

First a thank you to all of you here at All Saints for the invitation to return and preach as a part of Theological Education Sunday. I am blessed to work in an extraordinary place with many who would describe themselves as very ordinary Christian people, but who I know are through the grace of God doing extraordinary things with their lives. And I am so grateful to be able to share some of their story with you, you here at All Saints who through your gifts, and relationships with the faculty of Bloy House, as well as your participation in the life of the diocese, are also a cherished part of the Bloy House community.

Several weeks ago now one of our most beloved students was ordained a deacon. She has been at Bloy House for three years preparing to be a deacon. She came hoping to make quick work of what she saw as a hoop to jump through on the way to her real destination which was ordained diaconal ministry. But something happened to Valerie after she arrived. She caught the bug. She went to classes where she had the opportunity to engage in conversations with brilliant gifted teachers and other passionate Christian students who no matter what ministry they were called to, were also preparing themselves for deeper life in Christ.

Her vision of the world, which had never been small, grew. Her faith grew. Her sense of calling and its purpose grew, and she blossomed in that learning environment we fondly refer to as Bloy House, not Bloy School: more a spiritual home away from home than an institution and a graduate school. Suddenly seminary was not about doing what was required of her so much as it was a community of becoming for her life.

About a year into her time at Bloy House Valerie was diagnosed with advanced lung cancer, and so she began the long hard journey through chemo and radiation and more chemo, first hoping for a cure to the cancer. At that point we all waited to see if Valerie would drop out. If her weekends would become too precious to make it worth the long traffic filled

trek from Lompoq to Claremont. But just the opposite happened. Week by week we saw her struggle as Valerie lost her hair, lost her voice, lost her energy, gave up her job, fought her fight. But still she kept coming and learning and praying and loving within the confines of our tiny learning community. Over time when cure seemed less and less likely, Valerie settled for just wanting to keep the cancer at bay, to buy more time, to live more life, to grow more friendships, to serve more of God's beloved children. She wanted to have the time to become in her heart of hearts a true deacon of the church and a blessing to others and to finish the journey with her classmates on the road to her certificate of diaconal studies.

Valerie has most definitely in the last two years experienced anguish and darkness, but somehow miraculously through the love of her church, her friends, her seminary, and most especially her God, she has also seen a great light.

Bishop Jon recently decided that waiting for Valerie to be “done” was absurd. Valerie was never going to be done becoming a deacon and in the meantime there was ministry waiting for her loving hands and loving heart and a calling to be realized. So now well before her seminary journey will end, we have in our midst a deacon of the church...a deacon who has sat in darkness and even in the midst of that darkness has seen a great light and claimed for her life that great light.

One of the commentaries I looked at this week written by Dr. Bo Lin had this amazing quote to help explain the Isaiah passage that so shapes today's Old Testament and Gospel lessons. "There is no tyranny of time with God, there is no "the inevitable," nothing is "automatic" and fate does not rule".

Valerie would say amen to that. In some to-the-core place in her being the truth of that profound and hope filled reality has brought her great light.

Valerie is not alone in her journey through the darkness. I warn new seminarians at the beginning of their time with us that one of the inexplicable and uncanny truisms of seminary life is that it comes with profound human suffering of some kind. I watch from

week to week as students share their own life journeys with one another asking for prayers, hoping for miracles, trusting in God's never failing presence, bringing to each other great light no matter how dark the current circumstances may appear.

I watch as sons pray for organ transplants for mothers, as individuals are buffeted by the winds of divorce and the flames of custody battles, as those living in stability and plenty suddenly find themselves beset by joblessness. I watch as spouses become ill and cancers are diagnosed and grown childrens' lives spiral toward chaos. I watch as parents are up all night with sick children and still show up for class with homework in hand, forgetting for just a flicker of time how aching bone tired they are

and the work that awaits them on their return home from school.

I watched a woman stand before her peers and preach in preaching class a week after the death of her grown son. I listen as injury, sickness, and death creep into the lives of our unsuspecting seminarians...events no one would have predicted when their journeys began. Events that are shaping and forming who they are and how they are as they give up their self-assured poise and genteel ways, taking on the pain and suffering of the world they have been called to minister to.

Please do not misunderstand me. I'm not saying God brings these calamities into their lives...only that these calamities do come and

that God is hell bent on using them after they come, on making them count for good.

There is a particular form of Jewish poetry known as lament, and currently across the world we hear of people who are claiming that form as a core part of their own rule of life. Lament is the poetry of anguish, of bald faced honesty, ...and of absurd trust. Lament is the language that allows a prophet like Isaiah to witness the military, economic, and even bodily destruction of his own people, to cry out to God in recognition of this deep darkness, the lightless despair that seems on the verge of snuffing out all life, all joy and somehow still in the midst of that agonizing despair, and sometimes rage, at the deep injustice being wrought, to cry out to

God in hope and trust that a light is coming that will quench this utter darkness we have known!

But lament is not the exultant cry of one who bears witness to that light that has arrived, who have been around long enough to see resolution and repair to a broken world.

Lament is the call for help, the call of hope emanating from a seemingly sinking ship, a call that swears, “There is no tyranny of time with God, there is no “the inevitable,” nothing is “automatic” and fate does not rule. In lament we trust even while it is still night, that the night will end. The dawn will come. And the world will be made right! The dawn has come...can’t you see it? It is just beyond our horizon...if only we hold on, make ready and wait for its light to appear!

When Jesus following the loss of his beloved friend and cousin John went to the water's edge in that beautiful and wild place called Galilee, he went fishing for people...not to make converts, not to build a religion, not to build a following. He went fishing for people whose lives could be made whole in the midst of darkness by walking toward the sunrise not the sunset, by embracing the light even before the light had dawned, because Jesus knew as his beloved disciples came to know that we are set free from all that can harm us when we come to understand "There is no tyranny of time with God, there is no "the inevitable," nothing is "automatic" and fate does not rule.