

Join A Movement

My name is Lindsey Jacobsen. I'm a senior nursing major from a tiny Minnesotan town called Lyle who came to this campus four years ago as a wide-eyed and terrified freshman. However, my experience with the Augustana community has been unsurpassable. Now, I stand in front of this community with a call. This call is neither easy nor glamorous. This call comes with sacrifice. I'm here to call you to sacrifice your comfort and Join A Movement. Throughout my speech I will make reference to two very important religious leaders. The first is the renowned Reverend Dr. Michael Pflieger, a Catholic priest and social activist. The second is the biblical scholar Dr. Obery Hendricks, Jr. Dr. Hendricks is a theologian and professor, currently teaching at the New York Theological Seminary.

The Gospel reading this morning is Jesus' inaugural sermon – marking the beginning of his ministry. Jesus began his ministry with a radical agenda. Dr. Obery Hendricks, Jr. explains this verse further in his book, *The Politics of Jesus*. First, Jesus announces that he has come to bring good news to the poor. The reason for his ministry was to fight for radical change in the institutions that kept people downtrodden and impoverished. Jesus fought for **radical change**, because only radical change could make a real difference in the plight of the poor. Next, Jesus talks of releasing the captives; captives, meaning those unjustly imprisoned. This is because, at the time, the Roman jails were full of political prisoners – those who spoke out against the injustices of the government.

Then, Jesus declares liberation to those who were oppressed. Not those simply aching or slightly bruised. But *oppressed*, in the sense that they were crushed by the weight of the Roman Empire. To fully understand this we must look at what it means to be privileged and oppressed in our society today. In our society, privilege falls in the hands of those who are white, male,

heterosexual, and nondisabled. We must recognize that we encompass some level of privilege in order to be a part of liberating the oppressed. We must recognize our privilege if we want to be part of the solution. If we don't recognize our part then women, LGBTQ people, blacks, Latinos/as, other nonwhites, the poor, the homeless, the environment, and those with disabilities are left to fight on their own. The problem is that they can't do it on their own. Though they may have the power to change aspects of their own lives, they do not have the power to singlehandedly do away with the deeper structures of society that favor the privileged.

This privilege and structure stuff is deep. It's part of society. It is part of our unconscious thought. We may not even be aware it exists. For example, and pardon the nursing example, we say that African Americans are more likely to have high blood pressure. But what we don't think about when we say that is that blacks are discriminated against, though maybe not consciously. And here's how: A white employer is less likely to hire a black employee because of inherent ideas that this person will be untrustworthy and less intelligent than her/his white counterpart. Therefore, it is harder for blacks to get jobs, thus they have a lower SES, thus they are less likely to get healthcare, thus they are not taught the risk factors of high blood pressure or given the care they need. **THUS**, it **APPEARS** as though the fact that black people are black is what gives them high blood pressure. But if you look deeper, as I just did, you can see that there is something bigger.

We cannot leave it up to the oppressed to pull themselves up, because as a society we keep them and their voices down. To let the oppressed go free did not mean that Jesus gave money to a homeless person once in his life. Jesus struggled to change the structure of the society so that homelessness was no more. This is the life modeled for us, and we are called to do the same.

Lastly, in his brief speech, Jesus proclaims “the acceptable year of the Lord”. Dr. Hendricks explains that this an allusion to the year of Jubilee described in Leviticus 25:10. This was “the end of a 50-year cycle when all land that had been confiscated or otherwise unjustly acquired was to be returned to its original owners”. This is Jesus declaring to struggle and fight for economic, political, and social justice.

Rev. Dr. Michael Pflieger calls the church to reclaim its identity. In his sermon at the Congress on Urban Ministry, Father Pflieger makes a reference to the movie “Oh, God!” which most of us are too young to remember so we’ll have to take his word for it... In this movie, the main character says to God: “Why do you allow so much suffering in the world?” God replies, “Why do *I*? Why do *you*? I gave you all the power; I gave you all the ability. Why do you allow so much suffering? So much tragedy?”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that we are “prone to adjust to injustice”. Most of us go to church once a week to hear that everything will be okay because God loves us. And as Rev. Dr. Pflieger says, when you go to church there are unspoken rules. Do NOT rock the boat. Don’t challenge the powers in society or suggest that the congregation members are oppressors. Don’t talk about social justice, racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, or environmental violence. Just come in and feel good! Church is safe, church is comfortable. It’s time to change this. Jesus taught us to pray: “on Earth as it is in heaven”. This prayer is not us leaving it all up to God. Okay God, go ahead; create that heaven on Earth thing. My favorite quote from Mother Teresa is when she said, “I used to pray that God would feed the hungry, or do this or that, but now I pray that God will guide me to do whatever I’m supposed to do. I used to pray for answers, but now I’m praying for strength. I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us – and we change things.” It’s on us. We are to change things.

It is time to destroy the hell on Earth that we have created for those whom we oppress. It's time to be the dangerous church of Acts. The church must proclaim the Gospels – the news that liberation will be found here on Earth, the poor will receive good news, society will be turned on its head. More than talking about it, we must *live* the life of Jesus. Father Pflieger says, "It has never been the church's job to make current conditions bearable". It has been our job to tell those on the side of the road that they don't have to live like this one more day.

In Matthew 5:9 Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Dr. Obery Hendricks relates this to the setting around Jesus' birth. Augustus, the Roman Emperor, declared a season of peace...but for the rich. He planned to achieve this peace through political repression, which seems awfully counterproductive to me. He caused terror through brutal crucifixions, but claimed to be the guardian of peace. Augustus was, in Dr. Hendricks' words, a *peacekeeper*. He declared a season of peace, though it was intended solely for the rich. To keep peace, his goal was to please the people and extinguish uprisings. Those who opposed this regime were put in prisons or crucified. Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are the *peacekeepers*", but rather, "Blessed are the *peacemakers*." Those who actively take part to destroy the structure that causes oppression and exploitation. To remove this structure means creating a society where true peace is made for all.

Reverend Dr. Pflieger says there is a difference between being liberal/progressive and being prophetic. To be liberal is to say: The healthcare system we have now is better than it used to be. But prophetic is saying: Not until every woman, man, and child has healthcare will I be satisfied. Liberal is saying, "Well, it's better than before..." But prophetic is to say, "if there is even one person hungry, we *all* should be hungry." It is the difference between fewer, and *none*.

So I urge you to join a movement. Take a stand - be it speaking out against sexism, heterosexism, racial injustices, or the greenhouse gas emissions of disproportionately the rich

threatening the existence of life on Earth and affecting the poorest of the poor. Speak out. Don't just stand by and adjust to injustice; become part of the solution. I hope that you will join me when I say: "I don't want to be better than before; I want to be prophetic."