

June 17, 2018
Speaker: Nora Pederberg
Nutana Park Mennonite Church

Goodmorning,

Like many of you Patrick has asked me if I could take this time to reflect on the theme of Vocation, and perhaps to give a window into my arrival at this place. As you all know My name is Nora Pederberg and I am newly employed here at Nutana Park. I must admit that doing vocational reflection two weeks into a new position and straight out of university feels a little naive. I know that there is a lot that I cannot yet see when I reflect on how it is that I came to this spot. While wrestling with this I came across the words of Denise Levertov, who stated that on the journey of vocation, every step is an arrive. So with this assurance I will simply share with you how it is that I have arrived. And sharing that story, is for me sharing my relationship with the church.

When reading over the scripture verses for this week I had to laugh at myself a little. I flipped quickly by the familiar verses about the farmers seeds growing up. I glazed over the mustard seed passage as well, I know that one too. Then onto Jesus and the disciples in the boat. My red letter bible emphasized a message to me: Do you still have no faith.

Now Remember while reading this I had been consumed in my own journey with the church, reflecting on the narrative I'm used to sharing with others, my intense involvement with church as a child and teenager. The period of time I spent away from the church full of confused, angry, and distrust. The journey of working back into a church congregation and the way I fell in love with it all over again. Then I reached this phrase from Jesus: Do you still have no faith.

Usually when I read this passage I here Jesus chastising - even rebuking - the disciples who are doubting. This time, what I felt emphasized was the word *STILL*. Jesus wasn't just calling out those dummies for not trusting Him. I think He was also nudging them to reflect on what had come before this point, the events that they had been through with Jesus at their side. Or at least that's what I felt Jesus was nudging me to do.

So what does my journey with the church look like when I take the time to see how God was walking with me through my story. The beginning still held true, I am very much a child of the Church. I grew up going to church and Sunday school, youth group VBS,

ect. When I got older I went to a christian high school, taught sunday school, and read scripture. Church in my childhood was one of my primary places of belonging, and it was a huge piece of my identity.

After this I experienced a church split, and then left my small town to go to university. I've gotten into the habit of narrating this time as a period of darkness in my church life. I would tell people about the hostility I would face whenever I stepped into a Sunday morning service. The hours that I've spent sitting in a car outside a church crying because I was overcome with anxiety at the thought of going in. This was the part of the story where I told people of the huge storm that I was facing in my tiny boat.

But with Jesus' nudge to look with new eyes I began to see a different narrative. I began to see the way that God had constantly provided church for me before, during, and after the storm. I also started realizing how this 'darkness' forced me to extend my definition of what it meant for me to be a Christian, and brought me new insight into what ministry could look like.

I'm sure many of you have experienced what it is to feel hurt by the church, or even a great anger with it. I am generally a very emotional person, so this experience really changed something in me. I couldn't push away the church or christianity as a whole because those were a part of the very fibre of my being. But I could sure start to rage at injustice and seek out allyship with those who are marginalized or slip through the cracks, or don't feel like they have a place to belong. This is the passion that motivated me to study Peace and Conflict Transformation studies and pursue a year long internship in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

When I mention that God continued to provide church for me despite my inability to attend a Sunday Service, I think of the parable of God's kingdom being like seed that is scattered on the ground and all by itself the soil produces grain. I can recognize that being provided the summer camp where I lived and worked was a provision of church. I remember the young adults group I became a part of at Nutana Park and the way that space became a church of both peers and mentors. I started meeting up with Ron Schellenberg at that time forming a spiritual friendship. This touch of pastoral leadership was not the top-down model I knew, it was one of building mutual friendships. It was a big shift for me, and a pivotal teaching for my choices in ministry now.

I then started studying Theology as one of my major's in school, and found church in small classroom settings, forming bonds with classmates and professors that extended to holiday dinner invitations, sharing in communion, prayer, and joys and concerns. It was such a contextualized way to explore God, not at all the distant academic observations that I had intended to be making. It was all about life, and how we saw the world, and what that meant for our daily choices and rhythms.

With the constant growth of the presence of God's kingdom surrounding me, I began to yearn once more to be a part of a congregation. It was a long road and fairly painful in the beginning, but I was always presented with the most welcoming, loving, communities to continue this healing work within.

When I moved to Vancouver for a year, not only was I living in a community house seeking to do incarnation ministry. I also got the chance to attend a Baptist church that did a phenomenal job of genuinely seeking to welcome anyone who came through their doors to be a part of their church family. They had four part time pastors on staff when I was there, but for the first three months I attended, I only witnessed other members from the congregation doing the sermon portion of the service. The pastors were then making coffee dates with everyone they could, and forming discernment circles for those who were seeking guidance. Their work was so different then the ministry I expected to see.

In my own internship I was thrown into the role of ministry without really being aware that's what I had signed up for. We were hosting 50ish people every tuesday night, and prayer ever morning, there was also people to connect to one-on-one and ways to reach out. I got the chance to hold a baby 30minutes after it was born because I was one of the families main supports, I got to celebrate my friends cake as she reached one year sober, and I was a part of hosting memorials and funerals in our home because this was the space that that person's 'congregation' gathered every week.

I remember being terrified, going up to my teammates frequently "hey I'm not qualified for this, I have no idea what is that best thing to do, or what I should say, what if I mess up? What if I hurt somebody?" I was met with an understanding look, and a simple reminder. 'Well, I hate to break it to you, but your not a big enough deal to do real harm. If your focussing on what *YOUR* doing or saying then your focusing on the wrong thing, it's not about *you*.' Another lesson of ministry to change my perspective. I was certain that I had found the place where my deep gladness and the worlds deep hunger meet.

At the end of my internship one of my last assignments was to follow around Father Matthew for a couple hours as he went about his day. Father Matthew is a Priest in the downtown eastside at an Anglican church where he has been serving for nine years. His congregation however isn't those who walk through the doors of the church, instead he walks around the streets with oil and a communion set and a notebook and cares for the people that populate that area. He stops and asks one person how their doctors appointment was last week, he catches up with a friend that hasn't been around in a couple years. He knows almost everyone by name and has known many for nearly a decade. The people he talks to poke fun at him for his team losing out in a series, and then ask if his wife has been feeling better lately. I was in awe of this man's work. What an extraordinary commitment to these people!! to rooting in a place and knowing them all. When I told him this he gently pointed out that this is the same work of all those who work with the church. He was right, but I had never seen it before.

When I came back to Winnipeg for my final year, Matt and I were a part of Homestreet Mennonite. One of the most painful things about leaving the city this spring was knowing we would be leaving this church. Our last sunday I got up to express our gratitude to that place and share a blessing and I was crying before I even left the pew. When Matt and I were talking about the fall backup plan - deciding between winnipeg or saskatoon. The biggest con for saskatoon was that I didn't have a church family there, maybe we could find somewhere to attend but how would we ever find someplace where we could participate *SO* actively and be known *SO* deeply.

And here is where I hear Jesus calling to me from Mark 4. *STILL* I feared that I would not have church. That I would once more be swallowed up by waves of anxiety and hurt. That I would not be safe.

A thread weaving throughout this story that I have failed to mention is continual conversations with various people in my life about whether or not I could fit into congregational ministry. I had the opportunity to participate in different groups at CMU focused around discernment, as well as sharing these musings with both peers and mentors. It wasn't something that I was considering for a right now plan, but something that I was holding out for down the road. When *I* was wiser and more experienced, when *I* could do a better job. When *I* would be ready or worthy. When *I* was less focused on *I*.

But when May came I was unemployed and on the job hunt. Patrick came up to Matt one Sunday to ask about how my search was going. Matt replied “Not great, but maybe don’t ask her about it.” Patrick nodded understanding. Then Matt thought for a second, ‘Oh actually you should talk to Nora, she is trying to figure out if she’s cut out for congregational ministry, I’m sure she’d love to meet up with you sometime this summer.’ Patrick mentioned that if that were the case, their might be an application I would want to check out.

Matt and I went for a run that night to talk over what it would mean for me to apply here at Nutana and I started our conversation something like this:

“You were going to go to school next fall” “I know”

“We have a ten year plan that doesn’t include this” “Yes we do”

“This job looks perfect” “It does”

“what do you think” “I think this is exactly the path that we’ve been heading to”

Mind you we probably circled this conversation ten or twenty times before I really accepted the gift of this opportunity, before it felt real.

Feeling complete peace and complete terror at the thought of pursuing this, I recognized that these feelings may just be a sign that *this* could be the place where my deep gladness and the worlds deep hunger might meet

While I may not have too many stories yet to tell about my work in this space, I hope that this sharing has let you in to my experience of vocation At least my current working definition of vocation. A couple years ago I was challenged to expand my understanding of this term from just work, to all of life. While this may be obvious to many of you, it was pretty revolutionary to me. It allowed me to step out of the weight of trying to figure out what my calling was, and to simply start out with mundane rhythms of my day. “Pursuing a vocation” became me just stumbling through the Rabbi’s teachings, exactly where I found myself in that moment. It brought me to people who could exhibit to me the truth of working in ministry. It’s what made me realize I had a place in the church, in Saskatoon, at Nutana. That the seeds of the kingdom would continue to grow up around me and that if I can only remember my own experiences so far, I do not have to be afraid.

Thank-you, for having me.