

**Dr. Lonnie H. Lee**

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**Where God Dwells**

Luke 1:38

One of my favorite Protestant reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was a woman named Wibrandis Rosenblatt. She was a friend of some of the most famous Reformers – people Calvin and Zwingli. She made a career out of marrying important reformers. She began with the leader of the Reformation in Basel Switzerland, a man named Oecolampadius. When he died she moved to Strasbourg and married a reform leader named Wolfgang Capito. When he died she married the most influential reformer in Strasbourg, Martin Bucer who was the mentor of John Calvin. The Westminster group that traveled with me to Europe in 2009 visited the three churches where Wibrandis' husbands had their ministries.

Wibrandis advocated for reformed churches to take the ministry of hospitality seriously. She made sure that the homes of her reformer husbands were centers of hospitality for those who were in need. In particular her homes served as a place of welcome for refugees. One of these refugees, an Italian reformer named Peter Martyr Vermigli, described his stay in the home of Martin and Wibrandis Bucer in these words:

Immediately upon our arrival (in Strasbourg) we were received most cordially into Bucer's home. I was allowed to stay ... seventeen days. During this time, I saw in his preaching and conduct wonderful evidences of evangelical faith. He is so hospitable toward foreigners, who for the sake of Christ and the gospel, have had to travel to foreign places that his house resembles an inn ... His table is neither splendid nor common, but ruled by a pious frugality ... Before and after the meal a passage from the Holy Scriptures is read. This then provides the occasion for godly conversation (Ernst Staehelin, From Wibrandis: A Woman in the Time of Reformation, page 33).

The great contribution of Wibrandis was her capacity to teach her husbands that hospitality was at the center of their ministries. Making a home for others connected them to the mission of God.

This truth is at the heart of Luke's presentation of the story of Mary. The angel Gabriel comes to deliver a message. He does not go to an important metropolitan center like Jerusalem. Instead, he goes to the insignificant town of Nazareth. There he seeks out an ordinary young woman named Mary. He delivers to her a message that does not warm her heart. She is perplexed by the word she receives from the angel. He tells her that she is to be the mother of a son who will assume the throne of his ancestor David.

Mary challenges the angel on the impossibility of this scenario. It goes against nature for a virgin to give birth. It goes against the mores of her culture for a single girl to get pregnant before marriage. The angel points to her cousin Elizabeth who was almost ready to give birth even though she was well beyond child bearing age. God is not limited by the boundaries of nature or culture or historical precedent.

The pivotal moment comes when Mary must respond to this preposterous announcement. The angel has invited her to provide hospitality to God. She is called to make a home for Jesus within her womb. The creator of every home in the universe is seeking a dwelling place in her. Mary gives her

answer to the call when she says, “let it be with me according to your word (Luke 1:38)”. She accepts the ministry of hospitality. By so doing she magnifies and multiplies God’s mission in the world. She becomes an instrument for lifting up the lowly, feeding the hungry, and making a home for the homeless(Henry J. Langknecht, Christian Century, December 13, 2011, page 20).

The nature of Mary’s ministry is affirmed in the Book of 2 Samuel. There we read that King David wanted to provide a home for God. David conceptualized this ministry in architectural and institutional terms. The building of a temple of cedar would give God a home as glorious than the palace in which David lived as a king. He could think of no better way to honor God.

But the Lord uses the prophet Nathan to give David some advice about this building project. He tells David that he should not do it. Nathan challenges David to provide hospitality in another way. The greatest hospitality that David can provide is to be the servant of the Lord. It is by making his life an instrument of God’s work in the world that David can make a home for God. When David does that he magnifies God’s presence in the world.

Jan Edmiston is a Presbyterian minister who was facing a deadline for preparing a sermon. She decided that she needed to get away from the church for part of the day so she could concentrate fully on this task. She took her laptop computer and a large annotated Bible to an outdoor courtyard area of a Starbucks near her home in the Washington, D.C. area.

Not long after settling in to work she heard a man call out to her from the opposite corner of the courtyard. He was wearing a Muslim skull cap. He yelled, “Hey, is that a Bible?” She told him “yes” and then watched nervously as people at other tables began to get up and leave. Then the man asked if she was a Christian. When she said that she was he asked if she was a priest or something. She then identified herself as the pastor of a Presbyterian Church.

The man then approached her table and asked if he could talk with her. She described what happened next in these words:

I learned that he was a Muslim guy who was divorced from a Jewish woman. He said that he wanted to raise his children in a religiously devout family, but he wasn’t sure how to do that now that his married life had unraveled. He said, “I’m just really lonely and I wonder if you would pray that I would find a Muslim wife.” That’s how I found myself in this courtyard at Starbucks praying with a Muslim guy that he find a Muslim wife (told by Bill Tammeus in the Presbyterian Outlook, December 26, 2011, page 22).

That ministry of hospitality is where God dwells.