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3 June, 2020

Yes, We Can!

"My help comes from God, the maker of heaven and earth." Psalm 121:2

My Jewish colleague, Arnold Bennet, used to say, "The fact of poverty in a country like Canada is a failure of public policy." At first I was a bit scornful of his proclamation – too simple to be true! But the more I thought about it the wiser Arnold seemed.

If our public housing policy, for instance, cannot safely put a roof over a family, then the children in the family cannot go to school. No school, no education, no job, no hope for the future. It's a straight line from inadequate housing right through to despair. And despair is the breeding ground for violence, addiction and revenge, as we have seen from the looting in the USA this week. Property rights mean nothing to people who have no hope of owning property.

"Ah," said the politicians who wanted to get elected. "Ah, but..." said the voters, who didn't want their taxes raised. "We *can't afford* better public housing." And so we didn't. We thought we *couldn't afford* a generous public housing system in Canada where no one had to live crowded 5 to a room, or 10 to a house. And we so didn't.

And now we see a further, completely predictable and preventable outcome of the housing policy we *thought* we could afford. People in public housing are dying faster of COVID-19 than those in single family dwellings. Our public housing policy, the one we could afford, is also a death sentence, it turns out.

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40. *What ever* we did for them, we did it for him. How did it come to pass that we put Jesus in deadly public housing for generations? And we didn't even notice?

Somehow, we forgot that *we can afford* a lot more than we think. That is one thing that this virus has truly shown us. Because *now*, it is the middle class who need the help, not just the poor. The middle class needs salary support, and rent relief, and job support. And the money has been found.

Rightly so! The money has been found, so that our nation does not fall into the grip of an economic depression. Of course we need to do all that we can to protect our citizens! But let us learn, also, that we could have done more all along, we could have afforded more, we could have protected more people, and saved their lives ... if we had just known that we could.

Now we know. Let's not fail again!
Grace to you, and peace.

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*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*