

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's readings focus on God's reign. They give us a glimpse into how God acts, and they invite us to respond to God's action. In Isaiah, we have an image of God comforting as a mother. In Luke's gospel, we are reminded of the importance of receiving hospitality and in turn, providing hospitality. Like the seventy-two who were sent had nothing to offer – no purse, no bag, no sandals – these individuals came bringing peace and healing, which are part of God's vision for the world. And, both Paul in Galatians and Jesus in Luke's gospel remind us that we should not boast in what we do, but rather in what God has done. Therefore, as Paul states, "whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all and especially those of the family of faith." In summary, God's reign is about peace and healing, it's about God's action, it's about giving and receiving hospitality, and it's about working for the good of all. On the surface, it's straightforward and clear, but it's more difficult than you might think.

After all, how often do we want recognition of our acts of love and service, maybe with our name displayed after a donation, public praise from a leader, or an egotistical social media post? Or, what about our desire to be the one that serves someone we deem "needy" while missing the good news and life that is born in relationship with another? Or, how hard is it for us to be the one who receives hospitality when we are vulnerable in illness, old age, or in a foreign place? Or, how hard is it to work for the good of all, including those who walk, talk, act, and believe differently?

If you've been in this congregation for a few years, you know that each fall we have an "expected giving campaign." This is a time where we ask givers to share what level of financial gifts we might expect for the next year so that we might create a responsible and balanced budget that is aligned with our values and goals. What we know to be true is that our budget is a moral and missional expression of our priorities and concerns. It reveals what we care about, how we treat people, and where our priorities are for the future. So too, we can analyze our congregation's budget to see how aligned or misaligned it is with God's reign for peace, healing, and the care for all people that we heard about in today's reading.

So too, the government's budget is a moral illustration that can reveal how aligned or misaligned it is with God's vision for the world. Last Thursday, the U.S. Congress passed a budget package called "One Big Beautiful Bill Act." Following their adoption, the presiding bishop of our denomination (essentially our pope) called the bill "generation-defining and life-altering for many, with provisions that will harm the well-being of local communities and the lives of many individuals for generations to come."¹ What we see is that part of our nation's budget is misaligned with God's calling to cultivate peace and healing while seeking the well-being of all. After all, our denomination has long supported Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (called SNAP and also known as food stamps) along with other programs that are expressions of God's care and compassion.² According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the bill transfers wealth

¹ <https://www.elca.org/news-and-events/bishop-eaton-statement-on-obbbas-passage>

² <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/How-the-Senate-Budget-Reconciliation-SNAP-Proposals-Will-Affect-Families-in-Every-US-State.pdf>

from those in the bottom 10% of income to those in the top 10% of income, shamefully funding tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans on the backs of the most vulnerable.

The bill also threatens family and community stability by adding over \$170 billion for immigration and border enforcement.³ In short, that means it's doubling the spending each fiscal year to fund ICE detention centers, the border wall, deportations and more ICE agents to triple the number of daily deportations. Furthermore, this bill harms future generations by increasing the national debt and exposing future generations to dirtier air and a hotter climate by reversing our clean-energy transition.

Remember the reading from Galatians where Paul said, "So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all and especially for those of the family of faith." Paul calls us not only to care for Christians but to care for all people. So too, Luther explains the Fifth Commandment, which is "you shall not kill," by saying, "we are to fear and love God so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors but instead help and support them in all of life's needs." And Luther describes our neighbor as anyone God places before you, including your enemies, and he goes on to say that inaction toward a neighbor is also causing them harm.

You see, Luther, Paul, and, most importantly, Jesus make a radical claim for ethical responsibility. No matter who we voted for, where we get our news, or what city we live in, we are to live for and care for others. Every person

³ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/fact-sheet/house-reconciliation-bill-immigration-border-security/>

regardless of their country of origin, socio-economic status, or ability to work. God's vision is for a world where radical generosity reigns, service is our currency, and peacemaking is our goal.

While it can be overwhelming and feel powerless to see this bill pass, it does not change our commitment to love and serve all people. For we have a God that is described in the Bible as a mother who comforts us and provides for our flourishing. We have influence and power in our little corner of the world to serve here at the church to make sandwiches to feed the hungry, that encourage us to participate in creating "Bags of Love" for the most vulnerable, that inspire us to share in a meal and conversation with the marginalized at Trinidad Lutheran church each month, and that remind us that we are not alone in this work.

A couple of weeks ago I spoke with Diana from the Coalition to Save Our Mental Health Centers. You may remember that a few summers ago we supported a ballot measure to ensure that low-cost mental health care will be provided in the West Town/Humboldt Park community through a small property tax increase. This is not something that can be taken away by elected officials and will last forever. In talking with her, I learned how much closer we are to making it a reality in our neighborhood and how far we've come to make this a reality across the city. It is this work to care for the vulnerable and to ensure that it cannot be changed by the whims of an elected official that show me glimpses of God's vision.

As Paul reminded us, "so then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all." As Jesus reminded us, we are sent into the world to share

God's peace and healing. If the other does not receive the peace, shake it off, for in your gift of peace the reign of God has come near. There is much work to be done, but we do it together. May we strive for justice, feed the poor, care for the sick, and advocate for God's reign to be fully realized as we care for all. Know this, dear friends: the kingdom of God has come near. Amen.