

# The Bethel Pulpit

Deacon Lisa Huber

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**BETHEL**

LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the web at [www.bethel-madison.org](http://www.bethel-madison.org)

312 Wisconsin Ave, Madison WI 53703

**Text:** Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 16:13-20

**Title:** A Call to Action

The location for our Gospel story today, Caesarea Philippi, is an area situated about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It is one of the largest springs that feeds the Jordan River. Finally, the disciples and Jesus have some calm, alone time. No hungry crowds of 5000. No stormy seas. No one tormented by demons or in the need of healing.

Jesus asks them who they think He is, its **Peter** who answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" Jesus blesses Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." In blessing Peter, Jesus not only accepts the titles *Messiah* and *Son of God* which Peter attributes to him, but by endorsing both titles as divine revelation, Jesus unequivocally declares himself to be both Messiah and the Son of God. Jesus continues, "18And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Jesus promises the Church will never become extinct.

Peter is given a call to action " On this rock I will build my church." Wow! That is quite an agenda. It is overwhelming. It is immense. It is complicated. I can see Peter doing a fist pump and saying YES! Then wait.. what?? Me?? As he checks behind for someone else.

In July, I had the honor and privilege of accompanying eleven women from Bethel to the 10<sup>th</sup> Triennial Gathering of the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Also known as WELCA. Over 3,300 women gathered from all over the country. We were challenged, inspired and in awe of all the dedicated work that is done across the globe by WELCA.

We were given a call to action by the opening keynote speaker Kelly Fryer. Many of you may remember Kelly as she spoke at Bethel several years ago. Or maybe you have read her book "*Reclaiming the L Word.*" A book I highly recommend to anyone looking to rediscover their Lutheranism.

She asked us "Who's corner are you going to stand in? With whom are you going to align yourself?" Kelly moved to the desert several years ago, Phoenix, AZ and shared with us several stories of the difficulties faced in the state by immigrants. She is on the front lines, being their voice and their advocate when possible.

She talked to us about the difference of being nice and being good. Being nice means not upsetting the apple cart and avoiding conflict. We are often told to be nice, this is especially what young girls are taught. I see it every day in the way people act and the books that I read. Polite niceness avoids conflict. Being honest, being good can come with a cost.

If you're in a group of people, maybe you know them well, maybe you don't, someone in the group tells a joke that is offensive (to gays, to women, to someone's skin color, to blondes, or someone's ancestry) do you laugh politely? Do you not laugh but remain silent? That is being nice. To be good means to speak up. Not necessarily to cause a big scene, but to say – hey, that isn't ok.

Being good can have repercussions – at work, at home, with friends, with family. As our bulletin cover quote from Maya Angelou says "*it takes courage to be honest in the face of consequences.*" Take a moment to ask yourself, "Is God calling me to be nice or to be good?"

Whose corner should we stand in and with whom should we align ourselves?" There are a multitude of corners in our world we can stand in and give our voice. This isn't necessarily a political issue, though it can be. Luther wrote about how we are called to engage in this world (disengaging is a privilege, a privilege that many in this world don't have).

There are many, many corners to be an advocate and stand in, and people to align yourself with that are part of our community. Some of these options: volunteering at school, tutoring, homeless ministry, food pantry, engaging in the struggle against racism and white supremacy, the fight against human trafficking – anywhere there is a need and people need a voice, **you** can be there.

You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Align yourself with existing organizations that are already doing good work Lutheran Office of Public Policy, ELCA Advocacy, Southern Poverty Law Center or Madison area Urban Ministry.

As we move into fall here at Bethel it is time to link together, along with congregations throughout America, to do the work needed for Lutheran World Relief. Baby Care Kits, Personal Care Kits, School Kits and soap. As we gather the items needed for these kits we link together to make an impact around the world. Check out the table in the Parking Lot Foyer or our website for

kit content lists. And remember Soap Sunday on September 24, let's see if we can surpass last year's total of 691 bars collected.

Upon arriving in Minneapolis, I joined a walking tour around the downtown area. One of the buildings the guide pointed out was a unique shape that had 32 corners. At the end of the four days at the Triennial I was feeling quite overwhelmed with all the need in the world, like I had 32 corners I should stand in. We heard about immigration deportation, about the plight of unaccompanied minors fleeing towards this country, we saw a movie about human trafficking in Chicago. The needs and the brokenness in this world felt overwhelming. Maybe a bit like Peter could have been overwhelmed when Jesus told him he was going to be the rock that His church would be built upon.

A few deep breaths and some facts came to my aid. God, in the Holy Spirit, prepares us for where we can serve. The Bible called some to sell their possessions and travel far away. That used to scare me. What if God is calling me to something like that? I don't want to go.

Well if I am feeling that strongly it probably isn't something God has been preparing me for my whole life. For me, Being here. This is where I feel he has prepared me and called me to serve right now. With all of you. In this time and in this place. Jesus had been preparing Peter for three years. Where has God been preparing you to stand?

Then I also remembered that I am not alone. It is not all up to me. This is God's mission. God works through us. It is not our agenda or our mission. There is a plethora of other people who care and are tirelessly working on God's mission too. God is calling you and I to link together with others. Linking together is the only way to change this troubled world.

Peter wasn't alone either. He had the other disciples and soon the powerhouse evangelism of Paul.

While God isn't going to call us to something he hasn't prepared us for, he is going to call us to get out of our comfort zone. Kelly called on us to become Holy troublemakers. She says, "We are children of a trouble maker – not Martin Luther, but Jesus himself. As we understand the need for justice and the means we have to pursue justice, we too may be seen as holy 'troublemakers'."

Chances are we are not going to change the world on the scale of Peter or Luther. But that doesn't give us permission to be comfortable and contented. We have many opportunities to be a holy troublemaker for peace.

In her sermon during closing worship, Angela Khabeb, pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Waukesha, alerted those assembled: "News flash.

Christianity is not comfortable. If you are comfortable in Jesus, you are doing it wrong. When we have God all figured out, then God belongs to us and not the other way around."

So, now we feel the stirring of the Holy Spirit calling us to action. But how do we know the will of God? How do we know we are doing God's work when called to action? We need to discern before the action. Discern among your community. Pray. Talk with those who know you and whose opinion you trust. Pray more. Read Scripture in community. Ask yourself what your agenda is, are you promoting your self-interests or God's mission?

Paul said in our reading from Romans today, "*not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.*" And pray more.

Always keeping our eye on God. Keeping God at our Center. Are my actions building up the body of Christ?

Whose corner are you being called to stand in? Who are you being called to align yourself with? Be bold in God's mission. The time to center ourselves in something greater than fear is here. Remember it is God's mission, God's agenda. There is no authority greater than God.

Even Luther didn't work alone. Philip Melancthon, Johann Staupitz, his elector Frederick the Wise, his beloved Katie, and many others worked tirelessly for the reforms they believed God was calling them to enact. Together we are stronger.

Can you and I be a Holy Troublemaker for Peace and Justice? Throughout the Gospels Jesus calls on us to stand with our neighbor. This is the moment we need to decide. Each of us have a call on our lives to love, bless, and heal the world.

It's time to be good, not nice. It's time to put your foot on the accelerator and drive! And don't worry, you're not alone, the path of justice is contagious and you'll find others traveling in the same direction. The gift of God's love for all, is where we begin our acts of kindness and advocacy.

Finally, Jesus commanded his disciples that they should tell no one that he is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Well then, how shall they build *a church* on the truth of his identity, one that even the gates of Hell will not overpower?

The answer is by the life they live, a life we live, a life of love for God, a life that loves the other as much as one loves their self and a life in pursuit of justice and peace. **Their lives, and our lives, will speak louder, more truthfully, and more effectively than words.** Our actions bring Christ's presence to others in the world. In whose corner will you stand? Amen.