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From the Bishop:

As you probably know, thousands of bison once roamed the plains of North America. In the late 1800s they were almost brought to extinction. Thankfully, due to conservation efforts, bison are back in the United States plains – even if they aren't nearly as ubiquitous as they once were.

You probably also know that bison are the largest mammals in North America. Male bison (called bulls) can weigh up to 2,000 pounds and stand 6 feet tall, while females (called cows) weigh up to 1,000 pounds and can reach a height of 4-5 feet. Bison calves weigh 30-70 pounds at birth. These are large and powerful creatures.

But even though bison are formidable, the plains can still be dangerous. Their main predators are wolves and mountain lions (what we in the west call cougars), who prey on the weak and the slow – like young bison. Bison typically run when they sense danger, but when predators approach without warning, bison form a multilayer circle of protection. The cows form a ring around the young, and the bulls form an outer ring surrounding the cows.

Just picture this for a moment. A wolf is coming … the bison cannot run anywhere. And instantly, instinctively, they corral their young in the middle, the females encircle the young, and the males encircle the females. The two rings facing outward. It is a pretty powerful picture. The bison community automatically protects those who cannot protect themselves.

May I ask why we, as humans, seem to do a worse job of protecting the vulnerable than bison? We know God's imperative from Genesis to Revelation. I mean, who did the prophets cry out for? The laborer, the prisoner, the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, the enslaved, the marginalized. Who did Jesus heal? The blind, the deaf, the paralyzed, the bleeding, the possessed, the outcast, the sinner, the forgotten. Again and again, God calls for each beloved person to be held safe – to be provided for and protected – and, when necessary, for those able, to encircle those who are defenseless, especially those society has called expendable.

This is the call God places on each of us – to protect and care for the most vulnerable. Yet, we are witnessing and experiencing the opposite in our society and through government actions. Beloveds in Christ, do not be deceived. When food assistance and benefits are slashed, the vulnerable are left defenseless. When rights are stripped away from women, people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants, and others, they are being cast to the wolves. Jesus himself warns in Matthew 7, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

As followers of Jesus, in these times that may bring discouragement or a sense of being overwhelmed, in these times when it feels wolves are coming at you or for someone you love, may you feel encircled in love and protection – even as you are called to encircle others. May we advocate, love boldly, and protect those who are most at risk. Let us take heart in the promise of God's justice and mercy. Let us be a people who uplift the weary, feed the hungry, and shelter the displaced. May we be a church that embodies Christ's compassion and courage, refusing to look away, refusing to be silent, refusing to let the wolves win. For all people are beloved in God's eyes.

I close with this. I have a little miniature bison on my desk in my office. I look at it often to remember that I am protected by God and that I am called by God. May you remember – as a baptized and beloved child of God, God has called you in this time and in this place. And you are not alone. For even as you protect others, God protects you. Amen.

Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee
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From the VEEP:

"You are a superpower." Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton

"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all and especially for those of the family of faith." Galatians 6:9-10

Throughout history, when things have looked bleak, humankind has looked for heroes. Two thousand twenty-five years ago, an oppressed people were looking for a savior – a hero to sweep in and free them from the political and social rule of the Roman Empire. They were on the lookout for a hero.

But what, exactly, makes someone a hero? This is a question that my students and I would discuss every time I taught my unit on the hero's journey. Because I am a comic book geek, the conversation often veered into comparing various superheroes and rating their levels of heroism. One favorite topic was Batman vs. Superman. Batman does not have any superpowers. He can't fly, or move mountains, or shoot heat beams from his eyes. He is most definitely not invulnerable. So, what makes him a hero? Well, he is committed to justice. Because he is vulnerable, he risks his life every time he puts on the suit. This willingness to put himself at great risk for others is one of his most defining heroic traits. In fact, it is why some would argue he is a greater hero than Superman even though his heroic acts are on a much smaller scale.

Superman, on the other hand, doesn't risk his life when he steps in front of a bullet, and he does have superhuman abilities. However, what makes Superman a great hero isn't his powers or his invulnerability, it is how he chooses to use those powers. This strange visitor from another planet is the most powerful being on Earth and he could let that power corrupt him and use his might to take over the world and subjugate humanity. Instead, he uses it to fight for truth and justice. It is Superman's willingness to use his power in the service of others that is his greatest heroic trait.

Those people two millennia ago were waiting for a hero when Jesus came onto the scene. They were looking for a great military leader to save them from their oppressors. Instead, they got a very different kind of savior, but a heroic one, nonetheless. Like Batman, Jesus is vulnerable and risks everything for us, ultimately sacrificing his very life. Like Superman, Jesus rejects the temptations of using his abilities and position in self-serving ways. He might not have been the hero they were looking for, but he was the hero humanity needed.

In today's mixed up, turbulent world, we are also looking around for heroes. But, rather than sitting around waiting to be rescued, what if we set about being our own heroes, following Jesus' example? What kind of hero could I be? I'm not faster than a locomotive, nor able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, but I do have power related to various social privileges related to the color of my skin, my country of origin, my education and professional background. I can choose to reject the temptation to use that privilege only to promote and protect myself and use it instead in service to others. I can risk myself to stand with the oppressed against the oppressors. I can support and champion organizations that do the good work of feeding the hungry, sheltering the unhoused, welcoming the refugee, and healing the sick. I can subscribe to Faith Action Network's weekly newsletter and follow their suggestions for action. I can support Lutheran Community Services Northwest. I can educate myself about AMPARO, the ELCA's strategy to **A**ccompany **M**igrants with **P**rotection, **A**dvocacy, **R**epresentation and **O**pportunities.

As we continue our Lenten journey and prepare for the celebration of Easter, let us all listen for God's call and when God asks, "Who shall I send?" consider responding, "Here I am, Lord, I will go."

Here is what I or the council have been up to in March:

- March 8 and 9: I attended the ordination and installation of Bobbi Jo Cyr as deacon and mission developer at Luther's Table in Renton.
- March 15: Synod Council met via Zoom.
- March 17: The Synod Equity Team had our first training with Organizing for Mission, and the bishop and I hosted a Zoom orientation for our Churchwide Assembly voting members.

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