**First Lutheran Church, St. Peter, MN**

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**Reconciling in Christ: We are all one body of Christ**

**1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21**

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen

It’s my privilege to be with you this morning as Reconciling in Christ congregations across the ELCA are renewing their commitments to the full inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, a step First Lutheran took in 2008. Did you know that there are only 2 Reconciling in Christ congregations in your entire synod – out of 247 churches?

I bring you greetings from the Board and Staff of ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation, where I serve as the Regional Director for Minnesota, North and South Dakota. My quick job description is to help congregations in the region to live into the new polices of the ELCA in both pew and pulpit.

In our gospel reading this morning, we hear Jesus’ inaugural sermon – in the same week we heard our country’s first African American President deliver an inaugural speech with greater promise of full inclusion for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people than ever before. I am touched by the inclusion of Stonewall – the start of the LGBT movement – alongside Seneca Falls, and Selma, Alabama in his recounting of movements for freedom and equality in our country’s history.

“Inaugural addresses are important. President Obama used his to announce the priorities of his second term by presenting a vision for what this country can and should be. A century and a half earlier, President Lincoln used his second inaugural address to do something no President had ever done before – to speak in critical terms of the nation – in order to name the evil of slavery, to name the toll it had exacted in human flesh and warfare, and the need to stay the course to resolve both the war and its cause.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

“So what kind of vision do we hear in Jesus’ address? Jesus announces his mission and provides a description of the kingdom of God. It is a promise of God’s aid and presence. And all of this and more is summarized by the words *good news*:”[[2]](#endnote-2)

Listen to the translation of our gospel reading in The Message:

*God’s Spirit is on me;
    God has chosen me to preach****/to live/to be***

 *the Message of good news to the poor,
Sent me to announce* ***good news****: pardon to prisoners and
    recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the burdened and battered free,
    to announce,* ***“This is God’s year to act!”*** (emphasis added)

Professor David Lose of Luther Seminary says that: “This is good news only if we are willing to admit what is hard in our lives, to name what is lacking and what has been difficult. This is good news for those who are oppressed, those who are blind, and those who are poor, hungry, in need! God offers words of comfort, and such words mean something more to those living with discomfort.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

I’m afraid too many people hear that today and think it means someone else. And at the same time, “There is so much pressure on us externally from the culture at large and internally from ourselves to not need anything or anyone that I wonder if Jesus’ message is really heard.

“Except for one thing. The stories we tell ourselves about being perfect, the commercials we pay attention to telling us that we really can have it all, the ads that promise us that if we just purchase this product or that we will never feel insecure again – these are all false. And deep down inside, we know it.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

So, while Jesus’ message is good news, in order for all of us to hear it that way, we must recognize that we are not really free to be who we want to be, can be, and should be.” As Martin Luther King, Jr. told us: “None are free until all are free.”

Those who don’t, *or can’t, or won’t* see and admit their own need want nothing to do with him. But when we can be honest about our lives, especially about our deep hurts, fears, and longings, three things happen:

1. We feel an immense freedom simply from admitting the truth, from telling our stories with integrity and authenticity. And it’s validating to be listened to with compassion.
2. We can receive the help and comfort God offers – release, sight, healing, freedom, and more. Being part of the Body of Christ, offering who we are and receiving the grace of community.
3. We realize we don’t simply receive help and comfort, we are also invited to offer it to others. We are invited not just to hear and receive good news, but to BE the good news.

This, in a sense, is what the Body of Christ and community of faith is – God’s hands delivering the promise of good news to all who come in need.

For those who are afraid, we learn how to share courage. We learn to listen deeply, into the fears and concerns of others – especially those we feel are against us.

For those who are lonely or isolated, we give an invitation. Come join our community. Let us act together.

For the discouraged, we gather together and encourage one another. As St. Paul wrote about the members of the Body of Christ working together, we do not say to anyone – “you are not needed or un-important.” All human beings deserve acknowledgement, inclusion, equality, and opportunity.

What does our gospel reading tell us about what we are called to be, to do, and to say in the months ahead? As one who spent the 1980’s leading hundreds of what I came to call the Sunday morning forum “Meet the Homosexual Show,” I can vouch for how freeing and empowering it is to tell your own story of life and faith. When First Lutheran considered the decision to become a Reconciling in Christ congregation, some of you told your stories about why welcoming LGBT people in this congregation matters to you personally.

I invite you to join me in sharing your story as a Reconciling in Christ congregation in your synod – the SW MN Synod. Might we set a goal together of doubling the number of RIC Congregations to a total of 4? First Lutheran can witness to the ways congregations that have become RIC are stronger, less conflict avoidant, healthier in membership and finances, and reach out to people who have never been part of any church. Reconciling in Christ is not just a program. It’s about communities that live into the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus left to us. We are to be reconcilers amongst humanity even as we are reconciled through Christ Jesus.

In the Body of Christ, Youth can’t say “I have no place here.” Middle aged folks can’t say to Elders: “We don’t need you.” Gay can’t say to straight: “We don’t need you.” Bisexual and Transgender people can’t be discounted. Allies are essential. Whatever our race, nationality, educational background, or physical abilities – there is a place for every one of us as members of the Body of Christ.

Reconciling in Christ communities recognize the importance of continued conversation across the walls human beings continue to build to keep us separated by kind. We are all members of the Body of Christ embodied in all sexual orientations and gender identities, embodied in the poor, the differently abled, the homeless and hungry. We have heard Jesus’ vision, his inaugural address. We have been invited to live out God’s inclusive welcome. This is God’s year to act! Reconciling Works in every community. Amen.

1. David Lose, Luther Seminary’s Working Preacher Letter 1/20/13. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)