

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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You may have noticed that today we had all four readings, including the Psalm, for the first time in a year and a half or so. Due to screen fatigue and COVID concerns, we've been only reading the gospel and one other reading. Naturally, this allowed us to explore a text or two with more depth. Today, we can look at the breadth of the readings and a theme that connects them.

Most Sundays, the readings have a connecting theme or themes that relate to the liturgical year. In the Lutheran church, today's liturgical day is Reformation Day. On this day, each text shares a renewed understanding of how humankind is brought into the life of God.

For example, let's look at Psalm 46. It began with chaos in verse 2-4, then it reminded us of God's presence among political turmoil in verses 5-8, and it concluded with God's end to warfare in verse 9-12. With this Psalm or song, we are renewed with the assurance that in tumultuous times God is nearby, and that God is the harbinger of peace.

Now, the other three readings bring us similar messages. Jeremiah is a little bit different in that this prophet is longing for a time where we don't need to teach, read, and learn how to bring about God's justice, peace, and love, but rather each person embodies it. It's a renewed vision of the world, where God's life is pre-existing and fully present. John's gospel renews our understanding as Jesus proclaims that truth is not a *what*; instead, truth is a *who*. Another way to put that is that it's less about the information and more about the embodied relationship. Finally, in Paul's letter to Romans, we are renewed with the realization that we are brought into the life of God through action and not status. But it's not *our* action, it's God's action. You see, each of these readings are set in a different time, with different outlooks, problems, and social structures, yet within each reading, God illuminates a renewed connection with God.

Today, I'm reflecting on our last Homecoming and Reformation Sunday. It was the beginning of our worst surge in cases, hospitals were reaching capacity, and the death toll was growing exponentially. The world was different back then—there were no vaccines approved for adults, and we weren't even talking about children's vaccines. Like so many of our individual lives, the church was in survival mode.

A year later, the landscape is more hopeful. A majority of adults in Chicago and all of the adults surveyed in our congregation are fully vaccinated. A vaccine for children ages 5-11 is likely to be approved for use this week. Our survival is slowly giving way to a renewed sense of life.

We are starting to determine what that means in our own lives—we're figuring out if that means a career change; moving to a new location; ending, starting, or deepening a relationship; or recommitting to that which has grown in value. So too, this is happening in the church. Phyllis Tickle called this period in the church a holy rummage sale. It's the time to release what is not working right now, to hold on to what is renewing our connection to God, and to reassemble what has possibility. This is the work of the church this next decade. Whether we like it or not, we are amid God's reformation.

And 504 years ago today, there was a German monk who volunteered at a similar rummage sale. He wrote down 95 points that he wanted to discuss—some things he wanted to toss out of the church, others he wished to keep, and some to be reassembled in a new way. That beer-drinking professor tacked his talking points on a church door and was part of a renewal movement that we now call the Protestant

Reformation. That man, of course, was Martin Luther, the namesake of our denomination.

Ok, I've thrown a lot at you in this sermon. It's clear that, this year, I'm thinking of Martin Luther, I'm pondering the last year of our lives, and I'm holding the scripture's reminders—the reminder that God always meets us in our specific time, place, and social location to renew our connection to God's work. With all of that, I'm wondering, are you ready for a rummage sale? Well, in honor of that beer-guzzling monk, I want you to look in your bulletin where you'll find a few sticky notes. There, I'd invite you to ponder the question: What do we need to keep, toss, or rebuild in the church to better connect with God's work in this time and place?

On each sticky, write one thing that the church needs to toss, keep, or rebuild so that we can best participate in God's work. Be sure to note if it's something to keep, toss, or rebuild. Then, like Luther, tack your note on the doors to the sanctuary or drop your thoughts in the chat at any point during the rest of the service. This is all brainstorming, so there are no wrong answers.

If you're having trouble, here are a few of my sticky notes:

- Keep: God's expansive and unending love.

- Toss: Racist systems – intentionally or unintentionally built over generations, how food and culture have been associated with Lutheran
- Rebuild: Relationship with creation—to better care for God’s gift
- Keep: God’s abundant grace
- Toss: Sexism and heterosexism
- Rebuild: Sermons

As you write, remember, you're not alone. Remember the Psalmist, who was renewed in the knowledge of God's presence. Remember Jeramiah who imagined God's love beyond knowledge and embed it in our hearts. Remember Jesus who renewed our understanding of embodied, relational, and incarnate truth. Remember, Paul who renewed our understanding that it's not about what we do but it's about what God has done. Yes, rummage sales are difficult work, and the outcome is uncertain. But we're in good company—Luther, Paul, Jesus, Jeramiah, and the Psalmist have all been there and that is why we are here. As we rummage, two things are certain: God's love is ever-present, and God is with us in this journey—God is here in the people in this place and in this Holy Meal that strengthens us. Thanks be to God for another holy rummage sale. Amen.