

Sermon: Call and anointed to serve. Jeremiah 1:4-10, Luke 4:21-30 Feb. 2, 2025

Prayer: Merciful God, you called each one of us by name. Help us to follow in your ways. May we recognize your presence among us as we journey together? Amen

In 1993, I was ordained to serve the Lutheran Church in Guyana. I served the church for 14 years. In 2008, I immigrated to Canada and started my ministry with the United Church. I crossed borders, embrace new cultures, adapted weather patterns and got married to Ken whom I met at a Presbytery meeting. God calls, ordained and wherever the Spirit leads we faithfully follow.

Jeremiah reminds me of my ordination ceremony. It was a joyful, inspirational and meaningful celebration. The sanctuary was beautiful decorated with red altar linens to mark the occasion. It was a time of jubilee. (250th anniversary of the Lutheran Church in Guyana, South America/Caribbean)

On the altar was the sacrament of Holy Communion with the symbols of everlasting life for the people gathered in community. The church was filled beyond capacity. People came from my rural hometown church (Mt Zion, Sandhills, Demerara River) and from the congregation where I served my internship in Georgetown, family and friends from away grace the occasion. We are reminded that beyond our understanding God call and anoint you to preach Good News to the world.

In 2012, I was admitted as a United Church Minister and again it was a marvelous and memorable celebration. Many people traveled to Toronto Conference celebration of ministries which was held at Orillia. The occasions of Ordination, and Admission to service of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care are divine events in the life of the church. God requires total commitment, dedication and a deep sense of **love for people**.

You got to love people, all people, everywhere you go. You accept to serve with joy and humility with both a personal and communal call to ministry. I am confident to say that the joys are greater than the challenges. Amidst the hardships of ministry there is an inexplicable force or energy that binds you to the divine. Call to serve is a sacred event in the life of the church.

When I was ordained this was the very text read that day. Among the many ordination gifts I received was a card from a woman who served as a missionary to Guyana during my childhood days. These are the words: *“You did not choose me but I chose you, and I appointed you to go and bear fruits, fruits that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.” (John 15:16)*

Jeremiah explains his inability to do anything else but follow his call through the poetic voice revealed to him: *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”*

Yahweh claimed him for the prophetic ministry. God call, God equips, empowers and prepares you to a ministry of faithfulness. Sometimes we are not able to clearly articulate that vision of call to ministry. We need others within the church to accompany and help with discerning God's call. God makes no mistake with the people God calls to service. However, we will make mistakes and even messed up at times. Like King David, Moses, Abraham etc. The mighty and powerful call of God happens regardless of our human errors.

How do we live out God's call? God seemingly initiates the conversation. Before Jeremiah even knows that there is such a being as God, God already knows Jeremiah personally. Saint Paul in his letter to the church in Galatia reads: "But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles.." Galatians 1:15-17

Before Jeremiah asked the question, "What am I going to be when I grow up?" God takes the steps to equip and prepare him for a prophetic ministry. God grants Jeremiah great insight into the human condition. God equips Jeremiah with great tenacity. Jeremiah filled with deep compassion and willingness to truly suffer with God's people during the painful experience of exile. God even puts the words in Jeremiah's mouth. God's gifts of grace and love for humanity are amazing. You need words Jeremiah I will give it to you. You need the anointing Spirit I will give it to you. Go and preach Good News and love all the people.

Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." Jeremiah 1:6

God's call to ministry is a very personal experience. It could be a call to ordained ministry or other areas of ministry. God's call is not a one-size-fits-all, type of ministry. Nor is the call specifically directed toward maintaining the programs or projects of a specific congregation.

God calls you to do the kind of work that needs all of our gifts. God calls you and me to the place where our deep joy and the world's deep hunger for spiritual food intersects. We need each other in a relationship that is built on faith, trust, justice and love for God and people. We work as a team to accomplish the work of Jesus Christ.

I am blessed with the privilege of walking with families through celebrations of life's journey: baptism, weddings, birth of babies, and thanksgiving services. I walked with families through death, deep grief, illness and brokenness. We are not prepared to say final good byes to a loved one. But Jesus promised and provided strength and healing. God's ministry is filled with both the joys and challenges on life's journey. In the midst of what may seem like dim light or a declining church God erupts with great rejoicing and renewal of hope. Something new is bubbling that only God knows.

My hometown congregation is rural, very small community. Recently it became well-known with the development of a bauxite company. The church is still alive. God has not forsaken the people. During my childhood days the pastor came once per month but the people met each week for prayers and reading scripture. Their love and joy for church nurtured my faith and nourished

my spiritual quest. It is their rejoicing at baptism, weddings, Easter, Christmas and special events that keep faith flourishing until today.

God's call is for a purpose. It is for the sake of one person, a community of people or a world in need of God's love. It is a Spiritual encounter and a new beginning where our gifts and experiences are needed. God's call is life-giving. We are learning and growing together. Ministry changes our lives and the nature or shape of our call will change too. We re-discover the goodness and mighty power of God's presence. We reflect on ministry here what it used to be and how much it is changing. We ask questions: How ready are we to change? **What does change look like?**

It is not always easy to find answers but somewhere in our silence, solitude and spiritual quest, we begin to re-imagine something new. What is God saying? How do I hear God's call to serve? Jeremiah prophetic ministry helped the people of Judah proceed towards change.

He implored God's people to repent of their idolatry and corruption. He describes in graphic details the invasion of Babylon and the drought through which they suffer. At times he pleaded with the Lord to be patient and gentle with the nation. Jeremiah will suffer for his testimony. He was silence for his prophecies of doom and gloom. In his suffering, he lamented to God for his call to prophetic ministry. But God is the one who makes the call and anoints the servant to ministry.

Hear the Good News: Jeremiah says, God will deliver Judah from its suffering. They returned from exile and re-established/rebuilt again. The prophet stood with the faithful remnant. Together they re-imagine a new beginning. This is Good News for today in our broken world of pain and suffering. We are the community established and built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus fulfills God's call through suffering, death and resurrection. We are a resurrection people for new beginnings. Jeremiah and Jesus carried out a very personal ministry, placing their gifts and hearts to meet the needs of the people.

May you listen to the call of God on your life? As a community we place our gifts and hearts towards saving lives in a world in need of **God's love**. And all God's people say: **Amen**

Rev. Margaret MacDonald
Bolton United Church

Prayers

Minister: Prayers for the people. Request

Merciful God, today we pray for Canada:

We are thankful for the rich historical legacies and distinctive cultures, in this country. We are thankful for the faithful witness of the churches in the midst of empire building and colonization.

We recognized the diverse waves of migrants who settled here and worked towards building this nation. We are grateful for the hospitality that has long been shown to those arriving in Canada. We pray for the preservation of environment of the shorelines in these regions and around the world.

God in your goodness, hear our prayers.

We pray for amicable solutions to the many disturbing situations in our cities, nation and the world. Grant economic recovery, political stability and the eradication of violence. God of mercy, sometimes we do not know how to pray and what to pray for. Come Holy Spirit and make intercession for your people. Grant us wisdom to make wise decisions for the abundant life you promised all people.

God in your goodness, hear our prayers.

God of compassion, we pray for healing to those who are sick, seniors who ae challenge with the weather conditions, patience for care-givers, those who hunger for food, those who live in poverty, people who lives are disturbed with constant violence, war and economic challenges and those who need shelter through these cold nights.

God in your goodness, hear our prayers.

Grant healing for those in grief and renew our faith where we feel dry and parched. Stir up our passion for the work of your church with insights, visions and new beginnings. We ask for growth in every aspect of our faith community.

God in your goodness, hear our prayers.

Protect us as we travel each day. Watch over our children and families; keep us all safe as we learn to live during challenging times. We offer our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.