

Living the Lessons

Friends in Christ, Grace, mercy and peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I did not grow up a Lutheran, nor do I have Scandinavian heritage other than, perhaps some that came from Viking's invasions of the British Isles. I do have German ancestors, or maybe Polish, since there is a town on the border that has my maiden name of Dargitz. I confess to sometimes having a few jealous feelings about the rampant love of Scandinavians for their heritage and their ignorance of mine. I did not attend Luther Seminary in Minneapolis/St Paul. But I am madly in love with the people of Minneapolis/St Paul and Minnesota right now. For they are living out our lessons for this Sunday, sometimes at the cost of their lives.

Just so you know, I have marched or stood in demonstrations with my collar on, the first one was the first Women's March. The person I walked with was from the church I attended as a retired ELCA pastor. She carried a sign with the last line from our first lesson of the day. I wore my collar and a cross. I do have a rather ecumenical heritage. A several greats uncle of mine was Raph Waldo Emerson and my Dad was head of the Social Service Department of the Denver Council of Churches. And somehow, I ended up an ELCA Lutheran Pastor.

The church I served the longest was the first one in the Southwestern Washington Synod other than the PLU congregation to become Reconciling in Christ. And I love your statements of faith in your bulletin.

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We are living in a very hard time right now, one that I, and perhaps you, never thought you would see. But here we are. Perhaps you are bombarded with the news from Minneapolis and St Paul or perhaps not, as the major news sources are being rather circumspect about what they are publishing. But I'm an old lady with a lifetime of contacts, and I confess to doomscrolling each evening hearing lots of news from many sources. What I report today in this sermon came from the Religious News Report.

200 faith leaders were in Minneapolis as part of a larger convening focused on religious pushback to ICE. They were deployed to neighborhoods with significant immigrant populations, where DHS agents have been most active during their Operation Metro Surge. The clergy hailed from a range of traditions and worship communities across the country. Lots of differing theologies.

A few minutes after James Galasinski, who leads a Unitarian Universalist congregation in Canton, New York, arrived at his designated neighborhood he and two of his clergy colleagues encountered ICE agents.

He said, "I noticed an SUV with Wisconsin license plates and tinted windows," what activists say are telltale signs of unmarked ICE vehicles. "There were four men inside, and some of them had masks. That's ICE."

He and another Unitarian Universalist minister, Lise Adams Sherry of Anchorage, Alaska, called over Dan Brockway, an American Baptist minister who serves a congregation in Brockport, New York. The trio staked out the vehicle in front of a strip mall for several minutes, observing quietly, until three women walked past them to enter a minivan.

“All of a sudden, the car that they had been watching pulled up behind them to block them,”
Then two more cars came in.” “In just seconds, 12 ICE agents came out.”

The ministers — all wearing clerical stoles — began blowing whistles, attempting to alert the nearby community. ICE agents surrounded one of the women from the minivan and instructed the pastors to get back. Brockway, standing behind the other faith leaders, began livestreaming the encounter to his church’s Facebook page.

The encounter was brief: The woman, who the pastors said appeared to be pregnant, had citizenship papers with her. Think of that. Do you have yours with you today? She showed them to the officers — sometimes they don’t always dissuade federal immigration agents, who have detained U.S. citizens on multiple occasions. But in less than two minutes, the agents left the scene.

The woman was shaken. It was impossible to tell whether the presence of clergy had staved off a potential detention, but the pastors said the woman thanked them profusely before leaving.

One of the pastors said, “I’m seeing our nation become more and more fascist before my eyes. I saw it. I mean, demanding papers? I never thought I would live in a country like this.”

In another neighborhood a different group of about 50 clergy patrolled a major street lined with businesses owned by Hispanic and Somali Americans. Among them was Rabbi Diane Tracht, who serves a Reformed Jewish community in Indiana, and the Rev. Joshua Shawnee, who serves what he called an Inclusive Catholic Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Shawnee wore a whistle around his neck as well as a stole and said he had encountered ICE before in Oklahoma.

When Tracht was asked why she had come to the faith convening in Minneapolis, she recalled the Holocaust, saying it reminds her of the “literal genocide that authoritarian governments can do.”

“What did we learn from the Holocaust? We have to act and we have to resist,” Tracht said. “If I’m not going to act and resist now, then I shouldn’t call myself a rabbi and I can’t be a proud Jew.”

As a Lutheran pastor and a Unitarian Universalist passed by a restaurant while on patrol, the apparent owner stepped out holding two steaming cups of spiced tea — a common drink among Somali Americans. “She said, ‘Here. If you’re watching ICE, I just want to thank you,’” recalled Meagan McLaughlin, who serves an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation in St. Louis.

After the religious leaders returned from their patrols, several prominent faith leaders held a press conference to denounce ICE in theological terms. Standing behind a podium that read “Do justice. Love Kindness. Abolish ICE,” the first to speak was Bishop Mariann Budde, the Episcopal bishop of Washington DC, who made headlines almost exactly a year ago when she delivered a sermon to Trump in which she implored the president to “have mercy” on immigrants and other groups. She said, “In our varied and united faith traditions, love of neighbor is not optional.”

The Rev. Hierald E. Osorto, a local ELCA pastor spoke at a press conference in Minneapolis. He serves a majority immigrant congregation. Osorto noted that immigrant communities like his are also heavily active in pushing back against ICE, even if much of it is less public.

“For more than a year we have prepared for this moment,” he said. “Our families drew up paperwork — delegation of parental authority forms — so that if they were put in detention, their children would not be alone. We found people lawyers, so they could navigate the legal system.” He added: “We anticipated this time of trial, but we still pray: líbranos del mal — deliver us from evil.”

Another pastor, a trustee of the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, argued the federal government had “made a mistake” by targeting Minneapolis. He argued the federal government should have expected the intense grassroots resistance that has emerged in the city — including from local faith leaders.

He said: “You messed up. We didn’t do all that because we are heroes and saviors. We did it because we understand the meaning of our faith: that we are all connected. We join together. We are a part of a people, a body of humanity that is made in the image of a loving and beautiful God who wants all God’s children free.”

In Minneapolis, from legal resources and signage, to lawsuits and providing meals, recording ICE actions to preserve truth in the midst of death – they are making sure their community feels support and love. And they will keep doing just that. And yes, Renee Good and Alex Pretti have paid the cost with their lives.

I have a friend traveling in the Southwest who texted me how helpless she felt. Maybe you feel that way too.

So, what can you and I do to love our neighbors here and in Minnesota. I can preach, even if I am 84. I can stand with a sign in Puyallup once a week, send on to my facebook friends some of the particularly cogent and heartfelt posts I see from a lifetime of personal contacts. Even if it

probably won't be good for my book sales. I can even confess and discard my jealousy of Scandinavians. And I am so proud of you, joining with the Methodist Church to support immigrants. Our neighbors are near and far, all dear ones loved by God.

Jesus did not say our lives would be easy. The Beatitudes, the blessings, in Matthew's Gospel were not written when lives were easy then either, the last part makes that plain.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. For your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Life also was not easy when the book of Micah was written but there are clear instructions at the end of our first reading today. "What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." Most of my life, though I have had my share of sorrows, I thought life was easiest in America. Maybe not now.

But Jesus, the Word become flesh, the one who shows us God, is God and is still with us, blessing us to be blessings to others. Now and forever, living these lessons.

Thanks be to God. Amen

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