Pastor’s Message “Called to Serve”

I believe each of us is called to serve God in one way or another no matter what our age. Be it as a family member among our birth or adoptive family, our church family or through our profession, I believe that each one of us is called to make the world a better place in whatever way we can as we serve God.

We heard today how the Prophet Jeremiah was very young when God called him into service. Jeremiah tried to get out of it by saying he didn’t know how to speak to people and he was too young, but God assured him that he would give him the words to share with his people. All Jeremiah needed to do was obey.

With this in mind, I’d like to share with you my call story as an example of how God calls us and of how others can be called to endorse that call from God:

My call from God began a very long time ago… I grew up here in Dodge County and was raised in the Roman Catholic church. Throughout my childhood, I heard God calling me to Ministry. In fact, from little on, I would sit in mass watching the priest recite the litany, and think to myself, “I need to memorize this for when I lead worship someday!” It was as if it was a foregone conclusion in my soul that I knew I would become a worship leader.

But somewhere along the way, I found out that committing my life to full time Servant Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church meant that I would have to become a Nun... So I quickly changed my mind!

I mean, back then, there was that “crabby old Nun” stereotype - which definitely wasn’t me!  Plus, I wanted to get married and raise a family just as my parents had. I wanted to follow their good example of loving God, loving one another and loving their family.

So wanting a family, I'd poo-poo any thought of becoming a minister. Maybe someday I'd be a church cleaning lady like my grandma, but it looked like that was all the church might want from me.

I was confirmed in the Catholic church, but like many young adults tend to do, I walked away from attending worship for a time.  I thought I had everything figured out, I knew it all… and I didn’t want to hear anyone else telling me otherwise!  I was hanging around with other young adults who didn’t go to church anymore (or never did) and none of us would admit that we needed God in our lives.

That all changed soon after I started dating the man I was to marry (Shane!)  I was interested in finding out about the church he was raised in, and wouldn’t ya’ know it... it was United Methodist!

As it turns out, his grandfather was a United Methodist pastor from Pennsylvania who was living in Mutumbare, Zimbabwe as a missionary, teaching the local community about farming practices while his wife taught food preservation techniques.  That’s so cool!  And being a missionary had always been an interest of mine!

So, I asked Shane to take me to church with him so I could see what it was like to worship in the United Methodist Church. (As I mentioned in a previous sermon, this could have been a deal breaker!)

But to my surprise, it was similar to a Catholic Worship service. A bit more relaxed, but comfortable, and the service and congregation (that’s you!) were very visitor-friendly.

I remember Shane’s mother Jeannie telling me that the next week they would be serving communion and I was welcome to receive communion in their Church. Now, this blew my mind as being raised Catholic, people outside of the denomination weren't welcome to receive Holy Communion.

And even though she had told me I would be welcome at the Lord's table, I still needed to hear it from the pastor. When we went to church the following week, the pastor was sure to announce that ALL were welcome at the Lord's Table.  So that Sunday, I joined the communion line with tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat, giving thanks to God that there was a church that would welcome me no matter where I was from or what I had done.  I was welcome!And that was it! I was sold!

Fast forwarding through the next few years: we got married, moved to Iron Ridge, joined the Mayville United Methodist Church and had a child. Over the coming years, I taught Sunday School, Shane and I became youth leaders, I became Church secretary, Shane and I both became very active in the church on committees Etc... and yet I kept hearing what I knew to be the voice of God saying,  “It's not enough, Renae”. And as it had become an old habit for me, I kept poo-pooing that message.

Then one day our pastor was preparing for a vacation and she asked me if I ever thought about preaching and if I could fill the pulpit for her.  To my surprise, I answered her with, “Yeah! I think I have a few things that I'd really like to say!”

So when she was on vacation, I preached my first sermon and some very respected church members told me after the service that they felt I was being called to the Ministry.  As old habits die hard, at first I poo-pooed them too!  But they insisted that this was definitely something I should pray about.

So pray, I did! Or maybe it was argue, I did! I would pray about it and I would throw every reason why I wasn't ready for Ministry at God. (Sorry, you have surely dialed the WRONG NUMBER!)

I begged to keep serving him in OTHER ways: joining circuit committees and getting more involved in the church.  Then my husband and I felt called to become a foster family, so we went through the classes and all of the hard work required for this task. We became licensed as a foster family and spent the next 9 years of our lives trying to help those in need in the foster care system, both children and parents.

And yet I kept hearing,  “It's not enough, Renae”.

By that time our pastor had asked me to fill in for her a few more times.  Then she told other pastors in our circuit that if they needed anyone to fill in for them, they could give me a call, and they did! And it was because of the reception I received from those congregations AND my home church endorsing me and encouraging me that I finally started believing in myself... or better yet, I started believing that God... could use me as a Pastor.

I finally relented. I no longer poo-pooed God, but gave myself over to Him and simply said, “Lead me, Lord. I can't fight you any longer.  Show me the way.”

I don't think it was wrong of me to poo poo my call to Ministry. I believe I went into Ministry at just the right time in my life and in the life of my family.

Our New Testament reading from the book of Hebrews today showed us the patience and love God has for us. In Old Testament times, people feared the power of God, but after Christ’s resurrection, we see that God uses His power and His love for us to draw us closer to him through the forgiveness of our sins, and we give thanks to God for being patient and loving with us.

Being redeemed, we all can answer God’s call by each of us becoming ministers in our own homes, in our communities, in our workplace, and in our own hearts. There isn't one of us with the same set of gifts as the other, so it is my prayer that we work together to identify and strengthen whichever gift we have been blessed with so that the kingdom of God may be furthered and blessed.  Praise be to God and Amen.