



**Proclaiming Christ's Mercy —
Building Stronger Communities**

A Campaign for Lutheran Housing Support
and its Metro St. Louis Projects

**Mid-Week Worship Resources
for Lent**

WELCOME HOME:

A Campaign for Lutheran Housing Support and its Metro St. Louis area projects

The LCMS National Housing Support Corporation (Lutheran Housing Support) is a non-religious 501(c)3 organization that partners with neighborhood revitalization groups across the county to rebuild and restore deteriorating communities. NHSC focuses on providing residents the tools they need to transform their own neighborhoods.

Since 2007, Lutheran Housing Support has demonstrated a long-term commitment and support to its neighbors in the North St. Louis neighborhood of College Hill, providing leadership and financial resources to the area and has engaged more than 30 partners and the area's residents in building a viable community development plan for the neighborhood. **Altogether, this coalition has attracted more than \$4 million in direct and indirect investment to the College Hill community in the last nine years.**

College Hill Neighborhood
Revitalization Initiative



In the past several years, Lutheran Housing Support's commitment to the Metro St. Louis area has continued to expand. Working with Rev. Willie Stallworth and the people of Unity Lutheran Church, Lutheran Housing Support is helping these local partners develop their own community revitalization effort. **The Lansdowne Community Initiative (LCI) is working to renew a spirit of community that will stabilize and revitalize the Lansdowne neighborhood.**

Rev. Dwight Dickinson and the people of Great Commission Lutheran Church have imagined a brighter future for the Ville Neighborhood in North St. Louis since the congregation was organized in 2004. The Turner Middle School Re-Development project is no small undertaking; this \$13-million project will re-develop an abandoned St. Louis public school building. **What was originally built as the home of Harris-Stowe Teachers College will soon be home to 17 units of senior housing, an inter-generational day care, a home healthcare agency, and the church sanctuary.**



Great Commission Lutheran Church
**Turner Middle School
Re-Development**

PROCLAIMING CHRIST'S MERCY

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Mercy as sacred vocation. *The church is Christ's body, and as such, she continues his life of mercy as a witness to the love of God for body and soul. ... The church can no more ignore the physical needs of people than Christ could have refused to perform healings or persons can be separated into body and soul in this life. ... We care for people in need, not with any ulterior motive, nor even in order to proclaim the gospel. We proclaim the gospel and care for the needy because that's who Christ is, and that is who we are as the church in this world (John 14; Acts 4:12).*

Excerpted from "A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century"
by Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison
Journal of Lutheran Mission
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**Week 1: The Ministry of Mercy: RESTORE
Restoring The Blessing of Life Intended By God**

Rev. John Albers

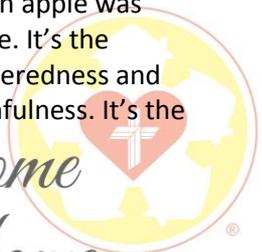
Dir. of Resource Development, LCMS National Housing Support Corporation

“Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
You shall be called the repairer of the breach,
The restorer of streets to dwell in.”

It’s fashionable these days to imagine that the church, that God’s people should change the way we have been at work in the world, and begin really helping people with everyday sort of problems, the kind of problems that not only destroy lives but overwhelm neighborhoods. Come to find out, that the call to a ministry of mercy is an ancient one. The prophets, and most especially Isaiah and his contemporaries, were regularly calling God’s people to this ministry, and not in some sort of vague, ambiguous way that’s difficult to live each day, rather, in some specific, to the point way that include some precise steps that can be easily included in an annual congregational action plan.

It’s not as if the ancient situation was really all the different the one we face today. Today, as in ancient days, God’s people daily seek after God and delight to know God’s ways. That’s not to say we haven’t lost our way, just like the house of Jacob who seemed to turn the ways of God’s kingdom into a self-seeking way; into some sort of process to satisfy our own desires.

The work of sin is not a new thing, and that certainly should not surprise us. That a breach would be realized between God and his people should trouble us, but it’s something that’s been a problem for time in memoriam; it’s been the focus of God’s work since he first took a walk in the garden in the cool of the day and realized an apple was missing from the tree that was off limits to Adam and Eve. It’s the reason God sent prophets, to speak out against self-centeredness and selfishness and sin and once again call his people to faithfulness. It’s the



reason God continues to send modern-day prophets to do the same, to call us to the work of mercy in the world today.

The ministry of mercy is all about working to restore communities and, for that matter, the people whose lives have been destroyed by the power of sin. That, in many ways, could describe the ministry of Jesus. The details aren't all that different from the details that describe the ministry of mercy that Lutheran congregations sponsor throughout the Metro St. Louis area. Food pantries, clothing banks, homeless ministry, emergency assistance ... it's just the tip of the iceberg. It's what Jesus did ... it's what God's people in Christ do. It's really just as simple as that.

“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

Actually, the ministry of mercy is all about working to restore the blessing of life that is intended by God. For some that will mean restoring some form of freedom in place of bondage, for others it will mean food, for others clothes and still others a safe place to call home. Whatever the details, the underlying work remains the same – restoring that which God intended for those whom God loves.

So here's the challenge for the church today, how do we rebuild? How do we work to build on the foundations of communities and neighborhoods that are crumbling, a shadow of their former selves? In many cases we, the church, are already there. In some cases, our presence has been reduced to a mostly-empty building, a remnant of a congregation struggling to be a presence in a neighborhood. In other cases, there is a surprisingly vibrant ministry that has reinvented itself to meet the needs of a people in the neighborhood that has changed incredibly from the neighborhood that once was. In each case they are responding to the call to repair the breach that sin has wrought.

There is this one other piece of the puzzle that comes along with the ministry of mercy. It's a critical piece that must not be forgotten. And while it is a post-script to this proclamation, it must serve as a



constant reminder that continues to inspire us. There is this promise, the promise of the Lord's presence to uplift and sustain:

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, '**Here I am.**'

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Psalm, Hymn suggestions, Readings

Psalm 14

Office Hymn: 842 Son of God, Eternal Savior

Readings:

Isaiah 58:1–12

1 John 3:18–21

Luke 6:27-36

Closing Hymn: 782 Gracious God, You Send Great Blessings



Week 2: The Ministry of Mercy: REQUIREMENTS **Inspired by Faith; Compelled to Act By The Love Of God**

Students find themselves contemplating the course of study that is before them, and the academic requirements for graduation, they work with their advisors, professors, and even ask for the input of other students as to the best way to satisfy those requirements. Some of them may even decide to change their plans – add a year of study, change their major or even add a component of study.

Be sure to read the fine print before signing on to the too-good-to-be-true balance transfer offer from the credit card company – sometimes it might be. Additional fees, outrageous penalties, interest charges that push legal limits once the offer expires are all requirements that could make it a risky proposition.

Title companies are in the business of requirements. Closing the sale on a home is not only extensive, it seems more than a little repressive. So when a mortgage company comes along and promises an easier time of it when it comes to closing requirements, you cannot help but be interested.

Our lives are overwhelmed by requirements. So when we hear something from the prophet Micah concerning that which our Lord *requires*, we are naturally more than a little concerned. Especially because the notion of “requirements” tends to run contrary to the idea of the gospel, the basic idea that God, through the work of Jesus Christ, fulfills the requirements of the law.

Except, mercy triumphs over judgment. That’s not just some sort of instruction for you and me concerning the ministry of mercy, another requirement concerning discipleship; it is also a wonderful re-statement of the gospel. Mercy triumphs over judgment — that’s the bottom line when it comes to the good news of Jesus.

Welcome
Home



In the waters of Holy Baptism God washes clean what was once stained by sin — mercy triumphs over judgment. While God has every right to let death reign; while he could very well let the rightful wages for sin be paid, God puts forward a new kind of kingdom where a new set of requirements are clearly demonstrated, first and foremost by God.

And it is in that kingdom and to those people — you and me — that God speaks concerning the requirements of his kingdom: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

In this case be sure to read the fine print; for that matter the terms and conditions are rather straight forward when it comes to this new sort of relationship that God imagines for he and his people and the manner in which they would live. It's a reflection of the mercy we receive from God.

Do justice. It's not a passive sort of role that God imagines for his people. God imagines that we would be active agents in the world. It is not, finally, sufficient that those who have been loved by God, that we who have been rescued from the grip of evil would sit back, wait and see what happens.

Love kindness. Exactly what justice looks like in one community as compared to another will change, but it will be marked by kindness. It is no accident that the people of God in Christ have been known for the care of the poor and those in need, not just in recent times and in some places, but since ancient times and throughout the world. But the challenge is a contemporary one, for today, in this time and place. Do justice, love kindness ... today. In this time, in this community, in this place.

Walk humbly. It would seem a requirement that runs contrary to the command to provide a bold witness, to speak out loud and confidently concerning the work of God in Christ. Indeed, that is the point. Walk humbly doesn't mean to keep quiet. It means, rather, that when we speak of the work we do, when we talk about the ministry of



mercy, we draw attention not to ourselves, but rather to the reason for it, to the hope that lives within us and the one who has inspired it.

The church continues Christ's life of mercy as a witness to the love of God, and boldly so. Why are God's people engaged in helping others? Why do we do the work of mercy? Why do we extend a helping hand to someone in need? We proclaim the gospel and care for the needy because that is who Christ is, and that is who we are as the church in this world.¹

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Psalm, Hymn suggestions, Readings

Psalm 25

Office Hymn: 708 Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart

Readings:

Micah 6:6–8

James 2:8–17

Luke 16:19–31

Closing Hymn: 784 Take My Life and Let It Be

¹“A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century,” Matthew C.

Harrison, *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, September, 2016, Vol. 3, No. 2, pg. 65



Week 3: The Ministry of Mercy: READINESS

Ready to Joyfully Share God's Bounty

The rich man was ready; ready for anything and everything. Except for ... well, except this word from God, "Fool, this night your soul is required of you."

Are you ready? If you aren't, there are plenty of people whose business it is to make sure you get ready. If you aren't ready for retirement, it's never too early to start. Insurance professionals will help you put together plans that can protect everything from your health to your life, your automobiles and your motorcycles, all in one place., If you have young children, more than a few financial planners will make sure to help you put together a plan to set aside sufficient resources to pay for college.

Are you ready? Now that the cold weeks of winter are beginning to give way to warmer weather, garden centers will begin to stock fertilizers for your lawn and flower beds. Soon seed packets will give way to bedding plants, stacks of mulch and every kind of yard tool you could imagine, mechanized and otherwise. You, too, can be ready for anything ... as long as you have deep pockets.

It is interesting what happens when you take one story from the scripture and place it alongside another, especially when both of them use very similar language to describe very different activity. In the parable Jesus speaks about a rich man who goes to great lengths to lay up treasure for himself. In his first letter, Timothy speaks of those who store up for themselves a great treasure. The rich man intends to provide for himself, but the ones of whom Timothy speaks are generous and ready to share, providing, it would seem, for the needs of others.

Both, however, are getting ready. Both are storing up a great treasure. But it is the nature and the focus of the treasure that is different. In the case of the rich man, the story itself is overwhelmed with the first person pronoun: my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods



... even my soul! Such is the nature of covetousness. The foundation of Christian stewardship is not first a matter of management, but one of ownership. The rich man may have prepared many things, he may even have managed them very well ... or at least provided very well for their storage. We could debate his choices. But the problem, finally, is not in those choices, it is in his fundamental misunderstanding as to who the one who had made such abundant provision, who had blessed him beyond measure.

“Be generous and ready to share.”

There is an ongoing debate about the nature of wealth. Many are quick to remind us that even those of modest means in our country are among the wealthiest people in the world. Some condemn wealth and income inequality as being the problem for the 21st century. Others are quick to defend wealth as not only being the result of hard work and ingenuity, but necessary. Who would provide the capital to build buildings and hire workers?

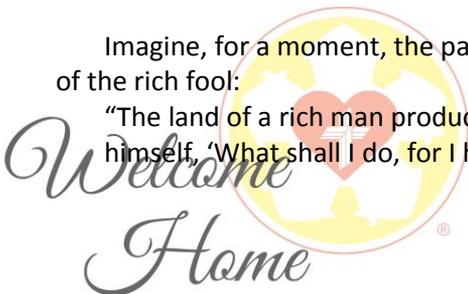
“One’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

It would be easy to conclude that this rich man is being condemned for his wealth. But that would be a mistake. His wealth comes as a gift from God. His wealth comes as a result of plenty which came from the land which is itself a gift. His mistake came in the manner in which he made use of those blessings.

Lives are changed, finally, not by the abundance of possessions, but by the use of those possessions. Wealth and the appropriate investment of wealth will transform lives and communities. The question is not whether our relative wealth will transform our life, it is a question of how it will change our lives.

Imagine, for a moment, the parable of the faithful steward in place of the rich fool:

“The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store the harvest the



Lord has provided?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will pray to the Lord for wisdom. I will seek out those who are in need, those whose land has not provided abundantly or whose crops have not received sufficient water.

I will find ways to share this harvest with the hungry. I will search for ways to teach others. I will set aside appropriate amounts of grain for years where the land may not provide as abundantly, but in all things give thanks to the one who has provided for me and for those whom God has given over into my care.’

And God said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have stored up a treasure for yourself. Come take hold of that which is truly life!’ ”

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Psalm, Hymn suggestions, Readings

Psalm 41

Office Hymn: 850 God of Grace and God of Glory

Readings:

Nehemiah 5:1–13

1 Timothy 6:17–19

Luke 12:13–21

Closing Hymn: 781 We Give Thee But Thine Own



Week 4: The Ministry of Mercy: RESOLVE

Reclaiming The Places and People That Others Have Forgotten

Rev. Dr. David H. Benke

Pastor, St. Peter Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, New York

Chair, LCMS National Housing Support Corporation

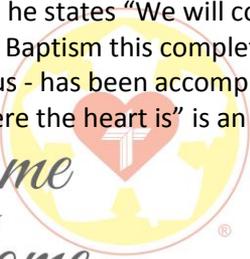
“I will restore David’s fallen shelter – I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins – and will rebuild it as it used to be....declares the Lord.” So the shepherd Amos prophesied long ago. What an incredible vision for people oppressed, crushed, burdened and homeless! What a message for those seeking refuge and finding none. What a future envisioned for those forgotten and swept away by violence and upheaval. God cares; God restores; God reclaims; God engineers repair!

Hundreds of years later, Nehemiah served as a fulfiller of that prophecy, rebuilding the broken and battered walls of the Holy City Jerusalem, reclaiming for returning exiles their capital and spiritual center. The message heard through prayerful action was that God keeps His promises.

Christians understand the divine dynamics of a restoration that dives beneath bricks and mortar, down to the profound depths of the meaning of existence. Jesus, about to be crucified, prophesied the fall of the Holy City. Several decades later, not one stone was left upon another.

But God was at work in a new way. For in Christ God reconciled the world unto Himself. The broken human heart is the interior workspace where the living God dwells through faith in the promise that the death and resurrection of God’s Holy One is the permanent restorative bond.

“Abide in me, and I will abide in you,” says Jesus. Speaking of the divine Trinity, he states “We will come and make our home in you.” Through Holy Baptism this complete interior restoration of us – sinful and unclean us - has been accomplished. And its durability is eternal. “Home is where the heart is” is an axiom taken to a new level in Christ!



*Welcome
Home*

When God reclaims the human heart, what flows forth is gratitude and mercy. Zaccheus the tax collector, the wee little man in the sycamore tree, is a classic example. "I am coming to your home," says Jesus to this hated rich turncoat, this governmental thief. And Zaccheus, whose heart and home now belonged to the Lord, immediately responds by giving back fourfold to any he has overcharged, and by giving half of everything he has to the poor. Mercy in action follows the outpouring of divine grace.

Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christians to demonstrate through their giving to the struggling church in the same Holy City Jerusalem the generosity exemplified by Christ, in the riches of whose mercy all believers live and breathe. And build they did. And rebuild we will.

We will seek the lost and forsaken, the homeless and the forgotten. Because God desires to reclaim, restore and repair the hearts of ALL humanity. "It is the will of God that all be saved and brought to the knowledge of the truth."

One afternoon in the early 1980s, a dozen Missouri Synod Lutherans from three congregations gathered in Brooklyn, New York, in a church basement. Their neighborhoods were in flames. Half the housing stock had been destroyed over the course of a decade. Drug abuse and political corruption ran rampant. Hope was on the discard pile.

But these believers held on to hope for the future. Because they believed Holy Scripture. They understood that God is The Rebuilder of Ruined Cities. On that autumn afternoon they made a fervent request to the leaders of their denomination for an interest free five year loan in the amount of one million dollars. That loan would form the basis for a revolving pool of money to build over one thousand homes on that devastated burned-out acreage. The Holy Spirit spoke through those believers to the hearts of the church leaders. And the commitment was made.

Today over four thousand single family homes have been built in Brooklyn and thousands more across the country, all emanating from



that church basement commitment. Neighborhoods have been reclaimed. Ruins have been restored. Hope runs rampant. Because mercy in abundance came from the hearts of God’s people to re-root the uprooted. They called their dream the Nehemiah Plan after that first fulfiller of prophecy. All glory to God, it is an ongoing reality.

The Lutheran Housing Support Network is a place where divine grace bestowed can be dedicated to reclamation and rebuilding in urban neighborhoods. Join those committed and dedicated to affordable housing. Let mercy flow from the richness of God’s grace!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Psalm, Hymn suggestions, Readings

Psalm 61

Office Hymn: 851 Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us

Readings:

Amos 9:11–15

2 Corinthians 8:1–15

Luke 19:1–10

Closing Hymn: 789 Praise and Thanksgiving



Week 5: The Ministry of Mercy: REJOICE
Celebrating The Opportunity to Provide Generously
Rev. Steven Schave
LCMS Director of Urban and Inner City Mission
Board of Directors, LCMS National Housing Support Corporation

Of all the people at church that day, she's probably the last person that you would think would be rejoicing. Surrounded by the rich and famous, the powerful and elite; stands this poor lone widow. All these happy, well put together, families and pillars of the church are gathered around her. So she must humiliate herself as the widow watches others fill the offering box with their much more impressive gifts. Because at this church, when people are "down on their luck," they are often looked down upon as if they had done something horribly wrong to deserve it. But you already know about that, because you see it every day. When you turn to look away from that person in need for the shame of it, or you look down on that lonely lowly homeless person for what they are – less than you.

There was a social experiment that made its way onto the Internet recently. Where a person went around to regular folks, who were eating outside, in public places, and he asked the folks if he could have some of their food. Needless to say he was told to take a hike. But then a homeless man was given a pizza. He's so very grateful for the gift and he proceeds to eat with joy. Then the same person from before, comes and interrupts the homeless man to ask for some of his pizza. The only food this homeless guy has, might be all he'd have all day, way better than cold trash from a dumpster. But this pizza had been freely given, by grace... and the homeless man knows he has more than enough from what little he has... so what does he do?... he shares it... with a smile.

And there it is. Like that widow at the temple, with just two coins to drop into the offering box, she may as well have dropped two stone tablets upon our heads. Each one etched with - Love God | Love your neighbor.



And Jesus says, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” We horde up for ourselves and we look down on others who have less, we do not love God as we should, nor love our neighbor. And it will all be taken from us, all of our worldly treasures that we cling to... because the wages of sin is death. And when it comes to our salvation we don’t have the currency, nothing to offer, not even two coins to rub together.

So who will fill the offering box with that which alone can make the payment for my sins?

And there He was at the temple that day, the reason why a poor widow put in all she had to live on, the reason for her rejoicing... it is the One who will completely empty Himself for her as Messiah. He fills the offering box not with gold or silver, but with His innocent suffering and death, His precious blood that atones. He gladly and freely gives it all away, down to the shirt upon His beaten and battered back. And a Father who sacrifices His one and only Son... for you.

So that we who are less, God would make us more. His own children bought at a price, to be washed clean as we are showered in His mercy, and clothed in robes of righteousness, to receive the very riches of heaven. And it changes everything. It changes everything to see that we are sinful wretches deserving of nothing, but by grace, God has emptied Himself to fill us up.

He sets before us a feast so that we can eat at His table with rejoicing. And when we see others who are in need we gladly give, even from what little we have, from the undeserved abundance that we have been given. That is the life of the Christian. Fancy clothes are like rags compared to being robed in Christ. Champagne is like swill compared to the cup of salvation. Caviar is like dog food compared to the bread of life that is a banquet for the soul. Earthly mansions, what a dump, compared to our heavenly home. It is this treasure in Christ alone that fills our heart with joy. It is why we give cheerfully in love for our

neighbor



To the world, the greatest gifts go unnoticed: two mites given out of poverty; bread, wine, a sprinkle of water; the One who stood at temple that day, who was worth more than all the offerings that were given from worldly wealth. Yes, Jesus is the one thing needful. So with the poor widow we trust that we can put all that we have, our very lives, into the treasury, because God is our all in all. He won't leave us to starve... or without a penny... so that in Christ we will pour ourselves out to bless others, what little that we can offer. Giving thanks that out of our poverty, God has given us eternal riches.

The riches of heaven are hidden there in a naked king robed only in crimson threads, enthroned upon a tree, who dripped into His Father's treasury, His Holy saving blood that was shed, every single drop, all for you. And now by grace through faith, the riches are yours. Freely given at great expense, once you were as worthy as a meager mite, but now, now you are precious in God's sight!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Psalm, Hymn suggestions, Readings

Psalm 70

Office Hymn: 787 The Temple Rang with Golden Coins

Readings:

Proverbs 19:14–17

2 Corinthians 9:6–15

Luke 21:1–4

Closing Hymn: 786 Lord of All Good



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