

Title: Good Trouble

Focus Scripture: We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. — I Corinthians 1:23-24

Short Summary:

As we celebrate MLK day, we not only remember the sacrifices and initiatives of those who led the civil rights movement, we recognize how the teachings and actions of Jesus—which ultimately led him to the cross—manifest what John Lewis called “Good Trouble.”

Extended Summary:

The history of human race could in large part be characterized as a history of various groups fighting for power to rule over others. This is typified as a specific kind of power, what Greg calls “power over” (something that he extensively explains in his book *The Myth of a Christian Nation*), and humans have been killing each other to acquire that kind of power since the Fall of Adam and Eve. This point in the history of America is an extreme manifestation of this pursuit of this power through violence.

Jesus’ life and death reveal that God and God’s people rely on a totally different kind of power – the power of the cross. The power of other-oriented, self-sacrificial love. It’s not power over others, but power that comes *under* others to humbly love, serve and bless them, even those who are our enemies.

It is cruciform power, that of setting aside one’s own privileges and advantages, to suffer alongside those who have been oppressed, trampled on, tossed aside and forgotten, just as Jesus did. It is the power of freely entering into solidarity with those who have been despised, discarded, disinherited, disenfranchised. To lend your voice to the voice of those who are hurting. It is the power of loving your enemies just as Jesus did for us while we were yet enemies.

In a sermon he gave in 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. said:

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction ... The chain reaction of evil - hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars - must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation. “

This puts into practice Paul’s teaching that when you respond to an enemy’s aggression by being kind to them rather than retaliating, you bring conviction. When you refuse to conform to unjust laws – such as were prevalent in the Jim Crow south – and you do so with a commitment to nonviolence and to loving your enemy, you are doing what John

Lewis called “Good Trouble.” When you’re willing to invite trouble into your own life for a just and loving cause, you are fighting the status quo through “Good Trouble.”

Jesus practices his own form of “Good Trouble,” which was simply saying and demonstrating that various people groups matter, including the Samaritans, Gentiles, Roman Centurians, women, the poor, lepers, the blind, and the outcasts like prostitutes and tax collectors. Any words or actions that disrupt the ranking systems of the world would be classified as “Good Trouble.”

Greg offers five principles that guide us to move into “Good Trouble” today:

1. Abandon Your Comfortable Faith
2. Cultivate Cross-Cultural Relationships
3. Look for Opportunities
4. Partner with Others to Support the Cause
5. Learn

To move into these five principles, Woodland Hills is offering a Learn-A-Thon on race, justice, peacemaking, and the civil rights movement. Visit whchurch.org/highlights to discover how to get involved.

Reflection Questions:

- What does 1 Corinthians 1:23-24 teach us about “Good Trouble”?
- What kind of “Good Trouble” did Jesus bring? How did He do this?
- How does “Good Trouble” break the cycle of the pursuit of “Power Over”?
- Why is “Good Trouble” or “Power Under” the only way to break the patterns of hate and violence?
- What are your next steps for moving into “Good Trouble”?

“Good Trouble” Gathering Groups Discussion Guide

Ice Breaker:

- What is something that made you laugh this last week?

Question #1:

- How would you define “Good Trouble” according to what was introduced in this teaching?
- How did Jesus practice “Good Trouble”?

Question #2: Read 1 Corinthians 1:23-24 together.

- What does this passage tell us about the nature of how God gets things done?
- What does it teach us about power?

Question #3:

- What is the difference between “Power Over” and “Power Under”?
- How does “Power Under” or “Good Trouble” break the cycle of hate and violence?

Question #4:

- What do you need to learn in order to better understand “Good Trouble”?
- What steps do you need to take in order to participate at a higher level in what God is doing to bring about the value of all others?