



MANITOBA / NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

Synod Devotions for Compassionate Justice 2017



“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

Liberated by God's grace, we are freed for reconciliation.

The word “reconciliation” has been defined as a “returning to faith or harmony after a conflict” (Wikipedia). In today’s social and political climate, we know about division, we know about opposing viewpoints, we know about divisive rhetoric and hurtful words. Perhaps we have seen political adversaries create devils out of their opponents; perhaps we have vilified others – turning the whole person into something to be dismissed and abandoned, instead of simply the idea with which we disagree.

Faith is about trust. Can we return to a place of trust when there has been division? Can we find common ground when we have been hurt, or perhaps when we have committed hurtful action? Is there harmony that can be sought after conflict?

If you joined in the service, or livestream, of the October 31st Prayer Service with Pope Francis and our Lutheran World Federation, you would have seen an expression of reconciliation. As Lutherans and Catholics, we are seeking ways in which we might work together, after centuries of conflict.

In Canada, we are looking for ways in which we might honour treaty relationships. How do we share land that has been inhabited by First Nation peoples for millennia, and how do we – as descendants of settlers who have now been here for a few centuries – live together?

Whether Lutherans and Catholics, or Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, or whatever else may divide us, we are called to a ministry of reconciliation! We are called to see the humanity in each other – to see each person as a child of God.

Let us pray...

God who mends, enter our brokenness and help us to be reconciled to you in our reconciliation with each other. Make us ambassadors for Christ, and point us to new living. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

An action to consider in your congregation:

Read the ELCIC’s Statement on implementing the UNDRIP, as a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #48

<http://www.elcic.ca/Documents/StatementonCalltoAction48.pdf>



Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes. (Isaiah 35:5-7)

Liberated by God's grace, we are freed for new relationship.

Going about our lives, it's easy to think about the things that matter to each of us, personally. We dream about a future where our needs are met: the house, the car, the perfect family. It is easy to think only about our own needs, our own wants, the things that make us comfortable.

But how do we factor in the needs of those around us? How do we make space for new ways of seeing the world, or needs that are different than ours?

As our church-year starts with the season of Advent, we wait and prepare, and we hear about mountains being brought low and valleys raised up. That God would come among us, and there would be this *leveling of the playing field* means more for how we live than we may want to consider. It means we – particularly in Canada, and among many of us in Lutheran congregations – may have to do things differently: giving up some of our wealth, giving

up some of our accumulated possessions so that people who are in need have enough. It means, in essence, a change in *systems* – the ways in which we've structured our society need to change for God's Reign.

There is a familiar verse from Isaiah 11: "the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" (vs. 6b). We speak of a new day, we hear scripture point to a new time. The relationships we've had – or have been comfortable with in the past – will be different! There is a mending, a *repair made* to something broken. Violence will give way to peace. All of this talk – these words of hope, these words of newness – describe what life will be like when God enters. When God reigns, the eyes of the blind shall be opened! When God reigns, there will be streams in the desert! We hold up passages like these around Christmastime because we are hopeful that God always comes among us – God became incarnate in a baby.

This new relationship is contingent on us. God works through us. We know what it's like to keep harmony in the home – whether it's between pets, or children, or perhaps reflecting back on our own experiences as children in our parents' homes. The new relationship we're called into with God is reflected in how we open ourselves to our neighbour. We are called to peace-filled living; we are called to be compassionate; we are called to open ourselves to people who are different than us so that we might be in caring relationship.

Let us pray...

God who joins us together, you welcome us at the font and you feed us at the Table. Point us to peaceful living with our neighbours, and help us forge new relationships. Through the uniting one who embodied compassion and peace, Jesus Christ. Amen.

An action to consider in your congregation:

Invite someone from your local KAIROS chapter to lead the Blanket Exercise – for more info

<http://kairosblanketexercise.org/>



But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.” Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’ (Luke 10:29-37)

Liberated by God's grace, we are freed to hold up "others."

Do we ever ask, “who is my neighbour?”

Who are the ones we refer to as “others?” Who fits into the “we” category in your life, and who fits into the “them” category?

It has been said that it is easy to know the right thing to do, it is hard to actually do the right thing. This probably has to do with the amount of responsibility we are willing to take on – often with good reason: we lead busy lives! But how do we do the right thing, delve into another situation, take on a cause outside of our own personal interests for the sake of someone else’s well-being?

The parable that we commonly refer to as “The Story of the Good Samaritan” is about communities that do not relate peacefully with each other – it would have been shocking for his listeners when Jesus mentioned “Samaritan.” And yet the story is about compassion, kindness, mercy, and how we are to relate with one another as human beings – not as Canadians, not as Lutherans, not even as Christians. Our Christian faith calls us to see the humanity in others, regardless of the others’ economic standing, or cultural background, or faith tradition.

Let us pray...

God of grace, point us to where we need to go. We work at discerning the way; we hesitate to follow because it can be hard. Give us courage, give us voices to speak for those who struggle to be heard. Thank you for being with us even through difficult conversations. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

An action to consider in your congregation:

Form a Circle for Reconciliation – see info at <http://circlesforreconciliation.ca/>

Liberated by God's grace, we are freed to live boldly.

The story of Malala Yousafzai is a familiar one in recent years because it is shocking: a girl, a Muslim, from Pakistan, who spoke in favour of education for girls and was shot by the Taliban for her advocacy, but she survived. And, further, she spoke even more publicly about the need for access to education for all children. She used the voice she gained through media reports about her story to speak up for people on the margins of her society, and for people feeling oppressed around the world.

We have opportunity to speak up. We have opportunity to initiate new relationships. We have resources, among us, to pursue big things, to try a different program, to engage in a project we've never done before!

Can we be bold? Martin Luther wrote in a letter to Melancthon in 1521, "Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world."¹ In other words, "sin boldly, but trust in Jesus even more!" Step out in faith! Trust that God is with you, even as you may go to new places, or step off the beaten path! We are called to do what is right, and we are called to work for the good of all. Let us not grow weary!

Let us pray...

God of all, be with us and give us courage when we go into new places, and when we meet new people. We know you desire unity among your people, and we work at our relationships. We pray for patience with each other, and hope for a future where we are one. We pray this in the spirit of the one who invited all to share in life abundant, Jesus Christ. Amen

An action to consider in your congregation:

Read "Mamoh Be-Mo-Tay-Tah – Let us Walk Together" freely download, or order print copies at

<https://www.councilofchurches.ca/social-justice/undoing-racism/>



So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all (Galatians 6:9-10a)

1. translated by Erika Bullmann Flores, found at <http://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/letsinsbe.txt>