

14th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

14 August 2016

The Rev. Dr. Brian C. Wyatt, Pastor

Exodus 3 & Isaiah 6 (selected verses)

Jeremiah 1:4-8 • Acts 9:1-9 • Jonah 1:1-3

So we've got a commissioning and sendoff service for Olivia, and lots of delicious food waiting to be eaten, so I'll keep this brief. Hopefully you noticed a bit of a theme in our different scripture readings this morning (anyone?)

As many of you know, Olivia will be leaving tomorrow (early tomorrow morning) to begin a year in Glasgow, Scotland, working as a mission volunteer for the Presbyterian Church. She is one of the 78 Young Adult

missionaries that our denomination will have in the field this year, spread across 21 national and international sites. This program has been around for a while, and is open to give young adults between the ages of 18-30 an opportunity to serve as a missionary, but with a shorter term placement than the normal three or more years.

After a week of orientation in upstate New York next week, Olivia and three other young women will travel to Glasgow, where they

will live together and work in some of the very underserved and poorest communities in the UK. And while I am proud and honored to have Olivia represent our church family in this way, she is not the only one among us called to serve as a representative for the mission of the Church.

In fact we heard five different scripture excerpts this morning of people called to serve God, and while I hope you noticed the similarities among the different readings, I also hope you noticed the differences.

- **Moses** was the very definition of a reluctant volunteer (or as we sometimes joke about in Youth Council, he was “voluntold”) God

has a task for Moses, but Moses kept coming up with one excuse after another as to why he shouldn't be the one God called.

- **Isaiah**, on the other hand, knew that he wasn't perfect and that God wasn't calling him because he was perfect, but he responded full of faith and willingness to serve, when he said, “Here am I. Send me.”

- **Jeremiah** was another one who was reluctant to believe God was calling him, largely because he was so young. He thought God should call someone older, wiser, and more experienced.

- **Paul** had to literally be struck upside his head to realize God was calling him. And

before he finally saw the light (pun intended), it turned out he was actually working counter to God's purposes.

- **Jonah** was happy to serve God until he found out exactly what God wanted him to do, or more accurately, who God wanted Jonah to serve. When he found out it was a group of people Jonah really did not like, the Ninevites, he decided to try his best and outmaneuver God's call. And we know how well that worked out in the end.

What I hope you take away from all these different call stories is that none of those people God called to in the same way. But God called all of them. And your story and my story may not be like Olivia's.

Maybe she was more like Isaiah, trusting wholeheartedly in where God was calling her. Maybe yours is more like mine – with more of a mix of Moses' excuses and Jeremiah's doubts and Jonah's desire to serve but only under the right circumstances.

But we are all called to service. As our commissioning service in a minute will remind us, our baptism is a sign of that call.

And maybe your call is not to travel to another country and serve God in that way. Maybe instead, your call is to pray for Olivia and the 61 other young adults who are doing that. Maybe your call is to help support Olivia's family while she's away.

Or maybe your call is to help provide Food City gift cards for hungry people in our community, or to invite friends to come to vacation Bible school or youth group or church. Maybe your call is to be a compassionate and listening ear for a friend at school or for a co-worker, or to extend hospitality by feeding someone or offering someone a warm place to stay. Maybe your call is to teach Sunday school or sing in the choir or to care for parts of God's creation—the land and the creatures who live in it.

My point is this—we can and should celebrate when God calls one of our church family to serve in ministry as Olivia is

about to do. But God doesn't call people to do ministry **for** us. God calls us all to minister in different ways while in community. We aren't sending Olivia to Glasgow to be a missionary for us, but with us. Which means we have a role here in supporting her, and a role here to figure out what kind of ministry God is calling us to.

As we now celebrate Olivia's call to this particular service, I invite each of us to reflect on what ministry God is calling to as well.