
For a World in Need of Reconciliation: Preaching Romans in the Lectionary Year of Matthew

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Each of the three sections of this article deals with a different aspect of preaching from Romans as proposed in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) Year A. Each section concludes by exploring implications for preaching. In the first section, the implications for preaching are drawn from the lectionary structure itself. If you like knowing the ins and outs of how an organizing structure works, section one is for you.

If you would rather skip those nitty-gritty details and get right to the broad themes that Paul has stockpiled in the dense treasure chest that is Romans, then you may want to choose your own adventure and get right to section two. This second section offers an overview of the many themes that emerge across the book of Romans. These themes will accompany the assembly from Advent through the Time after Pentecost during Year A. The second section also concludes with implications for preaching, in particular implications based on the broad themes of Romans.

The third section brings us a little nearer to home by exploring more closely the specific theme that Paul carries throughout the book of Romans: reconciliation. Paul unfolds the theme of reconciliation because of both his theological and socio-political lenses. Through his theological lens, Paul relates reconciliation to the death and resurrection of Christ, and through his socio-political lens, he directly addresses the climate of Rome at the time he wrote. Following the established pattern, the third section concludes with implications of Paul's emphasis on reconciliation for preaching in each of our unique situations.

Pertinent details: the unique position of Romans in Year A

Romans holds a unique position within Year A of the RCL. In this analysis of details pertinent to the position of Romans in Year A, there is only room to address the Sunday lections. However, the savvy preacher will want to note that other Romans readings dot the year on important occasions such as the Easter Vigil (Rom 6:3–11) and Reformation Day (Rom 3:19–28).

By far, Romans appears most prominently during Year A. It appears as the Sunday epistle reading twenty-four times in Year A, which means that 46 percent of the Sundays in Year A will have a reading from Romans. This compares to four appearances of Romans in Year B (8 percent), and three appearances in Year C (6 percent). The only semicontinuous run of Romans in the

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RCL occurs during the Time after Pentecost in Year A, where sixteen weeks in a row bring the hearer passages from Romans 1 to Romans 14. During this semicontinuous run, assemblies hear from every chapter except 2, 15, and 16. Since Advent II delivers a reading from chapter 15, Year A, as a whole, presents assemblies with portions of every chapter of Romans except 2 and 16. Of interest, Year B provides one more novel Romans pericope, so, in the entire three-year lectionary, it is only Romans 2 from which the assembly does not hear. (See chart on page 4).

Romans is the Epistle Reading three of the four weeks in Advent, thus establishing a significant presence from the beginning of the church year. These three readings focus on

- living in the light of salvation that is at hand;
- abounding in the hope of the gospel that compels one to welcome the other—even the gentile; and
- being set apart for the gospel.

They relate to the season of Advent, which shares themes of eschatological hope in God's coming.

Next, Romans readings comprise four of the five weeks of Lent. These texts focus on

- death through Adam and righteousness through Christ;
- faith that is reckoned to one as righteousness and delivers life;
- reconciliation to God through Christ's death and life through Christ's resurrection; and
- life through the indwelling of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead.

These Lenten Romans readings support Lenten liturgical themes, particularly baptism into Christ Jesus. They also explore resonant Lenten themes of death and new life and of relationship to God through the Spirit.

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Romans NT Text	Year A	Year B	Year C
Romans 13:11-14 Romans 15:4-13 Romans 1:1-7 (*Only entirely unique Sunday Romans reading outside Yr. A)	1st Sunday of Advent 2nd Sunday of Advent 4th Sunday of Advent	4th Sunday of Advent (Romans 16:25-27)	
Romans 5:12-19 Romans 4:1-5,13-17 Romans 5:1-11 Romans 8:6-11	1st Sunday in Lent 2nd Sunday in Lent 3rd Sunday in Lent 5th Sunday in Lent	2nd Sun. in Lent (Romans 4:13-25)	1st Sunday after Pentecost (Romans 5:1-5)
Romans 1:16-17; 3:22b-28 (29-31)	Lectionary 9 Time after Pentecost * Does not occur in 2017		
Romans 4:13-25	Lectionary 10 Time after Pentecost * Does not occur in 2017		
Romans 5:1-8	Lectionary 11 June 18, 2017 2nd Sunday after Pentecost		1st Sunday after Pentecost (Romans 5:1-5)
Romans 6:1b-11	Lectionary 12 June 25, 2017 3rd Sunday after Pentecost		
Romans 6:12-23	Lectionary 13 July 2, 2017 4th Sunday after Pentecost		
Romans 7:15-25a	Lectionary 14 July 9, 2017 5th Sunday after Pentecost		
Romans 8:1-11	Lectionary 15 July 16, 2017 6th Sunday after Pentecost		
Romans 8:12-25	Lectionary 16 July 23, 2017 7th Sunday after Pentecost	1st Sunday after Pentecost (Romans 8:12-17) Day of Pentecost (Romans 8:22-27)	
Romans 8:26-39	Lectionary 17 July 30, 2017 8th Sunday after Pentecost		
Romans 9:1-5	Lectionary 18 August 6, 2017 9th Sunday after Pentecost		Day of Pentecost (Romans 8:14-17)
Romans 10:5-15	Lectionary 19 August 13, 2017 10th Sunday after Pentecost		
Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32	Lectionary 20 August 20, 2017 11th Sunday after Pentecost		
Romans 12:1-8	Lectionary 21 August 27, 2017 12th Sunday after Pentecost		1st Sunday in Lent (Romans 10:8b-13)
Romans 12:9-21	Lectionary 22 September 3, 2017 13th Sunday after Pentecost		
Romans 13:8-14	Lectionary 23 September 10, 2017 14th Sunday after Pentecost		
Romans 14:1-12	Lectionary 24 September 17, 2017 15th Sunday after Pentecost		

Chart 1: A Comparative View of Romans in the Sunday Lectionary in Years A, B, and C

Then, the Time after Pentecost arrives and with it the sixteen-week semicontinuous series from Romans. These readings bear witness to how Christians live in a complex world.

1. Sin makes people fall short and, yet, God justifies by the gift of grace.
2. Righteousness is reckoned to faith so that promises rest on grace.
3. People are reconciled to God through Christ's death and given new life through Christ's resurrection.
4. Baptism into Christ's death unites people in his resurrection.
5. The wages of sin are death, but the free gift of God is eternal life.
6. Captivity to sin constricts human action.
7. Life occurs in the Spirit.
8. The Spirit intercedes for creation.
9. The same Lord is Lord of all (Jew and Greek).
10. God's gifts are irrevocable.
11. Transformation occurs by the renewing of the mind.
12. Individuals become one body through Christ.
13. Christ compels people to love one another with mutual affection.
14. Love of one another is found in Christ.
15. Living honorably is a mark of being in Christ.
16. Humans need pass no judgment on others.

These texts, overwhelmingly, encourage human behavior that resonates with life in Christ. Themes of loving the other and unification in Christ dominate the semicontinuous series. Above all, it is God's grace that makes possible such community now as well as such a redeemed community at the end of history.

Several Romans pericopes are repeated within Year A. What claim is the RCL making through the repetition of these Romans texts? Is there a logic to these repetitions? Four Romans readings are wholly or partially repeated within Year A:

The Advent I (Rom 13:11–14) reading is entirely contained within the Lectionary 23 reading (Rom 13:8–14). This is a significant text in the life of the church since it sheds light so clearly on the church's eschatological outlook of living in the light, because salvation is near. This resonates with the poignant words of Christopher Morse, "We are called to be on-hand for that which is *at-hand* but not yet in-hand."¹

Lent II (Rom 4:1–5, 13–17) and Lectionary 10 (Rom 4:13–25)

1. Christopher Morse, *The Difference Heaven Makes: Rehearing the Gospel As News* (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010), 122.

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overlap significantly. This text, which tells how God reckons righteousness to the one who lives through faith, shows God's free grace outstripping any righteousness on account of the law. It is possible that this text is repeated since Lectionary 10 is frequently the week of "Ordinary Time" that drops out of the lectionary year.²

Lectionary 11 (Rom 5:1–8) is fully contained in Lent III (Rom 5:1–11). Again, Lectionary 11 is one of those weeks that most commonly drops out of the lectionary. The text on being reconciled to God through Christ's death and being given life through Christ's resurrection is key to the whole of Christian Christology.

Lent V (Rom 8:6–11) fits entirely within Lectionary 15 (Rom 8:1–11). This text emphasizes how life comes through the indwelling of the Spirit. The Bible's overt pneumatology can use repeating in many of our congregations.

These repetitions present the preacher with some challenges and opportunities. The primary challenge may be that the same text informs two sermons in relatively close proximity. However, this potential challenge brings with it opportunity. A preacher has the opportunity to really pay attention to how this text functions within its season. For example, the RCL reinvigorates the ancient church tradition of providing instruction regarding baptism during Lent. So, for texts that duplicate during Lent (that is three of the four repeated texts), the preacher could focus explicitly on the Lenten text's connection to baptism. Liturgical theologian Gail Ramshaw suggests that Paul, even more than the Gospels, teaches us how to understand Christ's death and how to understand baptism in light of Christ's death and resurrection. She writes, "But the epistles explain how baptism incorporates us into the death and resurrection of Christ and how the baptized community is to live. Thus for the banquet that is the lectionary, it is extremely important to serve up the epistle. The epistles exemplify the Christian understanding that the good news of Christ comes to the whole community."³ For Ramshaw, the Romans readings teach a communal way of Christian living, which grows out of the Christ event and our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection.

2. The lectionary plans for the possibility of leap year having 53 Sundays. Therefore, most years do not use all of the assigned lectionary weeks.

3. Gail Ramshaw, *Three Year Banquet: The Lectionary for the Assembly*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 63.

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Implications for preaching based on the lectionary structure

The structure itself of the Year A lectionary bears implications for preaching Romans. The sheer number of Romans readings this year claims that the Christian life of faith needs to be regularly accompanied by Romans. The lectionary keeps Romans by the assembly's side throughout Year A, inviting the preacher to do the same. What follows are practical suggestions.

Already on Advent 1, the Sunday lectionary presents a reading from Romans. Using this early start to introduce the assembly to the upcoming, year-long journey through Romans, preachers can generate anticipation within the assembly for the themes that Romans will present along the way. Such anticipation-building fits with the season of Advent, which is itself a time of mounting expectation of the *adventing* of God. Advent sets up some major theological themes of the inbreaking of God and waiting. Thus, during Advent, the preacher, accompanied by Romans 13, 15, and 1, can appropriately set up some *major Romans themes*. (See the next section for *major themes* in Romans.)

The setup of the year-with-Romans needs to occur in Advent since the Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter seasons contain no Romans readings. The season of Lent, which interrupts this relative dry spell, offers many readings from Romans. For a preacher who wants to keep Romans in the assembly's view throughout the entire church year, the four Lenten Romans readings are key. These four readings provide the bridge between Romans' prominence in Advent and the upcoming semicontinuous series during the Time after Pentecost. The Lenten readings provide the critical connection between the winter and summer readings, which enables Year A to feel like a whole year accompanied by Romans instead of two islands of Romans readings.

The congruence of the Lenten Romans readings aids any preacher for whom the thought of preaching Romans may seem onerous because the sheer congruence of Lent and Paul's theology in Romans can reframe this anxiety into a calling to let Romans and Lent speak together. As mentioned above, both the texts and the season bring up themes of baptism, death, new life, and relationship with God in the Spirit.

The next and final run of Romans readings in Year A is the sixteen-week, semicontinuous series during the Time after Pentecost. This series structurally invites the possibility of a preaching series, which could mean anything from a commitment to preach from Romans, to a four-week series on themes within Romans, to an every-other-week rotation between preaching the reality of the cross in daily living from Romans one week and from another lection on the alternating weeks.

Broad themes

Romans is a sort of *magnum opus* for Paul. In it one encounters some of his most clearly stated theological claims as well as some of his deepest insights for local communities. Paul wove many themes throughout Romans; from this great trove, we will briefly highlight five themes.

Righteousness. One of the most significant themes throughout Romans is God's righteousness. From the outset of Romans, Paul announces that "the gospel unveils God's righteousness." He then proceeds to unpack this claim throughout the rest of the epistle. Paul's Jewish heritage equipped him with an understanding of righteousness as God's faithfulness to God's promises. Such an understanding of righteousness is sung in the psalms and proclaimed by the prophets.

- Sung in the psalms: "Sing to [the Lord] a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. For the word of the Lord is upright, and all [of the Lord's] work is done in faithfulness. [The Lord] loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord."⁴ The psalmist holds of the congruence of God's word and God's work, which are in parallel because they are upright and faithful, respectively.
- Proclaimed by the prophets: Here we only have time for one example; the word came to Jeremiah who proclaimed God's word: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them... I will rejoice in doing good to them, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul."⁵ Here, the prophet Jeremiah proclaims God's righteousness by showing that God establishes a covenant in faithfulness.

Paul understood righteousness to be covenant fidelity, which was consistent with his training in the Torah and his Jewish upbringing. Paul also amended his understanding of righteousness by coming to view it through the lens of Christology. Paul adapted his understanding of covenant fidelity and, therefore, of righteousness when he recognized the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the very fulfillment of God's promises.

Paul's understanding of righteousness does not remain focused solely on God's faithfulness to the covenant relationship but comes to include a dimension of human action. In Paul's understanding of righteousness, God's righteous actions compel humans to also put things right with the world. Human acts of righteousness do not emerge in a vacuum; rather, human righteousness derives and results from God's righteousness. God's righteousness, when it manifests in the present world, leads to justice.

Paul's understanding of God's righteousness and the derivative righteousness of humans reveals Paul's eschatology. God's righteousness—God's faithfulness to covenant promises—was most clear for Paul in the Christ event. Paul understood Jesus' death and resurrection to be a manifestation of God's adventing within

4. Ps 33:3–5. Italics added.

5. Jer 32:40–41. Italics added. See also Hos 2:20 and Isa 40–55.

history. In the Christ event, God broke into human history and began drawing creation into relationship with the divine.⁶ This eschatological coming of God bears concrete effects for humans because it evidences God's capacity and will to fulfill promises, and it inspires the human response of righteousness (i.e., setting things right with the world).

1. **Individual within community.** Another theme in Romans is the role of the individual within larger communities. One sees this through Paul's concern for the individual as embedded within all of history. For example, Paul draws attention to the individual's responsibility to government especially in situations where one needs to disagree with aspects of governmental actions.
2. **Transformation.** Paul is concerned in Romans with the ways that God moves creation toward the life God intends for creation. This calls for God's transformation of all the world.
3. **Eschatology.** Although this was mentioned above in the discussion on "righteousness," the Romans' theme of eschatology deserves to stand on its own. Throughout the letter, Paul moves this argument forward by showing how Jesus' death and resurrection inaugurate newness in the world.
4. **Justification by faith.** Paul adheres tenaciously to his revelation that justification is God's gift and not an achievement of the well-held law. For example, in Rom 1:17a, Paul writes, "For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith." Justification cannot possibly be achieved by human effort, but God gifts faith with justification.

Implications for preaching based on the broad themes of Romans

When you as a preacher read through Romans, imagine it as Paul's own sermon series to a particular community because in this letter, he strikes some of the most resonant and persistent Pauline keys and preaches the grace of God known in Jesus Christ. He defines the gospel as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."⁷ For Paul, the gospel and proclamation are enlivened by God to strengthen hearers. So, as Paul spoke and acted with boldness and confidence in the living Word of God, preach Romans with boldness and confidence that the living Word of God is about to do a new thing in the assembly you serve.

The five themes listed above are rife with implications for preaching in local assemblies. The theme of **righteousness**, as Paul presents it, invites the preacher to debunk myths about righteousness as a holier-than-thou bludgeon. Instead, restore the Pauline understanding of righteousness as God's faithfulness to God's covenant and creation's celebrative response to God's steadfastness.

6. This understanding of "eschatology" emerges from the work of Jürgen Moltmann and can be found in his many articles and, especially, when viewing his two primary books on eschatology together: *Theology of Hope* and *The Coming of God*.

7. Rom 1:16.

In this year of heightened political rhetoric, there will be abundant opportunity for the preacher to take a feather from Paul's cap and address his theme of **individual responses within community**, especially at times when there is tension regarding governmental decisions. Attentiveness to Paul's theme of **transformation** means that the preacher will be on the lookout for the trajectory of God's action in the world, ways to celebrate how the assembly already participates in this trajectory of God's action, and places to encourage the assembly's renewed participation in the trajectory of God's action in the world. Since, in Paul's view, **eschatology** is God's inbreaking into the world, evidenced most clearly in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the preacher can similarly focus on God's eschatological actions by lifting up for the assembly those places and times in our local context where and when God breaks into our midst with newness and life-giving force. In a world so driven by productivity and external calculations of value, Paul's theme of **justification** as a free gift needs to be heard repeatedly. The preacher gets to offer a counter-narrative of God's **justification** that is desperately needed to offset the thousands of messages to the contrary that the assembly hears day in and day out.

Specific theme: Reconciliation in Romans (and Matthew)

Now that we have briefly identified several themes in Romans, we move into the third and final section and take a closer look at one specific theme: reconciliation. Paul was theologically concerned about reconciliation. Yet, this is not all. He was also concerned about reconciliation for its impact on the socio-political climate of Rome. Paul's two-fold (theological and socio-political) approach to the theme of reconciliation makes Romans a particularly apt companion of Matthew's lectionary Year A and of our contemporary communities.

The theme of reconciliation is strong throughout Romans, where Paul focuses primarily on Christ's work of reconciling (i.e., setting straight and redeeming) the world to himself, and, derivatively, on human work of restoring that which is broken. Paul understands reconciliation to always contain these two stages: first, reconciliation is God's work, and, derivatively, reconciliation calls forth human action. Consistent with the first stage, any reconciliation that occurs, for Paul, was made possible through the death and life of Christ. For example, we read in Rom 5:10, "For

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if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.” God’s action in Jesus Christ is the impetus for any reconciliation. Reconciliation is begun in God, but it does not end there. God’s action of reconciliation overflows its bounds and calls humans to extend reconciliation. Later in Romans, Paul writes of human consequences of the reconciling action of the Christ event: “Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another” (Rom 14:13). Many times over, Paul has direct and contextual ideas of how the Roman Christians can live out God’s reconciliation in community.

Paul’s theological claim regarding reconciliation is a significant theme in the letter to the Romans. This theme is reinforced because it is also crucial to what Paul wants to communicate about the socio-political climate in Rome. Rome had plenty of issues in need of reconciliation. It was a city divided: there were divisions between elite and non-elite groups, divisions among various ethnic communities, and divisions within the “Christ movement” itself.⁸ Paul’s letter to the Christians at Rome was written to be expressly contextual, dealing with the multiple divisions that faced the community. Rome was the “political, military, and economic capital of Paul’s world,”⁹ and in his letter to the Romans, Paul addressed the political and social concerns of the community. Paul responded to the *particular* situation in which Roman Christians found themselves.

As Paul responded to the local life situation for the Romans, he not only approached reconciliation as an event that God would bring about. He linked his understanding of reconciliation to his baptismal theology and showed that Christians, by virtue of their baptisms, were incorporated into God’s work of reconciliation. Biblical theologian Corneliu Constantineanu writes about Paul’s baptismal motif in Romans, which links God’s reconciling activity to the reconciling activities called forth from believers.

It is through a description of the complex dynamic of the incorporation of the believer ‘in Christ’, through baptism, that Paul signifies a real sharing and participation of the believers in the same story, as active participants. From this perspective, we concluded that Paul does not simply write about how God’s reconciliation is achieved in Christ, as something done from afar, of which the believers are passive recipients. Rather, Paul includes the readers, their story, into the larger story of God’s decisive reconciliation in Christ; they are themselves an *integral part* of this ongoing story of reconciliation.¹⁰

Paul has news for anyone who hears Romans: God’s reconcil-

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ing activity is a contagious wellness. Those who hear the story of God’s reconciliation through Christ become active participants in the reconciling activities that God is up to in the world.

Implications for preaching based on Romans’ specific theme of reconciliation

Given Paul’s approach to reconciliation, it would be difficult to avoid noticing distinct implications for the preacher’s current context. Paul’s writing in Romans is applicable to the preacher’s context because, in addition to his theological concerns, Paul is deeply concerned that any reconciliation based in the cross and resurrection of Christ is not merely historic, but is eschatological since reconciliation exemplifies a manifestation of God’s inbreaking within this world with redeeming hope. Paul’s eschatological worldview, which includes his understanding of reconciliation, is the basis for his concern for the socio-political climate of Rome. Eschatological hope is the theological basis for Paul’s care about the socio-political climate of a particular place because eschatology orients one toward the other in need.

How does eschatology orient one toward the other? Paul in particular (and most theologically sound Christian eschatology in general) grounds his understanding of eschatology in the cross and resurrection of Christ. The cross and resurrection are the principle model for God’s inbreaking within the world. Since God’s inbreaking into the world and God’s drawing out creation into relationship with the Divine are God’s eschatological actions, the cross and resurrection are the principle model of God’s eschatological movement in the world. Therefore, God’s action through the cross and resurrection of Christ tells us about God’s eschatological orientation. In the cross and resurrection of Christ, Jesus comes to humanity, dwells with humanity, takes on the suffering of humanity, and overcomes sin and death, claiming new life where formerly there was death. These actions characterize God’s eschatological orientation toward creation. Now we can get back to our former claim: eschatology orients us toward the other. God’s eschatological orientation turns God toward creation in the midst of creation’s greatest plight. Paul’s (and the Christian’s) eschatological orientation turned him toward those who suffer or find themselves displaced.

Paul’s approach to reconciliation was also socio-political; he was addressing a specific community with particular complexities and liabilities. This, too, resonates within local communities in at least two ways. First, Paul’s *commitment* to theology-with-legs, that is, theology that can walk our local streets with impact, is a commitment to which each member of our assemblies can pledge attentiveness. Second, Paul’s observation that the Romans lived in

8. Philip Francis Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2003), 77–107.

9. *Ibid.*, 1.

10. Corneliu Constantineanu, *The Social Significance of Reconciliation in Paul’s Theology: Narrative Readings in Romans*, 1st edition (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010), 208.

a world in need of reconciliation on many fronts is increasingly apparent within our locales.

In 2016, as the globe faces the mounting complexities of immigration concerns, as Britain and the European Union discover all that Brexit (the British exit from the European Union) will mean, and as a divisive presidential year challenges the political system of the United States, this is incredibly apt. At the time of writing this article, a week of disturbing violence has unfolded in the U.S., with the fatal shootings of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge and of Philandro Castile in St. Paul, followed by the killings of five Dallas police officers. While these acts of violence were extreme, the fear that led to them and resulted from them is commonly known. Very likely, the preacher knows of festering hotspots of fear in his or her own community. These fear-festering places are akin, perhaps, to the divided city of Rome, to which Paul wrote. His close attention to the socio-political climate of Rome when writing the letter of Romans is instructive for the preacher who is faithful to the text and aware of local fears. The following are some foci for preaching for those preachers called to be as courageous as Paul in a world that feels its divisions palpably.

Foci for preaching Romans in the year of Matthew:

- Explore the implications of the gospel for the lives of your assembly.
- Respond to your local context.
- Preach eschatologically (i.e., deliver reconciliation and hope).
- Enact socially engaged preaching.
- Call people to be active participants in God's reconciliation.
- Try a narrative approach to preaching the story of your assembly

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embedded in the story of Christ's death and resurrection. (For Paul, in Romans, this was the very way he bridged any gap between God's reconciling impetus in the Christ event and reconciliation in the quotidian things of life among humans. (See Romans 5–8)

- Model the practice of liberating people from moral judgments leveled against one another. (See Romans 14—15)
- Revisit themes that Paul wove throughout the letter and show how these themes get lived out in daily life. By the time the summer Romans series is concluding, make sure you have handed these themes off for people to live them vibrantly in their own daily lives. What, for example, are reconciling practices that your assembly has been up to for a long time? How can your congregation employ those same practices that have been historically strong in a way that addresses a local issue that is decreasing the flourishing of people in your community? (See Romans 12—15)

Deeply engage Paul's words from Romans as you deeply engage your community, and the word proclaimed among the people you serve will surely body forth eschatological reconciliation and hope.