

**Worship: January 30, 2022-01-16**  
**On-Line only**

**Thought for Meditation:**

*Sometime when the river is ice  
Ask me mistakes I have made;  
Ask me whether what I have done  
Is my life.*

William Stafford, from "Ask Me"

**Welcome & Lighting of the Christ Candle:**

**Opening Prayer:**

**Holy One, you are the God who calls: calling us to this time together; calling us to quiet moments; calling us to go forth and be part of this world; calling us to discover our own deep vocation. So, together, let us enter a time of wonder and story and reflection. And we ready our hearts with ancient words, saying:**

**Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil,  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
For ever and ever. Amen.**

**HYMN #240 VU Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven**

~This first version has organ and the grand swell of a brass section, along with a large choir. Lyrics are on screen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4XFBRzK7cg>

~This second version has an organ and multi voices singing via zoom. Lyrics are on screen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdUyoe7pPtM>

**SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 1: 4-10**

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,  
 ‘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.’  
 Then I said, ‘Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a  
 boy.’ But the Lord said to me,  
 ‘Do not say, “I am only a boy”;  
 for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
 and you shall speak whatever I command you.  
 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.’  
 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me,  
 ‘Now I have put my words in your mouth.  
 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,  
 to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow,  
 to build and to plant.’

**SERMON:**

I waited for the elevator with one other – no, *two* other people. A young man and his infant son. “Camden. He’s 21 days old...today.” Dad introduced me to this brand new wonder with a mixture of joy and pride and glaze-eyed befuddlement. Which is probably the holiest of ways to encounter new life. When the elevator arrived for us, a man departing it, hearing Camden’s howls, chuckled and said “Well, that’s a set of lungs – you’ll make a good politician one day!” Camden’s Dad looked at me. His face above the mask now registered a good natured eye roll. “Who knows?” He asked me. “It’s a little early to be predicting, isn’t it? He’s just a baby.”

And yet: “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.”

It’s a lot to take in, this notion that you could be consecrated to something – to a career, a vocation when but a child, or even before you had taken your first breath. No wonder Jeremiah demurs, nay, probably is openly declining the role, when he says: “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” As in, No. Thanks but *no* thanks.

This story of Jeremiah being called to the role, the vocation, of prophet has all the classic marks of a ‘**call narrative.**’ In our tradition’s stories, God regularly seeks the young for sacred work. Jacob, Joseph, Miriam, Joshua, Samuel, David, Mary. They were all young when they encountered the divine call.

Essentially it follows this pattern:

1. God initiates the call
2. The person resists
3. God re-assures
4. The person accepts (sometimes reluctantly) and is commissioned.

But what did Jeremiah dream of, I wonder? I mean, *before* God spoke. What possibilities danced in *his* head and in *his* heart when he would lay in a field and look up at the wide sky?

What did you dream of being when you were young? Can you remember?

This week I had the delight of asking everyone I encountered just that question. And it seemed only fair to begin with my own plan:

When I was about 3, I apparently planned on being a cowgirl, à la Dale Evans. Holster and six guns at the ready. All though my school days I was determined to be a doctor – the medical kind. But high marks in physics was a requirement when applying to med schools then, and physics and I never did see eye to eye.

Sometimes it is those things that are not part of our deep selves that help lead us to where we will find fulfillment.

As **Lynda-Jean** told me, she had imagined becoming a veterinarian since she loved animals. However when she learned that if a cow was having trouble giving birth, that the vet had to reach inside and actually pull the calf out, ....well, she headed off to Mt. A and majored in Music. Happily ever after.

Sometimes something we love still holds our heart, but in lesser ways to our true calling. As in, not one but two members of our NMUC family: Both **Keith Ball** and **Rod Campbell** dreamed of taking to the sky as pilots!

Rod was so taken with flying as a teenager that he landed a twin engine Apache when he was 17. “I had no lessons and no license, but I did have the senior instructor coach me through the steps until we hit the runway” – for which we are all grateful, Rod! But he was quick to add: *I would do it again in a heartbeat.*

Keith says: “To fly was my first dream.” He got his basic private pilot licence when I was only 16. The RCMP always seemed to be his “second choice”, but he eventually applied because they had an Air Section. However, as Keith describes it, he fell in love with policing, spending 42 years at it. That’s the same length of time that Jeremiah spent in his vocation, Keith.

**Sharon Noel and Krista Tupling** both had nursing on their minds at one point. But something led them, called them, down another road.

For Krista it was the math and science requirements – and her lack of enthusiasm for them.

For Sharon, it was that she was too young to begin the training in Montreal. So in the meantime (Isn’t ‘the meantime’ a fascinating place? A sort of liminal space full of possibility as we wait....) Sharon took some commercial courses in French from a group of nuns for free, in exchange for teaching her fellow students English, everything from Business Administration to the Rosary! I love that the student was, at the same time, also teacher. After a move with her family she was offered a job as assistant to the Manager of the paper mill in Alma, Québec. Ask me how much I knew about paper mills, she says! And yet she made the job her own...and continued on an interesting path of ever new and challenging roles, only retiring after several years as Executive Assistant to the Lieutenant Governor of NB.

Krista had always loved medical ‘jargon’ and found herself taking – and excelling – at a programme for Medical Secretary. But before she could apply for a job in that field she was contacted by a bank for an interview...and the rest as they say is history. Although Ron always loved to say that he asked her after the bank interview: Did you tell them you’re lousy at math? “No, and they didn’t ask!” And there she stayed because it felt...just right.

Other folks are single minded in their career paths.

**Kaye Lister** says: *I always* wanted to be a teacher. My childhood friends endured many days of “playing school” with me, always letting me be the teacher! In fact, after my one year at Teachers College, I couldn’t wait any longer. Instead of continuing on to further my education, I began teaching right away and stayed with it for ten years before attending UNB to earn my degree.

Now that I am retired and looking back through the years, I haven’t regretted even one minute of my career.”

I love the chutzpah that I hear in these call stories. A boy saying yes to be a prophet to an unhappy people living in Exile.

Sharon jumping in to teach what presented itself.

Rod and Keith jumping into a plane to take the controls.

Kaye ready to plunge in to her calling as quickly as she could.

Krista leaving out her lack of math skills for..the bank.

The sense of true call bears within it its own sense of rightness. Sometimes though, it takes a while to become evident.

**Sheila Power:** As many of you know Sheila Power is a teacher through and through – teaching Sunday School here and teaching at FHS as the now Head of the Math Dept.

Her story follows the classic call story in many ways. We don’t know what Jeremiah yearned to be as a boy, but in her earliest days, Sheila wanted to be... a dog. (I love that kind of wide dreaming that crosses even the boundaries of species!) But as she grew, a voice – her Dad, Winston – told her “Become a teacher.” [Stage 1. The call]

Like prophets and other unlikely rebels, Sheila said No. [Stage 2. the resistance.] She had fallen in love with math at University, but was looking to a career in accounting or as an actuarial. She was also about to marry Tom, who was in the military, and her father spoke of the practicality of becoming a teacher: aren’t teachers always needed, wherever Tom might be posted? [Stage 3. The reassurance]

of the caller.] Off Sheila went to the University of Maine to pursue her B.Ed. [Stage 4. The acceptance/ commissioning.]

But the practical decision doesn't always fill the soul. Sheila didn't find real fulfillment as a middle school educator. And jobs were hard to come by in the early 90s. She put her teaching skills to use for a number of years at a mental health facility, working on the inpatient unit as well as offering outreach and support in the community. Still, something was missing.

“Ask me whether what I have done is my life,” says the poet Stafford. Sometimes we do not fully see or understand our true life, our calling. It is like ‘the river hidden beneath the ice.’

It was not until the move to Fredericton that Sheila decided to hold off on grabbing the first job, and to wait for what she thought was her dream position: to teach Grade 3. But suddenly she found herself at FHS, and the minute she entered a group of grade 12 students, she knew she had found her home...her true calling. [Here is where I think there is another stage to a call narrative: when our soul is stirred, when despite everything it feels not like acceptance and commissioning, but like consecration. The recognition of the sacred ‘rightness’ of the work. The vocation.]

Sometimes it catches us by surprise, doesn't it?

Because vocation, in its truest sense, is not a goal we pursue. It is not something we can chase down or achieve. Vocation has its roots in the Latin word *vocare*, “to call.” To live out a vocation, as prophet or teacher or pilot or nurse or banker or cowgirl, is to have discerned our own deep gift. Who we are.

Parker Palmer calls this our ‘birthright gift of self.’ The Biblical tradition speaks of it as ‘the image of God.’ Quakers call it ‘the inner light.’ Perhaps you think of it as ‘true identity.’ However you speak of it, it is something we possess all along. As we heard today: “Before you were born I *knew* you.” The gifts within. Who we are called to be.

We are often surrounded by expectations though, aren't we? The dreams of a parent or mentor who feels you ‘ought to be *this*.’ Or do *that*. Sometimes we are scared to test our wings. Sometimes it feels like there are too many obstacles. We can find ourselves down a path that is not our own.

But sometimes, if we are very lucky, we awake to this loss and begin anew to seek the treasure of our calling. Our own true way in the world.

Martin Buber tells a story. A rabbi named Zusya died and went to stand before the judgment seat of God. As he waited for God to appear, he grew nervous thinking about his life and how little he had done. He began to imagine that God was going to ask him, "Why weren't you Moses or why weren't you Solomon or why weren't you David?" But when God appeared, the rabbi was surprised. God simply asked, "Why weren't you Zusya?"

Ask me whether what I have done, is my life. Amen.

**MUSIC: This Little Light of Mine:**

**This one is a Bruce Springsteen version if you are feeling energized (or would like to feel more energized!)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0qAYq1GVec>

**This is a more trad (though karaoke) version, where lyrics are on screen and you provide the voice to go with the music:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckwMIYzm\\_t0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckwMIYzm_t0)

**Announcements:** Official Board will meet to approve the Budget via Zoom today, January 30, at 12:30 pm.

**MINUTE FOR MISSION:**

**PRAYERS OF PEOPLE:**

**BENEDICTION:**