

Memory and Hope

Workers Memorial Day is celebrated each year on April 28, the anniversary of passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act in 1970. It is an opportunity to remember and honor the people who are killed or injured in workplaces, as well as a chance for people to recommit to making workplaces safer and healthier.

Scripture: Lamentations 5:1-5

¹Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us; behold, and see our disgrace! ²Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to aliens. ³We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows. ⁴We must pay for the water we drink, the wood we get must be bought. ⁵With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven; we are weary, we are given no rest.

Litany

Leader: Throughout history widows and orphans symbolized the fragility of life, the vulnerability of people. Widows and orphans became metaphors for the struggle for survival in the face of unjust situations. But they were also tangible and real – neighbors, friends, or family members. Everyone knew a widow and an orphan.

All: Grant us memory of widows and orphans.

Leader: Often women became widows, and children became orphans, because their husbands and fathers died while working in the fields of the wealthy or building the cathedrals of the rich.

All: Grant us memory of workers and their families.

Leader: As society progressed, the workplace became increasingly more dangerous – machines moving at treacherous speeds, workers scaling higher heights and digging deeper depths. Every second of every day was measured, with ever-increasing expectations. And managers began to view personal interaction between workers as “time theft.” So, in the midst of this the widows and orphans still labor and have no rest.

All: Grant us awareness of the widows and orphans.



Leader: Stress in the workplace increased animosity and alienation among co-workers. Fewer workers were expected to accomplish more work. The pace was unhealthy. Whether autoworkers or hotel workers, expectations began to exceed possibilities for safe completion of the work. So, in the midst of this workers are still injured and even killed in their workplaces.

All: Grant us awareness of these injured workers.

Leader: Our prophets continue to remind us to treat widows and orphans fairly, to take seriously their circumstances when considering how we distribute our wealth, and to watch their interests in the halls of power.

All: Grant us the compassion and wisdom to be advocates for the widows and orphans.

Leader: Our prophets continue to remind us that we are to be the voice of those injured in their workplaces. We are to stand with those unable to stand. We are to raise our voices to protect other workers from the same fate.

All: Grant us the compassion and wisdom to be advocates for our sisters and brothers in the workplace.

Leader: Our calling as God’s people is to be hope for the world.

All: Let us fulfill the hopes of the widows, the orphans, the workers who are injured in the workplace. Amen.

Prayer

Creator God, you formed the world and its people with your hands. As we use our hands, our heads, and our hearts in co-creating the world in our many and varied vocations, we are especially aware of our vulnerability and fragility. We suffer with those injured at the workplace. We mourn with the families of the killed and injured. But our mourning will be hollow without a change in our lives. Awaken our passion for justice for those workers who come in contact with dangerous chemicals, fast-moving machines, and long hours. And grant us hope. Amen.

