
Advent 4

Matthew 1:18–25

Human Beings—Not for Sale



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel and bring your liberating justice into our world. Strengthen our will to address injustice and to work towards the liberation of all who are in bondage. Bless us in our Advent journey. Give us eyes to see every human being as a beloved child of God and give us the courage to proclaim that human beings are not for sale.

Amen.

One of the names of God that I love the most is Emmanuel—
God with us. I remember being struck as a child by the amazing
notion that God came to us in human form. The idea of Emmanuel
as a baby and as a child made God approachable to me in ways that
other names and forms of God did not.

O come, O Come, Emmanuel quickly became one of my favourite hymns.

The life, baptism, death and resurrection of Jesus serve to make holy
the human condition. In our baptisms we are reminded that God
finds each and every one of us precious, that we are the beloved
children of God.

During this Reformation commemoration year we are boldly proclaiming
that human beings are not for sale. This is one of four important and
central themes adopted by our global Lutheran community. The
over-arching theme is *Liberated by God's Grace*. The sub-themes are
*Creation—Not for Sale, Salvation—Not for Sale and Human Beings—
Not for Sale*.

With regard to *Human Beings—Not for Sale*, we make that statement
with the knowledge of the reality that in our world there are places
where human beings *are* for sale. We'd like to think there is no longer
slavery in our world, but there *is*.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), over 21
million men, women and children around the world are in slavery.
Modern slavery has become the second most profitable criminal
activity in the world.

Someone is held to be in slavery if that person is forced to work
through mental or physical threat; is owned or controlled by an

'employer'; is dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property'; or is physically constrained or has restrictions placed on freedom of movement. Forms of modern slavery include bonded labour, child slavery, early and forced marriage, forced labour, descent-based slavery, and human trafficking.

Slavery exists today despite the fact that is illegal in *all* of the countries where it is practiced.

In the *Small Catechism* (1535), Martin Luther explains the 4th petition of the Lord's prayer and expands on the definition of "daily bread" to include everything required for the "necessities and nourishment for our bodies."

In a similar way, our understanding of *Human Beings—Not for Sale* might be expanded to include anything that detracts from the necessities and nourishment of our body.

When we think about modern slavery, these might include poverty, war and racism; being a refugee or being internally displaced; female genital mutilation; domestic violence, rape or honour killing; unchecked disease; the intergenerational trauma which is the legacy of *residential schools*; inadequate housing; the lack of safe drinking water; the commodification of our bodies; the societal emphasis on unattainable ideals of beauty; violence perpetuated in video games; and more. I am sure you can add more things to this list.

There are many times in my life that I have taken great comfort in the knowledge of the humanity of Jesus: that God truly understands the joys and the sorrows of human existence.

(Continued)

In Matthew 25 Jesus reminds us *Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.* Emmanuel—who came to ransom captive Israel—is also with those who are in bondage today.

God calls us to join in God’s holy work of liberation whether by providing comfort to those in need or by working to end unjust structures that continue to take away the human rights of God’s beloved children.

I hope that, as I do, you can continue to take comfort and strength from the promise that Emmanuel, our God, *is with us.* ♦



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A series of Advent devotions prepared by the leaders of Anglican and Lutheran churches in full communion.