

But Be Doers of the Word and Not Merely Hearers Support for Workers & Union Organizing Proper 17, Year B

Overview

Focus Text: James 1:17-27

“But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.”

Scripture Commentary by the Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry, Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina

The language of this passage is marvelously energizing and suggestive. One is reminded of multiple images from Scripture: the language of Hebrews which speaks of the word of God as “living and active” (Heb 4:12); the parable of Jesus in which the word of God is sent forth like seed being randomly sown in soil (Mt 13:1-9, 18-23); the words of Isaiah in which the word goes forth, never to return empty (Isaiah 55:10-11); the dawn of the world when God spoke and creation came to be (Genesis 1:1-3). For James the Word of God is a living, vibrant reality.

Pastoral Reflection by the Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry

Discipleship is about what we do with our feet. The metaphor of feet is a rich one indeed. One of the powerful images of Scripture is that of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper (John 13). To be sure, the washing of feet was a sign of welcome and hospitality. It was in like manner an act of humility. It was also an act and a model of service.

How can we as people of faith support those who are quite literally on their feet all day at low paying jobs without health insurance and other benefits of life?

Personal Vignette on the Unionization Victory for Smithfield Packing Employees

Smithfield Foods is the largest hog producer and pork processor in the world. This multinational company is headquartered in Smithfield, VA, and has a massive operation in the Bladen County city of Tar Heel, NC. The company has \$7 billion in U. S. annual sales and \$1 billion in international sales. The five thousand workers at the Tar Heel plant slaughter, cut, pack, and ship more than twenty-five thousand hogs a day each day. The Tar Heel plant opened in 1993 and elections for unionization through the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) were held in 1994 and 1997. Included among the reasons union representation was sought was: hazardous working conditions, underreporting of injuries, denial that injuries were work related, discouraging workers from utilizing workers' compensation, threatening to terminate employment without just cause, to secure a living wage, and to secure health benefits.

Key Fact

Union membership rates in North Carolina have been in decline. The number of workers represented by or a member of a union in 1983 was 10.2 percent but that has dropped to 4.9 percent in 2010.