

# Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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September 6, 2020

**Community is messy! In our texts today, we find reminders of how hard it is to find balance in community AND stay rooted in LOVE at the same time.**

In the Gospel, Jesus establishes that the way of the cross is communal and it is messy.<sup>1</sup> In community, there is clash of personality and worse, people HARM and OFFEND one another. He knows his followers will struggle to put LOVE that he teaches into practice in the midst of conflict and competing demands.

Paul too, in Romans, writes to a community of believers who are experiencing this struggle- it's a group of culturally diverse people and who were also struggling to find a way forward in the midst of conflict. Not everyone shared the same habits, way of life, or convictions.

**If you are like me, you can relate A LOT to this state of DISequilibrium- we see it in our homes, our cities and on our PLANET.**

It's interesting- how, for some of us, a GLOBAL PANDEMIC has brought to light the HARM that we have done to this delicate balance that we live in with ALL creation- with our fellow humans, but also our community of all created things- the waterways, forests, and even the air we breathe.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Carter, "Matthew," *The New Testament Fortress Commentary on the Bible*, P157

We saw our impact to creation when in April, the earth experienced a “peak drop” of carbon dioxide emissions- about 17%, that is 1 billion tons of CO2 NOT being dumped in the air.<sup>2</sup> It took a GLOBAL pandemic to get the world to slow down- for individuals, corporations, and countries to change our behavior.

But some communities have known LOOONG before COVID hit how OUT OF BALANCE we were. Theologian Cynthia Moe-Lobeda uses the term “**Climate Privilege**” to talk about how high-consuming people and societies experience the LEAST effect of climate change.<sup>3</sup> She documents how people who are “**climate vulnerable,**” that is, people who are most likely to experience the effects of climate change, are largely people of color in the Global South.

I SAW this first hand in southern Mexico with Indigenous Mayan communities where subsistence farmers no longer receive the rainfall that they used to and as their corn crops dry up, many families seek other ways to survive- planting cash crops like the African palm tree (which decimate the soil within a few years and often leave families worse off than before) or families would migrate to look for more industrial jobs in big cities nearby, or sometimes to the US. **They are paying a debt that that is not theirs. Suffering the consequences of an imbalance they did not cause.**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/05/19/greenhouse-emissions-coronavirus/?arc404=true>

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda. “Climate Change as Climate Debt: Forging a Just Future,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*. 36 no 1 Spr - Sum 2016, p 27-49.

We, as residents in the US are the highest carbon footprints- per person- in the world.<sup>4</sup> Yes. We, **especially**, are out of sync with just about every other nation on this earth and with the whole community of creation.

We do not listen to the earth's plea and our neighbors' pleas to restore the balance among our social, economic, and ecological realities. Rather, again and again, we prioritize ourselves at the expense of others.

We are out of sync with the community of creation- just like in the texts. What we see is that in the midst of the DISequilibrium Jesus calls the disciples to TRUTH-TELLING, LISTENING to the one they have harmed, and to RESTORE what's broken.

In this gospel- we know that the author likes to make connections to Judaism. And In Judaism- Torah is central. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus says that he came not to end the law, but fulfill the law.<sup>5</sup> By law- he is referring to the TORAH, which WE know as first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Torah is the set of laws that God gave to the Israelites after being liberated from being slaves in Egypt. God gives them a set of rules to live by so that God's vision for a liberated people would continue and so they would thrive living in a new land in community with each other.

The Torah incorporates love of neighbor and extends this love to ALL OF creation. God, through Moses declares that every 50 years there should be a **Jubilee** year – which is rooted in the idea of restoring balance- and

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<sup>4</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC?locations=US>

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:17.

everyone will return property, cancel debts, and ALSO, they will let the land rest and only consume what is produced naturally for a whole year.<sup>6</sup>

The Torah lets us know that God's vision for the Israelites is one based on love of neighbor AND **creation**.

Understanding the gospel text in light of the Torah, points us to the love of God and love of all Creation that should be at the CORE of how we live and move in the world. And it points us to God's vision of liberated community of creation, where balance is restored.

Like the communities in our texts, we have strayed from God's vision for creation. But God continues to liberate creation and continues to invite us into that work.

Because so many people have stayed at home during the pandemic—we have consumed less, drove less, traveled less- the earth has also suffered less. But experts say we need to see the same drop in emissions for years ahead in order to reverse the course of climate change.

What would it look like to reach that goal? To continue to bring new life about....to come together to continue to give rest to the earth and the lives most impacted by climate change and climate privilege? What if all the climate vulnerable people around the world and in our own city in Lawndale, Little Village- are finally able to live with clean air – and have one less thing that keeps them from breathing?<sup>7</sup>

This year we have seen what is possible- let's not let that ball stop rolling! Today marks the beginning of the Season of Creation- which is a

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<sup>6</sup> Leviticus 25.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bettergov.org/news/interactive-map-pollution-hits-chicagos-west-south-sides-hardest/>

“worldwide celebration” by our ecumenical faith partners that focuses on “prayer and action to protect our common home.”<sup>8</sup> This year, it focuses on Jubilee- which you remember is rooted in rest for weary people and creation- and is “rooted in the idea of BALANCE between social, economic and ecological realities.”<sup>9</sup> And so, this Season of Creation we are invited to enter into PRAYER and ACTION devoted to restoring the balance of life on earth- throughout the five weeks... and beyond.

We’ve provided some tools through our Action Guide [link on screen]. In there, you can use the “Earth Examen Meditation” as a way to observe the balance of created things and your role in it. In that guide you’ll also find two letter writing campaigns to improve air quality through stricter air policies. I urge you to check out that guide and find these two things you can do TODAY to restore the balance that God intends for all creation.

I admit, climate change seems insurmountable. But we have SEEN what is possible, what GOD can do through us. Let’s be God’s hands and feet and not lose the vision for a healed earth and **fully balanced community of creation**- where we all have what we need to be well and THRIVE.

AMEN.

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<sup>8</sup> “Season of Creation Celebration Guide,” <https://seasonofcreation.org/celebration-guide/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.