about what is right and what is wrong. Nonviolent resistance is about seeking to change not just behavior, but hearts and attitudes. It is the choice that we see lived out by Jesus Christ as he willingly went to the cross instead of raising up an Army to resist the Roman occupying force in Palestine in the first century. It was the choice of Mahatma Gandhi who stood in the face of British Imperialism and actually used the teachings of Jesus and developed a tactic to resist injustice and oppression.

Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King both wrote reflections on Psalm 37 that we find is our Scripture passage for today.

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the noonday sun. 7 Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act. Don’t worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. 8 Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper—it only leads to harm.

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37 Look at those who are honest and good, for a wonderful future awaits those who love peace.

The Scripture reminds us that it is not just about doing good, but also about committing our lives to God so we can let go of anger. We leave rage behind by inviting God and God’s Holy Spirit to take a hold of our hearts. We trust God and we turn away from evil as we seek to emulate those whose hearts seek after what is right and good.

Five months ago, in September of 2013, it was the 50th anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church. As our nation and even the world watched the events of 1963 unfold, we were watching systemic evil being unmasked. It was rooted in slavery, Jim Crow laws, lynchings, school segregation and many other horrors that were committed upon a group of people because of the color of their skin. Dr. Beverly W. Harrison wrote these words in her book, "Making the Connections," these words.

SLIDE (Picture of Beverly W Harrison on left) “The deepest tragedy of human life is that evil, the wrong that we do to each other, is often done in the name of God. Evil is the active or the passive effort to deny or to suppress another's power of being in relationship with each other or with God."

The 16th Street Baptist Church was first named the First Colored Baptist Church and began in 1873 during the days of Reconstruction in the South in the heart of downtown Birmingham. Shortly after they moved into their first building they were forcibly relocated by the Birmingham City Council in order to expand retail stores in the early 1880s. If the church had been left at its original location it would have been on some of the highest priced land in Birmingham. It would have been across the street from the prominently placed and predominantly white flagship churches which are located in the heart of Birmingham.

But the congregation moved as ordered and built a large building to accommodate their large congregation. Their building was deemed too large by
the Birmingham building inspectors and so they were ordered to tear their
to down in 1908 and build a new building that was smaller. The leaders of
informed to build another building to serve the growing African
American population in Birmingham and so they completed the rebuilding of their
sanctuary in 1911. The church was Byzantine in architecture and exceeded 1600
in the sanctuary with a large basement auditorium. The building was a proud
marvel of its time because of its size and beauty. They were literally a monument
which stood opposed to systemic evil.

SLIDE 16th Street Baptist Church (Graphic)

I was in Birmingham a number of years ago and was able to visit the church
that you will see on the video screen. In the face of that systemic evil, this church
maintained a sense of mission, serving the community, and sharing the gospel of
Jesus Christ with hospitality and love.

As we reflect upon the feelings and the attitudes of many which led to the
bombing of the church on a Sunday morning in 1963, I would be remiss if I did not
share with you the fact that it was a Methodist layman named George Wallace,
who was inaugurated Governor of Alabama on January 14, 1963. He heaped logs
on the fire of hatred and bigotry with inflammatory words of defiance more than
eight years after the Supreme Court ruling in the Brown versus the Board of
Education in Topeka, Kansas, which ordered desegregation of public schools. If
you are old enough you might remember his words.

SLIDE I draw the line in the dust - George Wallace quote (Graphic)

“In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw
the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say
segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.”

That was the year that I was born and that was during his inaugural address
in 1963 in Birmingham. Birmingham would later be known by African-Americans
as the city of “bombingham,” because of the many random and unsolved
bombings that occurred in black sections of the city.

In April of 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King arrived in Birmingham at the
invitation of Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth. He arrived to lead a massive act of
nonviolent resistance aimed at ending segregation in the public schools. It
coincided with the second-largest shopping season of the year in Birmingham
which was just after Easter. Dr. King arrived to combat what was seen as systemic
evil where agreements were quickly made to keep the peace and then quickly
recanted as white resistance would rise. The effort began with a series of mass meetings in churches, lunch counter sit-ins, marches on City Hall, and a boycott of downtown merchants.

As Dr. King preached and his influence expanded, they organized kneel-ins at churches, sit-ins at the public library and a march on the County building to register voters. These nonviolent protests led to hundreds of arrests. On April 10, 1963, a court injunction was ordered against the protesters and the leaders of the civil rights movement agreed they should disobey the court order which Dr. King characterized as an unjust, undemocratic and unconstitutional misuse of the legal process. King, himself, was arrested on Good Friday, April 12, and wrote his famous, "Letter from the Birmingham Jail" in the margins of the Birmingham news as a response to the public statement from eight Birmingham clergy persons condemning the protests and Dr. Martin Luther King for what they described as being an, "outside agitator."

Needing to sustain the campaign, it was now being drained of financial resources through arrests and bonds that had to be posted, young children and youth were included in the demonstrations. On May 2 more than 1000 organized young people attempted to march into downtown Birmingham. Hundreds were immediately arrested. When hundreds more were gathering the next day, the director of public safety, Bull Conner, ordered the police and fire departments to use force to halt the demonstrators.

SLIDE     Birmingham protesters (Graphic)

During the days that followed our nation saw the images like these of children being blasted by high-pressure water hoses, clubbed by police officers, and attacked by police dogs. These images on television and in newspapers triggered an international outrage. With the city's business community now limping along, and having a public relations nightmare and declining revenues from the boycotts, the US Atty. Gen.'s office facilitated negotiations which led to an agreement on May 10, 1963, that called for the removal of signs which said, "whites only," and, "blacks only," above restrooms and on drinking fountains. A plan was developed to desegregate lunch counters, the release of protesters from jails and prisons, and the formation of a biracial committee to oversee changes in the city of Birmingham.

Segregationists responded with even more violent attacks, which included the bombing of the motel where Dr. Martin Luther King met with leaders of the civil rights movement, as well as the home of Dr. King's brother. President
Kennedy responded by ordering federal troops near the city of Birmingham to restore order if needed.

Three months later, on August 28, America experienced a turning of racial attitudes and feelings of enormous proportions not felt since 100 years before when Pres. Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Dr. King delivered his reverberating, "I have a dream," speech during the March on Washington. It's in this context, two weeks later, that members of the Ku Klux Klan, succumbing to an overwhelming systemic evil, bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church, killing four young girls while they learned about Jesus, the Prince of Peace, in a Sunday school class.

VIDEO Church Bombing Clip
SLIDE Systemic Evil

While giving the eulogy of three of the four young girls, Dr. King said, "The martyred heroines were a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity. They have something to say to ministers of the gospel who remained silent behind the purity of stained-glass windows. They have something to say to the politicians who feed their constituents with the stale bread of hatred and the meat of racism. Their lives have something to say to governments that compromise with undemocratic practices and blatant hypocrisy. Their lives have something to say to anyone who would passively accept evil systems and stand on the sidelines in the midst of a mighty struggle for justice."

As we think about the unhealthy, polluted atmosphere which allowed so many to be swallowed up in a vast web of ugliness of the human personality, I am reminded of the psychological phenomenon called, "groupthink." Irving Janis was one of the first to talk about "groupthink" and he talked about how groups can think so much of themselves that they set themselves up above the law, in almost mob-like fashion that encourages conformity of opinion.

I think of the contemporary example of the report issued last year by former FBI director Louis Freeh detailing the cover-up of sexual abuse at Penn State University. How could so many respected and upstanding persons fail so miserably in defending young children, while going overboard to protect their own images? Is a football program really that important that it would take precedence over the safety of children? Groupthink allows this kind of behavior to not only manifest itself but flourish.

The elements of evil in one person connecting with the elements of evil in
others lead to this kind of systemic evil. Groupthink sacrificed vulnerable children and protected Mr. Sandusky. Groupthink often leads to injustice and harm towards the most vulnerable in society when it goes unchecked. Groupthink made it possible for the perpetrators of the 16th St. Baptist Church bombing to not face conviction for their crimes until some 14 years later. Others involved in that crime did not face criminal prosecution until the year 2000, 37 years after the fact.

The report issued by Louis Freeh encourages us to guard against falling prey to the tentacles of systemic evil. Somehow we must guard against complacency and develop the courage to practice resistance against evil by speaking against abuses of power. I think of Dr. Vicky Triponey, the former Penn State vice president of student affairs. She ran up against the Penn State way and was fired when she dared to try to discipline various football players for everything from bar fights to sexual assault.

She was basically run out of town. According to Triponey, whose story is backed up by the local chief of police, people knocked on her door late at night, then bolted when she would answer it. Students prank-called her and savaged her on message boards. One morning, she woke up to find a "For Sale" sign in her yard. Even Joe Paterno—when he appeared on a local sports radio show in the fall of 2005—proclaimed that “that lady in Old Main” (referring to the university’s administrative building) didn’t know how to deal with students because “she didn’t have kids.”

The great preacher from the early 20th century Rev. Maltbie Babcock wrote this poem in 1901.

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**SLIDE**

(Graphic of Maltbie Babcock to the left) "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." ~ Ephesians 6:10

Be strong! Say not the days are evil, - Who's to blame? And fold not the hands and acquiesce, - O shame! Stand up, speak out, and bravely, in God's name. Be strong!

Be strong! It matters not how deep entrenched the wrong, How hard the battle goes, the day, how long. Faint not, fight on! To-morrow comes the song. Be strong!

Resisting evil is what the 16th St. Baptist Church was doing when they kept rebuilding. They opened their doors to the community for mass meetings to
organize against the injustice that people were facing in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. Resisting evil is what Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth did when he continued to preach and teach and invite Dr. Martin Luther King into his community even after his church and his home had been bombed. He, himself, had been beaten when trying to integrate the Birmingham schools and escort his own daughter to elementary school. Resisting evil is what Dr. Martin Luther King was talking about when he said.

**SLIDE MLK Quote (Graphic)**

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Resisting evil is what Dr. King himself did as he allowed himself to be jailed and as he wrote the letter from the Birmingham jail house. Resisting evil is what Dr. King did when he implored those at the funeral, for the girls who died in the bombing, not to become bitter or harbor the desire to retaliate, but to believe that even the most misguided can learn to respect the dignity and worth of all people.

Eugene Patterson was the editor of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution newspaper during those civil rights years and he died this last year. He painted poignant scenes of suffering to condemn the systemic evil, violence and miscarriages of justice. At the ruins of the 16th St. Baptist Church he crafted his most famous editorial column, "A Flower for the Graves." Upon reading the column, Walter Cronkite was so moved that he asked Patterson to read it on the CBS evening news.

**SLIDE (Eugene Patterson graphic on left) A Negro mother wept in the street Sunday morning in front of a Baptist Church in Birmingham. In her hand she held a shoe, one shoe, from the foot of her dead child. We hold that shoe with her. Every one of us in the white South holds that small shoe in his hand.**

*We — who go on electing politicians who heat the kettles of hate. [The bomber] feels right now that he has been a hero. He is only guilty of murder. He thinks he has pleased us. We of the white South who know better are the ones who must take a harsher judgment.*

*We, who know better, created a climate for child-killing by those who don’t. We hold that shoe in our hand, Southerner. Let us see it*
straight, and look at the blood on it.

SLIDE Systemic Evil

Those of us who seek to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world and to be his follower must not forget how he felt about systemic evil. His life exuded the highest form of integrity and peace and what it meant to love those who we saw as enemies. Mahatma Gandhi described Jesus as the most active nonviolence resister known in history.

The life and teachings of Jesus give us a clear picture of what it means to resist systemic evil when he said to, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." He taught us to pray using the words that we will pray at the end of the service that we pray each week, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Jesus proclaimed the vision of God's realm and entered into Jerusalem in the last week of his life to confront a Roman Empire which was based on violence and oftentimes injustice. Even with his arrest and torture which led to a public execution, Jesus practiced resistance. He offered love and forgiveness even from the cross, while still insisting on the truth of God as a God of justice and mercy and grace.

We live in a bit of a cocoon in Durango if we are honest, but as followers of Jesus, we are called to care. One of the issues we need to struggle with, and indeed we are struggling with as a nation, is immigration. No matter what political vantage point you want to look at this issue from, or any issue for that matter, remember that we are called to be followers of Jesus first, which means we are to care about the foreigner, the least, the last and lost—the poor and oppressed. I don’t have an answer or the solution, but we have to care if we are going to take our faith in Jesus seriously.

In Luke 4:18 Jesus tells us why he came and the one of the focal points of his mission as he quotes the prophet Isaiah.

SLIDE 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free.”

If we are to take the ENTIRE gospel seriously we have to care about those who are forgotten, held captive, and oppressed. This should make us uncomfortable because faith is not just about Jesus and me, it’s about Jesus and WE—you and me; us and them; all of us together who have been created in the
image of God. This is why next week, on Sunday, January 26 at 12:30 we’ll have a forum on immigration so we can come as people of faith to have thoughtful conversation.

In all of these conversations we are called to remember that, appearing before Pontius Pilate Jesus proclaimed, "If my kingdom were from this world then my followers would use violence to protect me, but my kingdom is not of this world." The systemic evil which led to the crucifixion of Jesus was legal in the eyes of the Roman government while the Resurrection was totally illegal. Soldiers were even sent to guard the tomb door and put the Imperial seal upon the death of Jesus, as if to say, "We killed you. Stay dead."

How grateful each of us should be that Jesus practiced nonviolent resistance by saying clearly, "No, you can’t kill me. I'm alive and death can't keep me in the grave. I will rise again to defeat the ultimate form of systemic evil."

I know it might feel as though we are powerless, but we have immense power to affect systemic evil. Another area where we see systemic evil in today’s work is modern day slavery. While we might not think it exists, the truth is that slavery today is a $32 billion annual industry. Modern day trafficking is a type of slavery that involves the transport or trade of people for the purpose of work. According to the U.N., about 2.5 million people around the world are ensnared in the web of human trafficking at any given time.

Human trafficking impacts people of all backgrounds, and people are trafficked for a variety of purposes. Men are often trafficked into hard labor jobs, while children are trafficked into labor positions in textile, agriculture and fishing industries. Women and girls are typically trafficked into the commercial sex industry, i.e. prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation.

Not all slaves are trafficked, but all trafficking victims are victims of slavery. Human trafficking is a particularly cruel type of slavery because it removes the victim from all that is familiar to her, rendering her completely isolated and alone, often unable to speak the language of her captors or fellow victims.

**SLIDE International Justice Mission (Graphic)**

International Justice Mission seeks to make public justice systems work for victims of abuse and oppression who urgently need the protection of the law. IJM investigators, lawyers and social workers intervene in individual cases of abuse in partnership with state and local authorities.
By pushing individual cases of abuse through the justice system from the investigative stage to the prosecutorial stage, IJM determines the specific source of corruption, lack of resources, or lack of good will in the system denying victims the protection of their legal systems. In collaboration with local authorities, IJM addresses these specific points of brokenness to meet the urgent needs of victims of injustice.

IJM seeks 4 outcomes on behalf of those we serve:

1. **Victim Relief** – The first priority in its casework is immediate relief for the victim of the abuse being committed.

2. **Perpetrator Accountability** – IJM seeks to hold perpetrators accountable for their abuse in their local justice systems. Accountability changes the fear equation: When would-be perpetrators are rightly afraid of the consequences of their abuse, the vulnerable do not need to fear them.

3. **Survivor Aftercare** – IJM aftercare staff and trusted local aftercare partners work to ensure that victims of oppression are equipped to rebuild their lives and respond to the complex emotional and physical needs that are often the result of abuse.

4. **Structural Transformation** – IJM seeks to prevent abuse from being committed against others at risk by strengthening the community factors and local judicial systems that will deter potential oppressors.

Once again let’s remember what God’s word says to us about those ensnared in evil such as human trafficking. In Psalm 146 we read:

**SLIDE**

7 He gives justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry. The Lord frees the prisoners. 8 The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are weighed down. The Lord loves the godly. 9 The Lord protects the foreigners among us. He cares for the orphans and widows, but he frustrates the plans of the wicked. 10 The Lord will reign forever. He will be your God, O Jerusalem, throughout the generations. Praise the Lord!

When a brothel owner steals and enslaves a young girl, that abuser is not just stealing a child from her family; rather, he/she is stealing an image-bearer and a creation of God. Check out the truth of this issue in this video clip.

**VIDEO**

Call and Response Clip

**SLIDE**

International Justice Mission (Graphic)
If hip-hop artists and popular singers and movie stars care, don’t you think we should care? You might be struggling, as I have, with what we can do about issues like this. One thing we can do is write our representatives to let them know we care. I know many Americans believe we should only focus on some of our nation’s internal struggles like the economy and job production and immigration and who should get married to whom. But the truth is that when we are at best as a nation, it is when we care about others more than just ourselves.

IJM has an annual prayer gathering, bringing together prayer partners from all over the world. In 2011, this army of prayer warriors specifically asked God to end slavery in South Asia—to bring literal freedom to the over 15 million people currently enslaved through bonded labor and commercial sexual exploitation.

Only a few weeks after this gathering, a government official was tipped off about possible slavery in a brick kiln in his district. This government called IJM to ask for their help to bring rescue. Together, IJM and the government officials prepared for a major operation—they did not know the exact number of people enslaved in the factory, but, typically, IJM rescues between 15 and 30 people at a time.

However, on an April afternoon, a team of government officials, local police, and IJM staff entered the brick kiln. They did not just find a few dozen people or even a hundred people enslaved there...they found 514 people! There were men, women, and children and whole families whose freedom had been violently ripped away from them. These were families who had been oppressed, abused, and degraded. This became the largest rescue operation in IJM’s history—only a short few weeks after a thousand people prayed for God to show his power and reveal his heart of justice by ending slavery in South Asia.

IJM has brought literal freedom to thousands of children, men and women over the past few years. The God of shalom is on the move—we feel it in our souls, and we also see it in his work of bringing literal freedom in the here and now!

We may not have the same professional training or direct access to victims of violence that our friends at IJM do—but God’s call to us is the same. Prayer is the best place for us to begin seeking justice and freedom for the oppressed. We should not underestimate the ability prayer has to shift the tide of oppression and brokenness—in our own lives and in the lives of those who are desperately crying out for freedom.
I encourage you to go to IJM’s website, www.IJM.org, and sign up to become an IJM Prayer Partner. We need to learn—to practice!—praying about issues of injustice and God’s passion for justice and restoration. IJM will send you a weekly e-mail that details their most urgent prayer needs.

In your bulletin today you have a prayer guide from IJM that I encourage you to use as part of your devotional time in the coming days. You can find a full devotional with powerful stories at http://www.ijm.org/sites/default/files/IJM-Just-Prayer-Devotional-2013.pdf

SLIDE  Children’s Hope Ukraine (Graphic)

Two of Missionary’s you support with your offerings are Daniel and Janna Ross that you see pictured here on the video screen with some of their “kids” at Children’s Hope Ukraine. They run this Second Chance Transition Home meant to keep kids off the streets after they leave the orphanage in Ukraine where 60% of the girls resort to prostitution. Many of the girls are “claimed” and literally enslaved in a life that will be no life. You stand up against that each time you give money in our offering plate and shop at our Thrift Store. I am so grateful for Daniel and Jana and their ministry.

Each of us is called to resist systemic evil wherever it might rear its ugly head. But more often than not, our struggle will not be about power against power, or weapon against weapon. Our struggle will be one of weakness against power, vulnerability against callousness, and forgiveness against revenge. My prayer as your pastor is that we always seek the strength to overcome systemic evil and invite the power of the Holy Spirit to fill us so we can do that. Let’s pray...

SLIDE  Prayer

God, help us not to be overwhelmed by evil doers. Help us never to become jealous of those who do wrong. Help us to trust you. Help us to do good in the face of systemic evil. Help us to stand up to injustice—to search for truth—to not just go along to get along. Help us to watch those whose very lives exhibit hearts that are right. In the name of God the Creator and Jesus the Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.
"Systemic Evil"

Theme: The Line Between Good and Evil

Scripture: Psalm 37:1-8, 27-28a, 37

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:

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Meditation Moments for Monday, January 20 – Read Amos 5:20-24 – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., June 6, 1961: “So let us be maladjusted, as maladjusted as the prophet Amos, who in the midst of the injustices of his day could cry out in words that echo across the centuries, ‘Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.’ … I believe that it is through such maladjustment that we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man’s inhumanity to man into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.”

- Both Amos and Dr. King challenged actions and attitudes most people took for granted. Dr. King said, “I never intended to adjust to segregation, to injustice.” Have you ever seen people get used to harmful ways of relating in a family, school or office? In what ways has God changed your outlook on life, and sharpened your perceptions to see things more from God’s point of view? In what areas do you still want to change?

- Where do you see people and organizations working to “let justice roll down like waters”? How can you become “tuned in” to such work, even when it stretches your comfort zone? In what ways are you using your gifts and influence to uplift others, especially “the poor and the destitute, the lowly and the needy” (see Psalm 82:3-4)?

Prayer: Lord God, you care about the poor and destitute—emotionally and spiritually as well as financially. This takes in everyone—people I see every day, as well as people I will never meet personally. Break my heart for what breaks yours. Amen.

Tuesday, January 21 – Read Micah 6:1-8 – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., March 25, 1965: “Let us march on ballot boxes, until we send to our city councils, state legislatures, and the United States Congress men who will not fear to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with their God. Let us march on ballot boxes until all over Alabama God’s children will be able to walk the earth in decency and honor.”

- The prophet Micah said, some in his day were “skilled at doing evil. Official and judge alike ask for a bribe; the powerful speak however they like” (Micah 7:3). Today we see people around the world seeking change in governments, more freedom and human rights, and we see how tough this process is, as it was for Dr. King 50 years ago. How are you listening for, and responding to, God’s call for you to “do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God?”

- To Christians who said he shouldn’t break laws, Dr. King wrote from the Birmingham jail, “There are … just and there are unjust laws ... It was ‘illegal’ to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany …. law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice.” God calls each of us to “slow down,” to examine how our attitudes and our country’s laws “do justice.” When did you take a stand for justice? When did someone else bless your life by standing up for justice?

Prayer: Lord, prophets like Micah and Dr. King remind me that you care, not just about what I do at church, but in all of life. Give me the courage to be a witness to your ways seven days a week. Amen.

Wednesday, January 22 – Read Matthew 5:1-12 – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., November 6, 1956: “Don’t despair if you are condemned and persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Whenever you take a stand for truth and justice, you are liable to scorn …. I still believe that standing up for the truth of God is the greatest thing in the world …. The end of life is not to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. The end of life is to do the will of God, come what may.”
Dr. King also cited John 3:19 in various talks: “The light came into the world, and people loved darkness more than the light, for their actions are evil.” How does that verse cast light on the fact that even “people who make peace” (verse 9) are subject to hatred and harassment? In what ways are you willing to disturb your own comfort, and the comfort of those around you, in order to stand up for “the truth of God”?

The “frame,” if you will, around Jesus’ picture of joy and happiness (or blessedness) even for those who are persecuted for being righteous came in verse 12: “Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven.” What has helped you to value God’s approval and eternal rewards more highly than short-term human praise or comfort?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you were the ‘truth of God’ in human flesh. You said “the truth will set you free.” Free me to clearly see truth as you saw it, and to live it out in your spirit and your strength. Amen.

**Thursday, January 23** – Read Matthew 5:43-48 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., December 24, 1967: “Agape is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return .... This is what Jesus meant when he said, ‘Love your enemies.’ And I’m happy that he didn’t say, ‘Like your enemies,’ because there are some people that I find it pretty difficult to like .... I've seen too much hate to want to hate, myself .... every time I see it, I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear.”

Facing social or personal evil, we’re tempted to hate the wrongdoers, to feel that “like” and “hate” are the only choices. Dr. King (and Jesus) said there’s another option. Dr. King said, to those he called “our most bitter opponents”: “We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you .... be assured that .... we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory .... Easter is an eternal reminder of the fact that the truth-crushed earth will rise again.” Whatever evils you face, big or small, how can you more and more live into the spirit of agape?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, give me more and more of your agape love. Guide me as I move away from hating in response to wrongs done to me and others in my world. Teach me how to see my “enemies” as you see them. Amen.

**Friday, January 24** – Read Luke 10:25-37 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., April 3, 1968: “The first question that the Levite asked was, ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ Then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’ That’s the question before you .... The question is not, ‘If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?’ ‘If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?’ That’s the question.”

This quotation is from the last sermon Dr. King preached—he was shot the next morning. Do you believe the courage to ask, not “what will happen to me” but “what will happen to him (or her)” is the special preserve of a few heroic people, or is it a quality all of God’s followers can develop, at least to some extent? When has your life been made better because someone sacrificed to help you?

Earlier in his sermon, Dr. King used a striking phrase: he said we need a kind of “dangerous unselfishness.” Shouldn’t unselfishness be a safe, “feel-good” quality? What forces operate in human hearts and human societies to make unselfishness “dangerous”? In what ways have you seen courageous, unselfish actions make the world a better place?

**Prayer:** Lord God, like all humans, I have a natural instinct to take care of myself—and that’s not bad. But I ask you to keep growing my instinct and capacity to care about all your children, and to act on that when necessary. Amen.

**Saturday, January 25** – Read Psalm 30:1-5 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from his book *The Strength to Love*: “I read these words: ‘The United States Supreme Court today unanimously ruled bus segregation unconstitutional in Montgomery, Alabama.’ My heart throbbed with an inexpressible joy .... The dawn will come .... ‘Weeping may endure for a night,’ says the Psalmist, ‘but joy cometh in the morning.’ This faith adjourns the assemblies of hopelessness and brings new light into the dark chambers of pessimism.”

Scholar Donald Williams wrote, “In [the psalmist’s] illness there has been weeping, the sense of God’s absence, and mourning. Now ... the healing of God has turned sorrow into joy.” Dr. King’s words of hope came after a major step forward for racial justice. His “heart throbbed with an inexpressible joy” at the news of a ruling against bus segregation, celebrating a societal victory of light over darkness, just as Psalm 30 celebrated a victory of life over death. When have you had life events where “weeping has stayed all night”? In what ways has God’s healing turning your sorrow into joy? How have the things you’ve gone through helped to build your faith and trust in God?

**Prayer:** Lord, when I face hard times where "weeping may endure for a night," I thank you that the worst thing is never the last thing, that in the end you always turn sorrow into joy. Amen.
Family Activity: As a family, talk about who your friends are, what foods you like to eat, where you like to spend time and what you like to do with your time. Discuss how similar your family is to those you spend time with. What differences do you notice between your family and those you are usually around? If you don’t notice many differences, choose to build relationships with people who are different than you. Maybe they will be from a different culture or race, maybe they will speak a different language, or maybe they will eat different foods. Ask God to help you understand and appreciate the differences of others. Give thanks to God for creating such diversity in the world.