

I want to thank everyone again for walking with me this week and the last couple of months, as I have traveled the arduous journey of the ordination process. The interview with the Board of Ordained Ministry involved three thirty-minute sections. The first session focused on Practice of Ministry and Christian Lifestyle. The second centered on Worship and Bible Study, and the third was Theology. When I arrived at the first session, the first question I was asked was “Tell us in five minutes, your call story.” The Call Story is my experience of how I feel God to be a pastor. The Board then affirms that what I have experienced is a call from God.

I thought I’d share with you my Call Story. I can look back on my life now and see that God was calling me all along, but I was not in the right place to listen. However, God was positioning me and preparing me for ministry without my realizing it. The call to ministry doesn’t always begin as a mystical mountaintop experience. It can for some people, but in my experience, it was a long process. When mine began, I was called to serve in the church as Sunday School Superintendent. God had to get me in the actual, physical place. I had to become a part of The Church to get it. I admit, I had not been a fan of the church in the past, because of the limitations that were placed on my thinking and my gender, so it is very interesting that God called me to lead a church.

I had heard that the Sunday School Superintendent was retiring, and my church asked someone to step-up. A voice inside me said, “I could do that,” as I had experience in teaching and I had young children. I was in the season where I could use my knowledge and experience to serve in that particular way. However, the boys were two, three, and seven at the time.

Another more practical voice said, “There’s no way you have time for that.”

Several weeks went by and my phone rang. I looked at the caller id to see if I wanted to answer it, like we all do, and it said, “St. Paul’s UMC.” Oh man. You know when the Church calls, you will be asked to do something. I did answer the call (pun intended), but I said, “Whatever it is you are asking, the answer is no.” Pastor Neal died laughing, but he was not swayed. He went into his spiel anyway. He said, “We are praying for a new Sunday School Superintendent, and your name came up in prayer.” How can I argue with that? That was confirmation that what I felt initially was a nudging from the Holy Spirit.

When I began this work, something inside of me came alive. It was exciting and thrilling, and I threw myself into every aspect of preparing, teaching, and loving the kids. Six months later, the youth director resigned, and two years later, the family ministries director resigned. Each time, the pastor came to me and asked if I would take on this new position. God was maneuvering me on this journey to obtain more experience of ministering to different ages. During this time, I began to feel that something was missing. I loved serving God and the Church, but I didn’t feel that it was enough.

God had gotten ahold of my heart and wouldn’t let go. One night during Family Camp, I was awakened to scripture stuck on repeat in my mind: Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. I spent two hours in prayerful reflection, going over each word, wondering what it meant for me, personally. It seems obvious now, but I kept telling myself, this is the Great Commission that we’re all called to do. What does this mean for me?

I shared with my pastor that I felt God was calling me to do something, but I didn't know what it was. He said, "Kristie, you'd be a great pastor." I said, "Yeah, right." Pastor Neal recognized my call before I did. He had been called, so he recognized the process. I had never experienced this before, so I didn't understand what this experience was.

Throughout my whole life, God was nudging and whispering, but I couldn't hear what Jesus was saying because my spiritual life had not reached a time of openness or willingness to listen. Finally, God was ready to reveal an important part of my Call Story, and I was in the right place – spiritually -- to understand it. Andy and I went to Portland, Oregon, to celebrate our ten-year anniversary. We decided to hike up Multnomah Falls. On the way up the mountain, I became so overwhelmed with God's presence in this beautiful creation. I heard a voice, not my own, in my head, that said, "Go to seminary."

I didn't know what to do with that. My response was similar to Peter's during his mountaintop experience. He doesn't want to come down off that mountain. He wants to build memorials to mark this place as holy where Jesus revealed himself to him. But, God said, "This is my Son, listen to him." Don't get caught up in wanting to camp out in this holy place and never come down off the mountain. Listen to what Christ is telling you, and then follow him down the mountain.

We all want to stay in those sacred mountaintop experiences. At retreats and camp when we are removed from our daily lives and given the space and time to experience Christ's holy presence. But, as we see in this scripture that Jesus led them back down the mountain, we also cannot stay on those spiritual highs. Because those spiritual highs are not connected to a

physical place. They are connected to Christ, and we take that experience with us as we begin the work Christ calls us to do.

We receive these mountaintop experiences for a reason. Jesus revealed his divinity to Peter, James, and John to assure them of who He is. In the chapter before this scripture, Jesus asks them, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter said that he was the Messiah. So, in this private moment on the mountain, Jesus revealed that he was indeed the Messiah. He was also showing these three prominent disciples what his resurrection meant. He was preparing them for their work, to carry-on His work, after he is crucified and resurrected. That's why Jesus led them back down the mountain to begin their work.

We also receive these mountaintop experiences, so we can be transformed. Just as Jesus was transformed from the inside out in this Transfiguration Story, we, too, can transform our lives to be ones that exude Christ's light and love. One way to do that is to open ourselves to listen and hear Jesus calling. We can follow where Christ leads.

My mountaintop experience was not just on Multnomah Falls. My long and meandering call story is a mountaintop experience because it was a time where I experienced Christ in so many ways. Through my service in the church, my pastor, and my own inner voice – they were channels that Jesus used to reveal himself to me. We can experience Christ in ways we never have before in our everyday lives. We don't have to be removed from them and go to a mountain to see and hear Christ. Jesus is always calling. We just have to open ourselves to listen.

How is Christ revealing himself to you? What circumstances or people are channels for Christ to work through? I encourage you this week to look for Christ in your daily lives. As we begin our Lenten

journey together this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, may we all experience Christ's loving presence throughout the season of Lent. May our Lenten journey be a mountaintop experience.

Gracious and Loving God, we come to you in this moment, seeking to feel your presence, yearning to see your face and hear your voice. Many times we feel that you hide from us, yet you do not shield the mystery of your presence. You graciously show us who You are, so that we can be assured of your presence, and to aid us through our work in which You have called us to do. We long to stay on the mountain engulfed in your overwhelming love and light, yet you have called us to tell others of your infinite love. Give us the courage to share your message. Help us live transformed lives, so they can see your light in us. Equip us to begin the work you have called us to do. Amen.