

Gospel reflections

Matthew 28:16-20

Last Wednesday, Reconciliation Week began with hope and healing the focus of our relationships with the Indigenous people of Australia. On May 25, the murder of George Floyd horrified us, and the images of protests and riots have consumed our screens since. The death of George Floyd at the hands of police has given us cause to feel grief also for the many deaths in custody of our own Indigenous peoples. It has been a week to think about the prejudice, inequity and pain experienced by the marginalised across the world and especially in our own country and communities. All of this amid a global pandemic that has taken 371 857 lives and caused ever increasing ripples of pain and loss. Ripples of suffering that reach into our own school and early childhood communities as families struggle with a myriad of challenges. Ripples that meet the hurt that is already there in the eyes of the child who is excluded from games, taunted for something they cannot change or struggling with their learning, in the tears of a staff member coping with family illness and the anger of parents experiencing marriage breakdown. There are days when the pain of the world is palpable, and we can almost hear it groaning.

Into this landscape we have this week's gospel reading which is Jesus' final words to his followers at the close of Matthew's gospel. Jesus stands with the 11 disciples, who are struggling to get their head around what has happened and what it means for them. They come to Jesus, worshipping, and some doubting, to be with him for the last time. Jesus gives them a mission and his words are empowering, encouraging and reassuring.

So what does this passage mean for leaders in Lutheran education communities today? For me, it reminds us of why we exist, that we are learning communities, that make known God's love for each child or student and member of the community. Jesus doesn't take us off to another heavenly place but sends us into this world, into the relationships and lives around us, bringing God's loving, healing presence and hope. Being 'sent' does not mean that we preach at people about a *bubble gum pink* kind of God's love in ways that deny the anguish or injustice experienced by others but rather we enter into relationship, being fully present, listening and walking beside others in the midst of their suffering. We show in words and actions that they are not alone and loved. At the same time we are called to work towards peace, reconciliation and justice for those who experience prejudice and inequality and we provide learning environments where our children and students can learn about these issues and take action.

This passage also captures what it means to be a follower of Jesus as we see the disciples worship and some still doubting. Doubting will be a part of the journey for those who follow Jesus. A life of faith is not one glorious ride of certainty but rather a calling, a relationship in which we will at times stumble and look for God's presence and promises. It is in these times that we need each other to provide assurance that Jesus is with us always.

Our core documents describe our mission and challenge us each day to explore what it looks like, sounds like and feels like.

The foundation of Lutheran education is the gospel of Jesus Christ (which) informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities [The LCA and its schools, 2001].

Lutheran schools and early childhood services, as part of the mission of the Lutheran church, are communities of worship and service, sharing and living the good news of Jesus Christ. [Growing deep 2014]

What a gift and responsibility. As this Reconciliation Week draws to a close and our world groans with pain and brokenness, what a message we have to share as followers of Jesus. In case it is all a bit overwhelming, Jesus closes with a promise: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:20). Jesus, Emmanuel, which means "God with us" (1:23), promises to be with us always and renews us each day with hope.

Lutheran schools and early childhood services are communities of hope, nurtured by the promises of God's word, love and forgiveness which empower staff and students to embrace the future with confidence. Growing deep

Inspiration from other followers

We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it. **Madeleine L'Engle**

So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: "I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also! **Martin Luther**

One of the most destructive mistakes we Christians make is to prioritize shared beliefs over shared relationship, which is deeply ironic considering we worship a God who would rather die than lose relationship with us. **Rachel Held Evans**

Your life as a Christian should make non-believers question their disbelief in God. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the Gospel, period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned for the whole person. **Desmond Tutu**

I'm part of this tradition. I'm part of this global, historic stream of people who believe that God has not left us alone but has been involved in human history from the beginning. People who believe that in Jesus, God came among us in a unique and powerful way, showing us a new kind of life. Giving each of us a new vision for our life together, for the world we live in. And as a part of this tradition, I embrace the need to keep painting, to keep reforming. **Rob Bell**

[Love made flesh](#) **Brene Brown**