

Building for Faith in Action Campaign Church as Landmark and PRIDE Kickoff

June 4, 2023

Landmark

If any of you know me and watch the show “Ted Lasso,” you know that I have been remarkably restrained in how infrequently I’ve mentioned the show from the pulpit. Yes, it’s somewhat more swears and sexual than I would normally recommend from here, but, especially in the first season, it’s like a mini sermon each episode. Each episode feels like it is going to be too sweet, like cotton candy, but ends up having just enough bite and complexity to not be cloying.

As our Building for Faith in Action Capital Campaign celebrates Union as a Landmark today, I can’t help but remember a quote from Ted Lasso from earlier this season. Rebecca, the uber-rich, ultra polished football club owner is talking with Ted, the head coach. Ted is mooning about how romantic Paris is, and Rebecca shuts him down by saying, “The Eiffel Tower is just a lamppost with a publicist.”

What makes something a landmark is being recognized, known. And, as Pat Shafer pointed out in our testimonial this morning, while our building is beautiful, it primarily serves as a resource toward what truly makes Union a landmark, what Union is most widely known for, and that is our almost two-centuries-long commitment to actively seeking God’s Justice.

This commitment to justice is woven into our church’s DNA from the earliest. Union, at its founding in 1836, was interracial. Union elected our first female trustee in 1887, more than 40 years before women would even be allowed to vote in this country. Our church was committed to women’s leadership long before the nation came on board.

When Union founded the first free library in Green Bay, that was a justice issue, wanting to make sure that everyone had access to ideas and the means to better themselves. If we were to ask people what Union is recognized for, what makes it a landmark, the majority would talk about our church’s participation in the Underground Railroad and the fact that we voted to be Open and Affirming decades ago.

If you think about it, both of the things that outsiders think of if they know of our church are about subverting the dominant morality of the day in order to help others live freely and authentically.

Romans 12

As I was searching for scriptures that speak to this notion, the chapter from the Letter to the Romans which Brittany and I read today kept coming to mind. There we read:

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by
the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God.”

—Romans 12:2

So much of this age is committed to maintaining the status quo, even harkening back to an imagined past. So many pretend that the old days were good, when a man and a woman got

married and stuck it out. When people waited until marriage to have sex. When people listened to the police, and teachers just taught reading, writing, and 'rithmetic.

The thing is, all of those things were an illusion. None of them were true. And, over the years, good-hearted people have followed our scripture today and, rather than being conformed to the soul-sucking, unjust, narrative of their age, have faithfully been transformed by the renewing of the mind. What's more, being transformed and renewed, our scripture tells us, is the will of God.

I need to keep things tight today, because I'm hoping that as many of you as are able will head over to Green Isle Park when we're done here, so that you can participate in our third annual Imago Dei Ecumenical PRIDE worship service and picnic. So, instead of unpacking the rest of this passage, I'm going to encourage you to go back and reread the entirety of Romans 12 on your own. You might even put your Union bookmark at that passage for the long haul.

(By the way, there are more bookmarks available in the church hall. Take as many as you like.)

Reread it, and allow Romans 12 – not retro attempts at maintaining power and control – to shape your faith. What you will find is that Romans 12 lays out the marks of someone following Jesus, and it says nothing about banning books or bodies.

PRIDE

Romans 12 ends with encouraging us to overcome evil with good. In these times when our love and our bodies and our families are under attack, it may feel safest to shrink back. To be beige. But I remind you that the PRIDE flag includes all of the colors of the rainbow because we're all needed.

Now friends, I know that, for some, not speaking out is about both psychological and physical safety, but for those of us who have the power, it is time to rise up. Rev. Ashley Horan is a Unitarian minister who stated this brilliantly. She wrote recently:

I will spend exactly zero seconds playing the “don't be scared, rabid transmisogynists and homophobes, we're not trying to convert your kids!” game. Not a single one. Why? Because I absolutely, unapologetically believe the queer agenda IS about spreading queerness—or more correctly, queering this culture.

YES!

We want more and more folks who are currently under the oppressive grasp of all the systems out there that are trying to squeeze the soul and the joy and the freedom out of everybody (not just queer and trans folks) to see that another world is possible. Queerness and transness are about so much more than who we have sex with and how and who we're attracted to and which body parts we have and how we express our genders.

Which means that our agenda is about so much more, too. Our agenda is about kicking open every door that has blocked someone from being in the room because of their sexuality or their gender. Our agenda is about radical forms of community care and resourcing and sharing that mean the most vulnerable among

us are held in care. Our agenda is about creating safety and stability beyond the violent systems of policing and prisons. Our agenda is about centering the brilliance and leadership and thriving of the ones who have too often been pushed to the margins, especially those whose identities sit at the intersection of multiple marginalizations. Our agenda is about making family in a thousand ways that honor our elders and protect our children and bind us in kinship to one another beyond geography and bloodlines and any state-sanctioned relationship. Our agenda is about making sure every person, in every kind of body, at every stage of life, is treated with dignity and seen as the expert on their own experience and can access affirming, comprehensive medical and psychological care.

And because of this, our agenda is always going to insist that in order to achieve these goals, we must also heal the wounds of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, ableism, colonialism, and all oppressive systems. Our agenda is always going to insist we need all of us to get free. So if that's the queer and trans agenda, HECK YEAH we're actively recruiting. Come on over, kids, because it's wild and glittery and joyful and loving and life-saving here in our communities. We're not perfect, but we're sure trying to build a world where all of us can be free and thriving. We're wildly diverse, we've gotten really great at loving each other fiercely, and there's room for you—yes, you— here.

Rev. Horan ends with:

While I don't think we're giving out cards or toasters anymore, I promise you it's pretty great over here. We're waiting for you.

Conclusion

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by
the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God.”

—Romans 12:2

For 187 years, this is what Union has been known for. So, go free some people who are enslaved. Create the 2023 version of a free library. Queer the culture. And, in doing so, know that you are heeding what Romans 12 tells us are the marks of a true follower of Jesus, by overcoming evil with good.

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Romans 12
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