

## **Sermon for 31 January 2010 Epiphany 4C – St. Francis**

Feeling a bit of scriptural whiplash this morning? First we heard God's call to Jeremiah to be a prophet for the Lord. Then we listened to one of the most inspired and loved passages from the Apostle Paul. Just when we might have been lulled into a warm and fuzzy state, basking in the words of affection and images of devotion, Luke breaks into our reverie and paints a frightening scene of Jesus' hometown folk turning into an angry, blood-thirsty mob.

It probably will not surprise those of you who have braved the weather to be here today to learn that both the first and second readings are prescribed readings for ordinations and marriage respectively, but the Gospel is only prescribed for this Sunday in Epiphany. I suspect many of you are wishing this portion of Luke was eliminated from our readings. While other gospel writers include this story of the hometown folk going from supporters to detractors, only Luke portrays an angry mob scene in which Jesus is pursued so violently. Luke wants his readers to understand early on how difficult and dangerous Jesus' call to ministry and prophecy was. Preaching messages that fly in the face of a group's expectations of who God is, how God acts, and who is included in God's kingdom always has been. That explains why Jeremiah was so reluctant to accept God's call. Even though Jeremiah was only na'ar a boy or as Claire Keene and I also accurately translated for our diaconal ordination a youth, Jeremiah knew that God's call would lead him into difficult places where people might reject him and his message. How right he was. But each of our Biblical models today, Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus also experienced moments of spectacular support from others around them who were moved to serve God and who understood something of the true quality of love that Paul's hymn proclaims to the church in Corinth.

As a member of the Standing Committee of this diocese I am privileged to hear the personal stories of being called to serve God by our candidates for ordination. I have never heard one insist that they knew that they should be a deacon, or that they knew they should be a priest. Each and every one of them expresses humility and a healthy reflection of reluctance in deciding to follow that call. Quite frankly if they did not I would question the validity of their sense of call. I know from my own sense of call strong feelings of questioning and trepidation. Although I first felt called to the priesthood at the age of 16, it was 30 year later before I heard the passage from Jeremiah read just before I knelt before our Bishop to be ordained. If you remember our church's history, when I first felt called women were not being ordained. My journey toward ordination had many stops and twists and turns. On

the day I was to be ordained I still was not sure that it would really happen. In fact, I was so unsure that I would not wear my newly purchased clergy collar under my vestments. I did not want to go through the embarrassment of removing the collar if the ordination did not happen. But as you all realize the ordination did happen and happened with the help and support of many, many others.

After the service was over there were pictures made and people to greet in the church. Finally, I was able to run and change out of my vestments to go to the parish hall for the reception. As I dashed down the hall, now in my suit and clergy shirt, I struggled to get my new clergy collar around my neck and attached to my shirt. Between excitement and lack of practice I could not get the collar on. I stood in the hall outside the parish hall now filled with family and friends and the parishioners I would be serving and I was not fully dressed. I stared desperately looking around for help. Two seminary classmates quickly realized my predicament and rushed over to help. It took both of them but they finally got that collar on me. To this day my favorite picture from that reception is the one Mark took of me being helped into that collar by these two dear friends. This picture serves as a constant reminder of the power of community and my need to work with others and to turn to others.

As I have continued in service to our Lord I have been blessed by many others both lay and clergy committed to serving our Lord. God's call most often comes unexpectedly pulling us towards service and people we may never have anticipated. Like Jeremiah, we may often feel inadequate and unprepared. But God's call does not occur in a vacuum. Even when we encounter human resistance, possibly even rejection as did Jesus, God remains faithful. As I have learned the call has taken me in directions I could have never imagined in my teenage years.

Today as I look out over the face of you who have braved the ice and snow to be here at St. Francis I am aware of how much God needs each and every one of you as we strive to serve our Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ. One year ago today I could not imagine that I would be standing here with you, but God's calls also amaze and surprise. And you, God's people at St. Francis, continue to amaze and surprise as this week's Hoot, our bimonthly newsletter, grew to 36 pages. Pages filled with reports of ministry, opportunities to join ministry, and visions of new ministry. Please take time to read it and consider where God is calling you now to serve. St. Francis is a parish filled with committed and ardent people who also feel called to serve our Lord. What a blessing all of you are!