

Psalm 29 & Luke 4:18
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“Lois Buchholz’ Ordination”

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We in the United Church of Christ believe God is Still Speaking, and in the 14 years since this identity campaign began, I wonder how often we ask the next question, are we listening?

Psalm 29 is an unmistakable call to listen for God. The author tells how God’s voice goes out over the waters, God’s glory thunders, God speaks with power and majesty, God’s voice breaks cedars and flashes forth flames of fire, shakes the wilderness and urges all of creation to say “GLORY.” Come on good people of God say it loud and say it proud after me, “Glory.”
“GLORY”

Well Lois, you have been listening to God and now we gather on this day where you are Ordained in the United Church of Christ as Pastor and Teacher. But, as we gather for this service of Ordination, I have to make a confession, I am only 99.99 percent excited that we are together on this occasion. I know as your pastor I am supposed to be 100%, put my whole body in and shake it all about, supportive, but actually I am only 99.99 percent.

See, my slightly diminished joy comes as I sense the loss of a faithful, gifted, generous leader from our congregation. Some of you may not know that Lois sang solos in worship, songs like “every morning is Easter morning,” which became a beloved tradition at Emanuel. Lois co-taught Confirmation, co-taught numerous adult education programs, served on the Open and Affirming Discernment Team, she became an Elder, she would guest preach, she served on numerous boards and committees and more. All along the way she kept telling me, “Bill, I think this will be good experience for me as I move toward ordination.” See, she tried to prepare me for this day, but along the way all I saw was how she generously shared God’s gifts, grace, and faith, helping us at Emanuel to better understand how to be the body of Christ in today’s world.

Yet, in times of change we are taught to lean on our faith. And I trust God is raising up and bringing in new leaders who will help Christ’s church become the church Jesus needs us to be today and tomorrow. We see it happening in Osseo, Wisconsin where Lois began her ministry in early August; officiating at funerals, deepening her Pastoral identity, getting to know a new community of God’s people, planning adult education, participating with our brothers and sisters as they reach out and build relationships in their community, leading worship and more. So, in times like this, I trust God. I believe we all can keep our eyes and hearts open, listening for the call of God, listening for the needs of God’s people and God’s world, and watching for God to raise up new leaders who will help us give ourselves away serving and loving others, like Jesus.

In Luke’s gospel chapter 4, verse 18, Jesus borrows words from the Isaiah reading a few moments ago, and provides us with his ordination vows, “The Spirit of God is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to

the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

We in the church sometimes treat the prophetic call as a side job to the 'real' work. We become occupied with alps of administration, mounds of meetings, pyramids of worship planning, and pikes of the pastoral caring, and we allow the prominent cliffs of the prophetic call to go under attended.

Ordination sets some of us aside in the community of faith to provide certain kinds of care and leadership to God's people, but it also sets us aside to help church and society wrestle with modern concerns; like how our world can become a safe and equal place for all women and men? Like, how our nation can be compassionate and radically welcoming of immigrants while maintaining law and order? And how people with skin like mine might begin to struggle with the systems which keep others who look like us in places of power and authority. And how these systems we have taken for granted create inequality for our neighbors of different ethnic backgrounds, for women, for folks of diverse gender identities and abilities, as well as others. These are questions Ordination and baptism call us to struggle with carefully, compassionately and yet truthfully.

I remember a moment of renewal in my own pastoral identity. I was at a UCC clergy circle in Detroit, Michigan. A culturally diverse group of clergy were gathered and discussing struggles around pastoral leadership in the church. A colleague spoke up and offered words I will never forget. "The people in our churches are tempted to believe that we clergy have been called to serve them, since in their minds they pay our salaries, they think we are 'hired' to do what they want us to do; but our baptism, and our ordination vows call us to be, not a servant to the people, but a servant of God, living as faithfully as possible and calling all to follow the way of Love."

Lois, this day has arrived! You are sitting in the service of worship where you will be ordained as pastor and teacher in the United Church of Christ. Today is a big deal.

It is here! After having to balance vows you made to your parents with vows you made to God, and vows you made to yourself; a balance which sometimes became frustrating and difficult when these vows clashed with each other. Today you are ordained. We all rejoice that God's Spirit has brought you to this day and you have welcomed us to participate with you, where we become witnesses to a God who is Still speaking and are renewed in our call to ministry and mission.

It is my prayer we will all sense the Spirit of God upon us and find old ways and new ways to announce the Good news...

"You despairing, I have words of Hope!
You hateful, I bring words of unity and love!
You lairs, hear words of Truth

You lonely, there is an eternal One waiting to befriend You, who will never, ever leave you.

You facing transition or who do not see the future clearly, hear of One who Rules all things yesterday, today and forever.

You Tired, meet the One who makes all things new.

You oppressed, Meet the undying assurance of God's Justice running down like water, and God's righteousness flowing like a mighty stream."

Together, lay and ordained we are the body of Christ and are called to hold before ourselves, and the world around us, the countercultural promise of Christ's resurrection. Nothing can defeat us, not apathy or despair; not faltering or failing... Not even death, defeats us.

The Song Lois taught this congregation is true, "Every morning IS Easter morning," each morning God declares that our struggles and hard work in Christ's name; our faithful listening and marching, our praying and voting, thanks to the Grace of God, none of it is in vain. It is stamped with a promise of Resurrection.

May the Spirit of God be upon you Lois, upon on all of us and our congregations and May God's Spirit ignite us and offer new life.

Amen