

BOOK REVIEW

***BAPTIZED FOR THIS MOMENT* *Rediscovering Grace All Around Us* by Stephen Bouman**

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The Rev. Dr. Stephen Bouman is the former Director of the ELCA's Domestic Mission Unit and was the Bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod of the ELCA. He was in New York City on September 11, 2001 and begins this book by remembering where all of his family members were on that day and, how as Bishop, he called the ELCA churches in Manhattan as the day unfolded. Rev. Bouman writes of the many memorials he participated in during the days and weeks following 9/11 and also recounts the acts of kindness that began in the city that day. As part of the response to 9/11, he organized Lutheran Disaster Response New York.

The church's response to tragedies is the underlying theme of the book. We are called to be a public church, and we often encounter fear and anger in public spaces. How can people of faith bring comfort to these spaces? How can we encourage one another in these difficult conversations? The author's examples of tense conversations serve as guidance for people of faith entering places of crisis. Careful prayerful listening is the basis for a faithful response. Lamentations come before healing, the author states. We need to give voice to the pain and walk alongside the suffering. Finding hope comes in sharing one another's stories.

Hope can influence our conversations in the public sphere. Unfortunately, hope is harder to see in a polarized world, so part of our call is to create spaces where hopeful conversations can take place. Rev. Bouman writes of many conversations in his ministries where anger and mistrust turned into understanding and hope. The tools for this transformation were the telling of stories and truly listening to one another. Another piece in the toolkit of hope is the exegesis or critical interpretation of scripture; every exegesis in the book serves as a model for hopeful conversations. For example, Luke 8 is given as an example of the action-reflection-accompaniment model.

Rev. Bouman uses the image of the table as a way into hopeful conversations in the public sphere. The perfect table of creation, the broken table, and the kitchen table all lead to the altar table of word and sacrament. The altar table leads us out into mission with our neighbors. This mission becomes the public mission table, which the author describes as a careful process and response to conflict, crisis, and tragedy. This response is much deeper than social ministry or an outreach ministry, but is defined by who we are as people of faith. It is important to note that these hopeful conversations are not an add-on ministry but part of our foundation as a church.

I found this book inspiring and helpful. There were many examples of conversations in times of conflict where anger turned into hope and hope became action. The scripture passages and table images can connect to any congregation in challenging situations. The reflection questions at the end of each chapter would be useful for church councils, Bible study groups, youth or adult education, or table discussions.

The book contains many practical tips and usable instructions based on Rev. Bouman's experiences responding to tragedies. Show up. Listen. Tell stories. Pray. These simple actions described in detail in many different situations can guide us all into ministries and relationships of peace and acceptance.