

## Module 3 Handout -Three Ways to Move Forward

From pages 54-55 “How is sexism personal and how are we the body of Christ together?”  
*Faith, Sexism, Justice – Conversations Toward a Social Statement*

### THE WORK AND WITNESS OF JESUS

Some Christian traditions and communities understand Jesus’ maleness to mean that male bodies are closer to God incarnate or that male bodies are somehow more “good.” In response to this, one might look toward Jesus’ work and witness for clues about what Jesus’ embodiment means specifically for women.

In the gospels, a few patterns emerge. Jesus performs tasks that transcend strict gender roles; for example, he washes the feet of his disciples, a role that belonged to slave girls and wives. Jesus goes out of his way to heal and celebrate women and includes women in his ministry. Jesus’ ministry and work in the world embodies justice and peace for all; again and again, Jesus explains that the reign of God upsets any group establishing itself as privileged, central or superior. At the end of his ministry, Jesus once again subverts the patriarchal ideal of control and domination by dying on the cross.

#### DISCUSSION:

1. When sexism in our culture tells us that the bodies of women, girls and gender non-conforming people should be controlled and dominated, how does God’s incarnation in Jesus help us see an alternative?
2. How can you go out of your way in the next week to affirm the goodness of all bodies, not just those that our culture already validates?
3. Talk about the media you consume, policies you might advocate for, or problems you can speak out against. What action could you take to make our world a better place?

### FREEDOM AND VOCATION

Luther’s understanding that we are justified by God’s grace through faith, rather than through the good works we do, redefined the role of works in Christian life. He offered the thesis that a Christian is paradoxically both perfectly free and dutifully subject to others. Luther spoke of this freedom that results from justification as like a tree that brings forth good fruit.

Many interpret this to mean that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live into God’s work, regardless of the norms, biases and roles of our context. At the same time, we are subject to God’s will on behalf of our neighbors and all creation. We are shaped by God’s relationship with us, to live our lives freely for the neighbor, and we have the ability to make decisions with consequences for those around us. Simultaneously, we are also called into relationships, places and roles that are not limited by the roles prescribed by our patriarchal world.

#### DISCUSSION:

1. What kinds of gender roles, stereotypes and expectations do you feel *freed from* in your life?
2. What work do you feel *freed for*?

### PARTICIPATING IN GOD’S LIBERATING WORK

Baptism affirms our vocation to work toward the liberation of all people of every gender, race and ethnicity, social class, immigration status, sexuality, age and ability. This is where we might draw on the theological traditions of **mujerista** (a theological tradition shaped by Latina women), **liberation** (a theological approach shaped by marginalized people committed to justice and action), or **womanist** theology (one type of liberation theology shaped by the experiences of black women). These ideas have likened justification to liberation from human systems that oppress people. Only God can usher in God’s reign of justice and love, but we are called to ask how we can participate in God’s work, seeking to establish justice and love in our society.

Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice; we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

**DISCUSSION:**

1. What do you think it means to drive a spoke into the wheel of sexism and patriarchy?
2. How might you do this as you see problems more clearly in your own life, family or community?