



METROPOLITAN  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
SYNOD ELCA

*As dawn broke over D.C.*  
**Reflecting on Bishop Budde's Sermon**

As dawn broke over D.C. that morning, I joined other ecumenical and interfaith leaders as we made our way through the heightened security of the National Cathedral. We arrived at 6:45 AM for an 11:00 AM service, giving us time to recognize and hold the weight of what was to come. The presidential inauguration had been the day before and the flurry of signing of executive orders left many in our communities—particularly our LGBTQIA and immigrant siblings—feeling shocked, vulnerable, and afraid.

As we gathered, looking over seating charts and participating in the walk through of the service, our own vulnerability and fear became evident. Eyes widened, brows lifted, and shoulders shrugged whenever we faced questions about how to meet the imminent needs of those we were entrusted to serve and love. We had few answers that morning, and there remain few satisfying answers today. What we did know was that many of us were there because we trusted Bishop Budde's pastoral heart and prophetic wisdom.

As I sat in the sacred space, eager to hear a good word, Bishop Budde began to speak. What emerged was what I can only describe as a "prophetic whisper"—gentle in its delivery but piercing in its effect. She offered us preachers a masterclass in capturing and maintaining listener attention, demonstrating how a prophetic lullaby could carry just as much power as a thundering homiletical exposition.

Yet what moved me most deeply was not her preaching. Instead, what drew me into this profound moment was witnessing a shepherd understand her unique position and choose to use it faithfully.

Beyond her homiletical decisions and delivery, what I believe should demand our attention is how she wielded her considerable institutional and social capital. From her place as Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington D.C., speaking from the prestigious pulpit of the National

Cathedral, she navigated the complex intersection of her identity as a white woman in North America. Her position illustrates a profound tension: while her whiteness grants her privilege that replenishes itself even as it is deployed, her womanhood still leaves her diminished under patriarchy. White women occupy this distinctive space of being both empowered through whiteness and constrained by patriarchal expectations. In this moment, Bp. Budde used her white privilege while simultaneously resisting patriarchy's demand for her submission. These conscious (or unconscious) prophetic choices have captivated the world.

Bp. Budde has since been elevated to celebrity status, garnering interviews on global platforms. It comes as no surprise that her witness has ignited strong emotions: exhilaration, outrage, pride, judgment. White supremacy and patriarchy evoke such extreme emotions when there is a disruption in how these socio-political systems operate. And we, Christians and clergy, are not exempt from the impact of these systems or these emotions. I've especially noticed the judgment among and upon ecclesiastical leaders who lead faithfully, yet differently, than Bp. Budde. Her message was vital and her delivery masterful, and I wonder if we can also acknowledge that the amplification of her voice—and its condemning use by and toward ministers of the gospel—is itself enabled by systems of privilege.

My goal here is to highlight, and celebrate, how Bp. Budde's faithful response to the day's calling demonstrates more than a powerful and effective homiletical approach; it was a demonstration of what becomes possible when white privilege and patriarchal resistance is deployed in service of justice.

**Rostered and lay leaders of the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod, and all who seek to live out their vocations and lead faithfully: embrace the unique platform God has entrusted to you. Your identity—your color, gender, faith tradition, and sphere of influence—is not accidental but providential. It is sacred ground from which you are called to speak truth, embody justice, and reflect the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. *May we resist the temptation to compare or judge our or one another's prophetic witness. Instead, may we hold ourselves accountable to our divine calling: preaching, teaching, and embodying bold and unapologetic love for all God's beloved creation.***

*Holy One, protect and strengthen all who speak truth to power, from those who whisper in quiet resistance to those who shout a clarion call. Grant wisdom to those who risk less, that they might amplify those who risk much. Guide us all in using our voices, whatever their reach, to herald your justice and love. And may we each steward our particular place of influence with courage, wisdom, and grace for such a time and place as this... with God's help and in Jesus' name. Amen.*

En Cristo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leila M. Ortiz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rev. Leila M. Ortiz, Bishop

