

**January 6, 2012**

***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

**A voice cries out.** As the New Year unfolds, voices of hope and promise for the year ahead fill the morning air. One of these voices is announced by the prophet Isaiah toward the end of Israel’s almost-fifty-year period in Babylonian exile, 540 BCE (Before the Common Era).

Envisioning a new future, it is a voice of hope for a better day, for a day of justice and restoration:

*In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, says the prophet. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain (Isaiah 40:3-4).*

At their deepest level, the voices of prophets over the centuries sound a chord of peace with justice. With deep yearning, they cry out for a more fair and just world, a world with a more level playing field; a world where, as the prophet prompts us, *the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.*

In looking back, one of the best things that happen at Christmas is that people become more aware of the discrepancies that exist between rich and poor, between the *haves* and the *have-nots*; and they’re moved to reach out and do something about it.

In a recent poll by the Public Religion Research Institute, more than 67% of those Americans polled said that government should do more to narrow the gap between these *haves* and *have-nots*. Curiously, the poll found that majorities of respondents of all religious groups, ages and education levels supported this view.

As the New Year breaks upon us, this is good news indeed. As Americans, it’s good to remind ourselves that just because our houses of congress have so egregiously failed us in recent times, doesn’t mean that we—the citizenry—do not have a sensible notion of justice and fairness.

Jim Wallis, a widely respected *evangelical* Christian leader (founder of *Sojourners Magazine*) noted that, *Many evangelicals, and especially their younger generation, now see poverty as a fundamental biblical issue and believe budgets are moral documents.*

The point is, we Americans know when things aren’t right. We know when the playing field is not level.

**A bending towards equality and fairness.** No matter our political persuasion, the majority of Americans of all stripes want to see an America where equal opportunity and

fair play exist for all citizens. Again, we know when the playing field is not tilted toward justice. And in particular, we know when it's tilted in favor of the few and when—everyday—the future of *the many* is a little more closed and hoped-for restoration and reform seem, sadly, more distant.

The recent social movement, *Occupy Wall Street*, is abundant testimony of this *yearning for a better day* that is sweeping across our nation. More than having a specific agenda or even recognizable leaders, the movement has become a voice for the underclasses, a voice that acknowledges, generally, that something is not right, that the crooked needs to be made straight and the uneven, level.

One of the qualities foreigners have historically admired most in us Americans is our sense of fairness in life. We have an ingrained soft spot in our heart for *the little guy*, for the underdog. We take pride in the legacy of our traditions and in our belief that if we work hard and do things *the right way*, opportunity's door will open to us.

What these recent polls suggest is that we Americans expect a level playing field, an equal opportunity to achieve and a sense that our community and national lives are defined by fairness and justice for all.

Let the voices cry out! Let the songs of hope and common fairness be sung! Let the passionate cry of the prophet echo across the land!

*Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall be made level and the rough places a plain.*