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Good morning, sisters.

Good morning.
Let's open with a moment of prayer.

Holy Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight and energizing to your precious daughters. In your holy and beautiful name, in the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

So, when I was asked to speak this morning on upending tables, the verse that came to my mind is interestingly the verse that Linda just used to describe me, one of my favorite is verses, Micah 6:8. What does the Lord God require of us but to love mercy and to do justice and to walk humbly with him?

I think that upending tables is about doing justice, and that's what I want to unpack with you this morning is what does it mean for us to be required to do justice?

I am going to start by stepping back and by putting that in the context of God's goal for us. And I am not talking about God's ultimate goal for us of eternal life; I am talking about God's goal for us starting here and now, which is abundant life. Amen?

I preach in Spanish all the time, and we say amen, so you just need to get used to it and respond to me.

So I usually don't like this translation of the scripture that I have up here. I usually don't like The Message, but I like it for this particular scripture, and the verse that we are going to read together right now is connected to the fact that we normally think of abundant life very individually. If I follow Jesus, I have abundant life.

But the scripture sees it not only individually, but also communally. It's about us having abundant life, and this scripture in this version says it beautifully, so I want us to look at it together. I am going to read it.

Pay close attention now: I am creating a new heaven and a new earth. All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain are things of the past, to be forgotten. Look ahead with joy. Anticipate what I am creating; I'll create Jerusalem as sheer joy, create my people as pure delight. I'll take joy in Jerusalem, take delight in my people. No more sounds of weeping in the city, no cries of anguish; no more babies dying in the cradle, or old people who don't enjoy a full lifetime. One hundredth birthdays will be considered normal -- anything less will seem like a cheat. They'll build houses and move in. They'll plant fields and eat what they grow. No more building a house that some outsider takes over. No more planting fields that some enemy confiscates. For my people will be as long-lived as trees, my chosen ones will have satisfaction in their work. They won't work and have nothing come of it; they won't have children snatched out from under them. For they themselves are plantings blessed by God, with their children and grandchildren likewise God-blessed. Before they call out, I'll answer. Before they finish speaking, I'll have heard.

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Isn't there what we want? Amen. We all want that. The question is how do we get from here to there?

I believe that Micah 6:8 is a strategy. It's about how we get from where we are now to the kind of beautiful promise that we just read.

I want to start in talking about Micah 6:8 as a strategy, I want to start just by celebrating that we do a pretty darn good job of loving mercy. Christians in general and particularly women and particularly Lutherans and particularly Lutheran women, we have to celebrate that we are pretty good at acts of mercy, that there are people around the world and throughout the ages who have felt loved by us in the name and spirit of Jesus. Let's celebrate that. Amen?

Walking humbly? Not quite. Sometimes. Doing justice is more confusing. And one of the reasons why it's more confusing is because our world typically separates mercy and justice. Mercy and justice are often in tension, sometimes even in conflict, and the people who love mercy in our congregations and the people who do justice don't always get along with each other. But biblically, mercy and justice kiss. I believe that if we follow mercy all the way, go deep into mercy, we end up at justice. And that's the journey that I want to take you on right now.

That journey starts with a question that I want to ask you. When you look out into the world, do you see anything that breaks your heart? Now, I am not talking about the heartbreak that is inevitable in a fallen world. A dear friend of mine the other day lost her 90-year-old father. Her heart was broken, but it wasn't a surprise. No, I am talking about what Father Gustavo Gutierrez of Peru talks about when he says that extreme poverty, oppression, injustice means dying before your time, suffering unnecessarily and unjustly.

So I was a missionary in the Philippines for a few years, and as part of the work I did there, I was a chaplain in two hospitals a mile apart. One of them was the National Children's Hospital for the poorest families, the children of the poor, and the other one was St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, which was a middle-class hospital, a mile apart.

One day I was at the NCH, and a doctor came up to me and he said Pastor, I need you to come with me because we have to break the news to a family that their toddler is probably going to die. I said Doctor, I don't understand this. That baby has pneumonia, and we can cure pneumonia with antibiotics. What's going on here? And he said yes, Pastor, you are right, but that baby is allergic to penicillin, and penicillin is the only antibiotic that we have at the National Children's Hospital.

So I knew that at one mile away at St. Luke's, we had 20 antibiotics. I knew that if that baby died, he died unnecessarily and unjustly. He died before his time.

When you look out into the world, what kind of unnecessary and unjust suffering do you see that breaks your heart? And I want you to turn to the woman next to you and just share what came up for you first. And for many of us, it's a long list, but just the first thing that came up, if you'll turn to the woman next to you and share it. What unnecessary and unjust suffering breaks your heart?

So I am going to call you back together. But I just want us to red flag this, that this is where we start if we want to follow mercy so deeply that it takes us to justice. We start with the ways in which our heart is broken by the unnecessary and unjust suffering in our world.

And I want to share with you the unnecessary and unjust suffering that is currently breaking my heart. The Southwest California Synod, where I am a pastor, is a companion synod with the Lutheran Church of El Salvador. So if you are in Southwest California Synod and if you visit our companion synod, you will probably stay at the guest house in San Salvador, which is run by this lovely little abuela, this lovely grandmother in the front you see in the picture named Trinidad. That's her family who helps her run it. The boy on the far right is Jose, her grandson.

When Jose was 15 years old, two people of the Mara came up to him. The Mara is often referred to in the papers as a gang. That's a misnomer, I think. It's an international Mafia. It's one of the most powerful international Mafias we have seen. They make their money from guns trafficking, drugs trafficking, human trafficking, and the extortion of small businesses to the tune of about \$650 million a year. When the Mara comes up to a young man like Jose, they give him three choices. They say you can run, you can die, or you can join. And if you join, you have to prove that you are serious by killing a family member.

So two members of the Mara came up to Jose at school and said we have chosen you. You are going to join the Mara. They gave him the three choices. Jose is a Lutheran kid. He did not like those three choices. He thought, my father will help me. My father is a strong man spirit actually and physically. He will figure this out.

So Jose goes running home after school, and sure enough, his father has just gotten home from work, from driving a bus, with the two members of the Mara are running right behind Jose. His father comes outside and he says to the other two boys, he says you can't have my son.

Whereupon one of them takes out a pistol and shoots him dead in the street.

The next day Jose runs for the United States, where he has relatives. He is one of about 160,000 kids between the ages of 12 and 17 that have come to this country over the last few years. When they get here, because of an agreement that we made as the United States in 1948--1948 -- as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the end of World War II, we agreed that we would welcome people running from unjust persecution in their countries. That we would welcome them.

So because of that, Jose has the right, all these children have the right to apply for political asylum, to have their day in court. What they don't have is a free public defender. We don't provide public defenders to people applying for asylum. Even if they are children. If these kids get a lawyer, 75% to 80% of them are judged to be eligible, are judged to be eligible for -- as refugees, as political asylees. If they don't have a lawyer, 93% of them are sent back. And our Lutheran church in El Salvador has told us what happens to these kids, and it's not pretty. That breaks my heart.

By the way, the Mara does not seek for girls to be its soldiers. It's a macho organization. No, no, it tells girls that they are invited to be girlfriends of the gang, and we all know what that means.

They have been lately going after kids that are actually even younger, and when younger kids are gone after, very often the mothers come with them. I want to read you a story from one of the mothers that we are working with in Los Angeles.

I cannot return to El Salvador or the Mara will kidnap my daughter and kill me. I come from a humble background and worked hard to open my own small store to support my family. The Mara started taking over my neighborhood, and everyone lived in fear of the gang members. They would come into my store and take things without paying. They would also ask for money almost daily and raise the amount they demanded constantly. They were demanding more than what I could give, so I was forced to close my store. The Mara was very angry that I closed the store and demanded \$7,000 -- American dollars -- or they would kidnap my 8-year-old daughter. They said she was very pretty and they could do a lot of things with her. They also said that if I were to go to the police they would kill me and my other children. I would not have gone to the police anyway because they are connected with the gangs and often tell the gang members when victims report crimes. The gangs have killed many people who have tried to cooperate with the police. I know I can't go anywhere else in El Salvador because the Mara is everywhere, and others who have tried to flee to other parts of the country following similar threats have been found and killed.

After the Mara threatened to kidnap my daughter, I could not send her to school anymore. We fled to the United States and asked for protection at the border. We were detained in freezing cold rooms and given very little food to eat. The gangs have now started targeting my mother, and I am afraid that she will be hurt or killed because I left.

My sisters, this breaks my heart. And you know, if we were all to go around this room and share what breaks our heart, our hearts would be on the floor. There's a lot of bad news. In fact, there's so much bad news that your average person can't even bear to look at it. It's too painful. But if you can't look at it, you can't do anything about it.

Fortunately, we actually have the only thing that can help us deal with this bad news, which is that we have good news. If the heart of the creator and the sustainer of the universe is also broken by that which breaks our heart, then there is hope! Amen? Amen.

One of my favorite verses is also Matthew 9:35 and 36. When Jesus looks at the crowds and he has compassion. Compassion is not pity. Compassion is an English word or a Spanish word consisting of two Latin words, com and passio. Com means suffer, and passio means with. Jesus looks at us and he feels our pain as if it were his pain. He feels our hopes and dreams as if they were his hopes and dreams. That's why on a human level, he did what he did.

We need to have the same depth of compassion that Jesus did. We need to have the compassion of Jesus flowing through us. But Jesus does something in this scripture that we need to do in order for that to be true. What does he do before he has compassion? Anyone? He sees. He sees deep into the hearts of people, and he knows what's hurting them. He sees deep into their lives, and he knows what they are longing for. We do not have a compassion problem in our church, but sometimes we have a vision problem. Sometimes we don't see what is actually hurting even the people in the pews, let alone the people in our communities.

So I want to take you on a journey of seeing. I want you to imagine one person who is suffering from that which breaks your heart. Can you do that? Just hold that person in your heart and mind. And we are going to take this journey from mercy to justice with carrying that person in our heart and mind.

So the first step in that journey you've already done, which is just to make them visible. There are a lot of invisible people in our world. But they are not invisible to Jesus. Nobody is invisible to Jesus. So you have done the first step of having his compassion fill you just to see that person.

But let's go farther because Jesus goes farther. If all you see when you look at that person is their need, they are only partially visible. Because people are more than their need.

Another verse I love is Hebrews 13:2. Don't neglect to show hospitality because by doing so you may entertain ... who? Anybody know? Angels an angel doesn't just mean celestial being with wings. It means any messenger of God sent to bring you a blessing. That person that you are holding right now in your mind and heart may just be an angel. They may be a messenger of God sent to bring you a blessing. If we take that seriously, it makes it much easier to look at these terrible needs because we know that in the middle, the people coming to us with those needs are also coming to bless us. Amen? Amen.

I need that. I need this interaction.

But let's go even deeper. That person is not just an angel. In Ephesians, we read that we have one heavenly father, one heavenly mother, and what does that make us to each other? Brothers and sisters. Well, I am half Latina, and in that part of my culture, this is heavy. We don't always like our sisters and brothers. In fact, I have a sister I don't particularly like. I can say that to 3,000 people because we know. (Laughter). It's not a surprise. But I am still

responsible to her and for her. I am still my sister's keeper.

What does it mean for you to see that person that you are holding in your mind and heart is your actual brother or sister? Whoa! That's intense; right? Fanned that person is a believer, that person is more than your brother and sister; that is your arm. We are one body in Christ. If we have pain, you know, I broke my wrist awhile ago, if we have pain in your wrist, you have pain in your whole body. Why don't we feel the pain in our wrists and our arms and our fingers?

So see that person, if they are a believer, as part of your body. But now we are going to go one step farther, and this is the one where we cross the line, where we, without even noticing, organically cross the line from mercy to justice. It doesn't just say that Jesus saw individuals. It says that he saw the crowd. We see the problem and the solution differently, my sisters, if we only see individuals or we also see the crowd. If we see one little kid struggling in school, having trouble with her studies, and we have compassion, what do we do for her? We tutor her; right? But if we see 300 children struggling in the same school, we say what is wrong with that school? Why aren't the teachers teaching? We begin to deal with the system because we have compassion for the crowd.

If all I know is Jose, I say can we find that boy a lawyer? But if I know that there are 160,000 of him, I have to say what is wrong with this system? That all these children don't have lawyers?

We see the problem and the solution differently if we see the crowd. Then we move into the terrain of justice.

When Jesus saw and he had compassion, what did he give? This is a trick question. He gave everything; right? He gave his life. He gave everything he had to give. The question is not what are we required to give; it's what is in our hands? What do we have to give? It's not enough to love with your heart. You have to love with your mind as well. Because we have minds. We have to love as intelligently, as effectively as we can. That's what stewardship is.

So there's a lot of tools we have in our hands; right? You all know this. If you have a hungry person, you can give them a fish. And let me tell you, sometimes that is the most intelligent and effective thing to do. Because if somebody is hungry, they can't wait to learn how to fish. But can we do more? What tools do we have in our hands? Right? We can not just give them a fish, we can come and teach them to fish. We all know this. But if you take your fishing pole down to the pond and there's a wall around the pond, it doesn't matter if you know how to fish. You can't feed your family until you take down the wall.

It is the same love that makes you give a fish, teach someone to fish, or take the wall down around the pond. The point is to use everything that we've been given in the name of compassion. And that includes justice. So we got that? That's a third of what I wanted to do with you.

Now I just want to talk about one of the aspects of biblical justice that integrates seamlessly with mercy. I call it familia justice. And to unpack it for you, I need to go back to when the people of God were coming into the promised land. When the people of God came into the promised land, how did they divide it up? By tribes; right? What were tribes? They were

brothers. Right? So they divided up among their brothers and sisters. And they don't give a bigger piece to the brother that was cuter or smarter or even harder working. We know from Levi's tithe that they give everybody the same amount. Well, of course they do. They don't do that because they are communists. It had not been invented yet. They do that -- I mean, I am a mom, and I just don't give one of my children more cookies than I give another one. When I am handing out the cookies, they all get the same amount of cookies because I love them equally. I don't play favorites. Well, God doesn't play favorites. God makes sure that each of the tribes has the same amount. They are all his kids.

But of course, it doesn't stay like that; does it? Because one year, one of the tribes can't grow enough food on its plot to be able to feed its people. So they have to borrow from their brother. But the next year, how are they going to grow enough food to feed all their people and also pay back? They can't. So they pay back in the one thing they've got, which is land. But my sisters, then the next year, they have even less land to be able to grow enough food, so they have to borrow again, and so it goes until you end up with some of the brothers and sisters having no land and others of the brothers and sisters having all the land, and then the people with no land, the only way they can feed themselves is by selling themselves. And so you end up in a situation where some brothers and sisters are the slaves of other brothers and sisters, and God, their loving father and mother, is not pleased. I mean, who would be? Would we be pleased if our children were slaves to our other children?

And so God calls for a reset, and we know it as jubilee; right? This is the famous jubilee verse. That every 50 years, everybody goes back to that original land. So that everybody has more or less the same amount. They go back to that familia justice, the inheritance that comes not because you earned it but just because you are members of a family. It's a beautiful law. But of course, whether or not it was ever practiced, sooner or later it stopped being practiced, and we ended up with terrible inequality in the land of Israel, and the prophets began to call people back to a jubilee vision.

This is a scripture that I think most of us know. It's very famous, Isaiah 58. There is this one interesting little line in the middle of the scripture. It's in verse 7. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? We usually just skip over that line because it's weird. But really look at it. What is it saying? It's saying that when we feed the hungry, we are not just doing charity; we are taking care of our family. And when you don't feed the hungry, what you are doing is hiding yourself in your own house so that your sisters don't know you are there. So you don't have to share what's on your table with them. Whoo, familia justice. It's really core.

And of course, when Jesus comes, by the time that Jesus comes, this prophetic call to practice jubilee, to practice healthy family, has gotten connected with this dream of the last days. That the year of the Lord's favor, when the messiah comes, it's going to be a time for eternal jubilee, when we will be a healthy family forever and ever. So knowing that, let's look at Jesus' proclamation of his mission in Luke 4, again, a very well-known passage. When Jesus reads this passage -- and look at it up on the board -- notice that at the end, all the eyes are fixed on him. They are all staring at him. Why are they staring at him? They are not staring at him because he says that the passage is fulfilled in their hearing. He says that afterwards. They are staring at him first. They are staring at him because he changes the scripture. If somebody read the scripture in church one morning and changed it, would you stare at them?

He changes it in two very important ways. This is -- he is reading Isaiah 61. That's what this is. But he inserts a line from Isaiah 58. This line about letting the oppressed go free, it's not in Isaiah 61; it's in Isaiah 58. And he sticks it in the middle. And then the other thing he does is he doesn't read the last line of the verse. He stops right after the year of the Lord's favor to emphasize that now it's eternal jubilee. Now it's the year of the Lord's favor.

Now we are back to being a healthy family. And if we have any doubt that this is what people understood, look at Acts 2. Remember what happens in Acts 2?

I am going to actually read this one out loud.

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

They got it. They got it. They got that now is the time, it's the year of the Lord's favor, the Lord has come. Now it's eternal jubilee. And so now we are going to live like a family. They are not socialists. It hadn't been invented yet. They are living as a family, taking care of each other. Wow. I just want you to imagine for a minute what it would be like if just Christians -- nobody else -- if even just Lutherans, the whole world over, lived like this. Would the world be different? Amen. And it would be a more just world because mercy and justice biblically kiss.

So that's the second part of what I wanted to give you. First I wanted to give you the journey from mercy to justice through our broken hearts, through seeing with the eyes of Jesus, through having his compassion, through giving all the gifts we have to give. And then I wanted you to understand the aspect of biblical justice; that is the full union of mercy and justice, which is familia justice, family justice.

So now in the remaining time that we have, I want to unpack what does it mean for us to be family? Because you know, we can't stop being family. We can be dysfunctional family or healthy family. Those are our only choices. We are family. We have one heavenly mother. We cannot stop being family. So how do we be family? And I am going to get a little down and dirty here about it. How do we do this?

I have a few suggestions, and then I do want to take a little time to share what this looks like in terms of that which breaks my heart, so I am just very quickly going to talk a little bit more generally, and then I am going to talk a little bit about what we are doing about this horrible situation in Central America.

So many of us, many of you are activists or see yourself as activists. Many of you don't, but many of you do. And I was with a women's group the other day that I was training, and almost all of them saw themselves as activists, and I said so, as activists, what is your relationship to your congregation? And one woman said, well, we teach them the truth. I said how is that going for you?

An organizer is somebody who engages people, who inspires people, who moves people to participate. God has placed in all of us in our hearts his image, and part of what that means is that he's placed in our hearts a little flame that desires mercy and justice, that desires the vision of abundant life we saw at the beginning. It's in all of us. But there's a lot of resistance to that. You know, it's hard. It's costly. It's frightening. We don't know that we have enough at the table.

And so what an organizer does is to fan the flame in everyone's heart until it overcomes all of that resistance. To fan that flame of their desire for mercy and justice. So if you come to your congregation as organizer, not as activist, you come expecting that flame, fanning that flame, listening to the name of the flame in each person so that you can build it to the point where your congregation becomes a family. And not only when your congregation becomes more of a family, but where you begin to expand that family. So it starts in the congregation, but then it moves out into the community and out into the world until more and more we become everywhere we go we are spreading family. Can you feel it? Can you see it?

So that was just a little bit of -- I have a lot more, but I am not going to go into it. Instead I am going to talk to you about what this looks like in some of the work that we are doing with the unaccompanied minors and with the mothers with the families.

So I want to talk to you about how we are moving our churches to address this crisis, this crisis that is breaking my heart, and I want to share with you a little bit about the Guardian Angels program. And where did I put my clicker? There it is. I got so excited I lost my clicker. Oh, well. There we go.

So in Southern California, in the Southwest California Synod, when we heard about Jose's story and we realized it wasn't just his story but it was the story of a lot of kids, we called some of the immigration lawyers that we knew, and we said what's needed? What do you need the church to do? And they said well, you know, these kids are in court, and they don't have lawyers, and they are terribly alone. Can you imagine being 15 and showing up in a country where you don't speak the language and don't have any money and being expected to defend yourself in court? And to be alone? These kids are in absolute terror. So our legal friends said can you go down and accompany them? Can you just -- remember, this is an act of mercy; right? Just be with them. And we decided that what we would do is that we would wear t-shirts with this emblem on it. This emblem is the emblem that every Latino kid grows up with above your bed. I think some kids of (Inaudible) instruction did too. Right? We wear them on a T-shirt so as we are coming into the courts, immediately kids look at us and they are look what's that? Look at that. But it's a trusted symbol, and so they know that we come from God. And immediately -- I never forget we give out referral information on little cards, and on one side of the card it has this picture.

I just remember this 13-year-old girl just holding the picture, just holding it, because it meant to her that God was with her. Just go in and accompany. Accompany and watch. Monitor to see whether or not the judges are treating the kids right.

You know. And make sure, try to find them lawyers, try to find them social services, whatever you can do. And by the way, I forgot to mention that this situation is currently getting much worse under the new administration. We have a couple of executive orders that directly relate to these, to these mothers and kids.

One of them says that a sponsor who takes one of the kids so the kid can leave the detention center and be in a home while they are going through the court process, if a sponsor is undocumented -- because the sponsor takes the kid with no money provided, just to take care of the kid -- and if the sponsor is themselves undocumented, the administration is now prioritizing the detention and deportation of those sponsors in front of those children.

These traumatized children are now going to watch their uncles or their aunts or their distant cousins, whoever took them, being taken away. And kids that are left without a sponsor are now going to be a priority for processing. We'll read detention and deportation because fast processing, rocket docket, means we can't get them lawyers. Also, if one of the parents is in this country and has helped to pay a coyote, a smuggler, to help take the children here, that parent will be charged with human trafficking under the new administration.

And I know a 13-year-old girl who was raped by the Mara and then raped by the Mexican police because she didn't have a coyote. She didn't have a smuggler. So parents who want to protect their children are going to be charged with human trafficking. So that's some of the new crisis, not the chronic crisis that we are dealing with.

But so we are there. We are there in court. We are there to accompany. We are there to deal with all of this. And sometimes we can deal with it successfully, and I want you to see a little video right now of just one of the moments when it actually worked when besides accompanying, we could actually make a difference. So let's play the video.

So I do want to say that Guardian Angels started in Southwest California Synod, but now it's a national program. It's in Chicago. It's called AMMPARO. You saw AMMPARO, and it's also getting ready to start in a couple of other synods as well. It's not, actually, that difficult to start.

I mentioned that this is an example of the unity of mercy and justice. It's a mercy program, but let me tell you that anybody who gets involved in going to court sooner or later says what can we do about the crowd? What can we do about some of these unjust policies that are sending children back to die and separating families? And thanks be to God, as part of the AMMPARO program, we do have a program director of migration policy at the ELCA Advocacy Office, and she is available to help us deal with these real walls that keep us from getting to the pond.

So we really have a commitment. Part of what I love about our church is we really do have a national commitment about the seamless journey from mercy to justice, and we make resources available for that.

I also just wanted to draw your attention, if you want to go even broader than just responding, if you really want to respond to the immigration crisis in a way that is even broader than just helping these refugees from Central America, there is a new national network that I've been privileged to be part of starting called Matthew 25. Matthew 25 is a bipartisan Christian network to protect and defend the vulnerable in the name and spirit of Jesus. And you can look it up at Matthew25pledge.org if you are interested in looking into that.

But essentially, it was promised in your little bulletin that I would tell you what you could do. So I am just going to give you a few things that you can do if your heart was also broken by some of the story that I told you.

What with you do in the Guardian Angels program is that we accompany. Accompany.

It's a beautiful, simple word. Companion, accompany, companiero, just accompany the people who are suffering unnecessarily and unjustly, and much will come from that if that's where you start.

Now, accompany in partnership. Often the church thinks we can do it all by ourselves. Not only is that not necessary, it's relatively arrogant because God is actually lifting up, always lifting up movements of people to do what he wants done in this world, and what we have to do as Christians is to give our unique gifts, all of our unique gifts, to God's broader work for justice. And as we do that, we are a testimony. We are light and salt. So accompany in partnership. Who else is doing the work to make a difference in the things that break your heart? And instead of doing something separate, how do we join in a way that brings all of our unique gifts to that process?

And part of what that means, my sisters, is that we join together as immigrant and nonimmigrant churches in this work. In Matthew 25, we have a particular emphasis on that, that immigrant churches have certain gifts to bring; nonimmigrant churches have other gifts to bring; when we come together, we have a really beautiful partnership. We have the exchange of hope and passion. Because often as the people are suffering most, we are very motivated to doing something about this. But we don't have any hope. We know how small we are and how big the problem is. And people who have the resources, people who are not immigrants, don't do anything about it because it's hard to drum up enough passion to sustain. But when immigrants and nonimmigrants work together in intimate solidarity as sisters in Christ, then we have an exchange of hope and passion, and we get it done. We hang in there.

So I would really encourage you to seek out those kinds of partnerships. So partnerships with the larger movement, where we bring our unique gifts, and partnerships between immigrants and nonimmigrants, between the people most affected by what breaks your heart and the people who have more resources. Partnerships in joint mission.

So accompanying in partnership is critical to what we do. Legal support. It's not very sexy and dramatic. It's costly and frustrating. But legal support is essential right now. If you work in any way with people who are refugees, people seeking asylum, even the larger immigrant community, we don't have enough lawyers, and all our lawyers who give pro bono are tapped out to the max.

Individual family campaigns. Sometimes, you know, with so much suffering going on, it feels a little weird to fight for one family, but we can actually sometimes save one family at a time, and that actually creates an enormous amount of educational impact. We have a pastor in south LA right now facing deportation. He came to the country when he was 17 to work in the fields. He was deported. He came back, he married a U.S. citizen, he became a pastor, he has citizen children. He is a great pastor. But he's got a deportation order from 25 years ago. Under the Obama Administration, he had what's called a "stay of removal" where he had to check in every year. We are doing a campaign around that pastor. It takes a lot of letters, calls, visits, and prayer. But in the process, we are also teaching a lot of people about the system and getting a lot of people engaged. So individual and family campaigns are very important.

Public witness, and under public witness is the question of sanctuary, which I really don't have time to talk about in this context but is something that I am very available to talk about if anybody's interested.

We do have an interfaith sanctuary movement, and Matthew 25, which is bipartisan Christian, also works closely with that movement about the ancient biblical principle of sanctuary.

Lastly, even when you are dealing with a federal issue like immigration, there are local and state policies we can work on. ELCA offices are wonderful around that, and we need to take advantage of that resource. I want to give you an idea of these are effective ways to respond to a crisis that breaks my heart, and many of them are applicable to the crises that may break your heart as well.

So I just want to recap right now. I want to go back. No, I have a little time, so I am going to tell you one more story. Is that all right?

Yeah.

I am actually under my time. I can't believe it. I want to talk just for a minute more about the unique gifts that we bring as the church into these broader movements for justice. And I spend a good part of my time teaching people about how to do this in eight-hour-long or four-hour-long trainings. I am just going to give you a couple little suggestions and stories about what that looks like.

We believe in the power of prayer. Amen? Amen.

If somebody is sick that you love, how often do you pray for them? Nonstop. How often do we pray for our legislative leaders? Maybe once a week on Sunday maybe.

That's not prayer, sisters; that's lame.

So what does it look like? Can you imagine what our country would look like if we prayed fervently -- fervently -- for our leaders on both sides of the divide to fear God and love God's people? Pretty amazing, huh? And not just privately, sometimes we need to pray publicly. So a little story. We were trying to pass some legislation in San Diego, California, a few years ago that would have made a real difference for working poor families in that city. City council was very conservative, but we had a lot of really good arguments. We had a very broad coalition. We were going every week, like the persistent widow, every week to city council, and we were sharing our arguments, and we got a little under 50% of the council on our side with us. But we had to have over 50%, and the other half had been invested in heavily to vote against us. So we weren't getting anywhere.

So we decided that it was time to stop talking and start praying. So when we went up to the microphone, usually you have two minutes or so, we went up to the microphone, we just let people pray. Some people prayed for working poor families. Other people prayed for members of the city council. Other people prayed for the shalom of the city.

So one Tuesday night, one of the members of the city council who had been invested in very heavily to vote against us, but he was a very devout conservative evangelical, suddenly voted with us. And we won. Rand afterwards a journalist interviewed him and said why do you vet for this legislation? And he said I couldn't take being prayed for one more week.

You see, he had armor against the talking points. But he had no armor against the prayer. It went underneath, and because he was a true Christian, he had to struggle with his God, and he changed.

Now, do you think that was frightening for him to do that? You bet! He could lose his job around it. But do we live by fear? Or do we live by faith?

The process of overcoming fear with faith is the process of encouragement, literally to give courage. We have all, at some point in our life of faith, been encouraged. Somebody, we have been frightened to do what God is calling us to do, we have been resistant, and someone has fanned that flame, someone has given us the courage to overcome the resistance and do what we are called to do.

I believe that many of you, if not all of you, know something about the art of encouragement.

Part of the unique gift that we bring as Christians into the halls of power, into the divisions in our churches between partisan sides, we bring this capacity to encourage. It's a gift that if we are not there, if we are not in those halls of power, if we are not speaking into the divides because of our fear, we cannot bring it. But if we bring it, it can change hearts and minds and the world. It's part of how we be healthy family is by encouraging one another.

So I would call you as you respond to that which breaks your hearts that you bring all of your gifts as Christians into all of the gifts that we have as members of the United States society. That you take the gifts of democracy which are precious and you take all the gifts of who we are as Christians, and you bring it all. You bring it all to the creation of a healthy family.

May we hear and believe. Amen.