

Sermonette: Housing and Health, Susan Lebo

Aloha!

One world/one community. Every day world news, national news, and local news stations carry stories of the escalation of people lacking adequate housing, healthcare, and nutritious food. Every day, it becomes even more clear that achieving viable long-term, sustainable solutions to these most basic needs requires each of us to think globally and to act locally.

I work in Iwilei and most days I walk to work from my apartment Chinatown. On my way to work a week ago I counted the number of homeless people I passed. I have several routes to choose from, down King Street or Hotel Street, past the Salvation Army on Nimitz or past the Institute for Human Services on Iwilei. I took the Nimitz side that morning. My count was Forty! I took Iwilei side on my walk home. The number was higher and I stopped counting. Many of these people are not simply people I pass. Many are people I see every day. People I have short or long conversations with, or simply say hello to each day I pass. Some are chronically homeless, others recently homeless. More and more are young people in the late teens and twenties. Some are newcomers, but most are long time residents. Some gather each day seeking day labor work, others no longer seek assistance.

My friend Sheila has a master's degree. She is my age. She worked steady for more than 25 years. After losing her job in 2005 she became homeless. Her mental and physical health has deteriorated and she no longer is able to hold a steady job. Sheila lived in her car for several years. When we last visited she had moved into a gardening shed in someone's backyard for which she was paying monthly rent. No electricity, no bathroom, no kitchen, but it meant no longer having to live in the park, under the overpass or in her car.

We all have friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family members who face daily challenges, be it dealing with furloughs, layoffs, foreclosures, acquiring affordable housing, access to reliable and affordable healthcare. We, as a congregation and as individuals, have covenanted to promoting lives worth living and to building healthy communities, local, national, and international.

Let us reflect on and celebrate the actions we have taken to promote social justice, housing, health, tolerance, and acceptance as well as the actions we pledge to do tomorrow, be that supporting through donations and/or volunteerism, YO, Habitat for Humanity, creating tenant associations to promote tenant rights; hosting Family Promise families; hosting exchange students; participating in our OWL program, helping to draft legislation or to engage in public protests, civil marches and parades, contributing to food banks and food drives, disaster relief campaigns, our RE program, and the multitude of other actions that we hope you will take this opportunity to share.

Closing Words:

Poor/Rich

By Katey Ball

Poor

Hungry, Unfortunate

Starving, Freezing, Begging

Forgotten, Ashamed, Idolized, Lucky

Overspending, Flaunting, Flourishing

Entitled, Careless,

Rich

Katey's motivation to write this poem came from watching the news and realizing that over half of news stories were devoted to celebrities and the latest crimes they had committed. She thought, are there no bigger issues in the world today? Is it really imperative that we know how much weight a pop star has put on when we are engaged in global conflicts and when so many of our citizens are facing challenges ranging from access to a good education, to receiving a livable wage, to obtaining affordable housing, adequate healthcare, or simply getting enough to eat. So, I leave us all with the words:

WE HAVE POWER, INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A COMMUNITY. WE HAVE THE ABILITY EVERY DAY IN THE CHOICES WE MAKE AND THE ACTIONS WE TAKE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, TO CREATE THE WORLD WE WANT TO LIVE IN.