**New Hope Global Sermon Responding to God’s call 5 08 22**

**Introduction:**

The sermon this week is a combination of a mini-sermon I gave at another church and God’s redirection of my sermon’s contents! Sunday May 8 is Mother’s Day in the US and one church invited me to speak on what it meant for me to be a woman in ministry. The church is composed of mostly all Asian Americans under 30, and they wanted to hear from an older woman (I’m grateful they didn’t say an elderly matriarch!) as part of the tribute to women today. Here is the picture of the mothers in the church after the service. Many of you know my story, but I share this sermon because of a lesson from God that supersedes whatever testimony we each have.

I had written up my story as per my assigned topic the week before and was all ready to go when the Lord redirected my emphasis. It came as I was meditating on the impact of my own call from Eph.3:6-7. On Thursday of this past week, the Lord said, “you need to shift your focus in your talk. You are called “to preach about the boundless riches of Christ” (Eph.3:7). So do that. Cut back the focus on your testimony and your story. Lift Jesus up to this church and declare Christ’s boundless riches.“

What a lesson for all of us – always look for ways to focus on Christ and not on us. I was even sick the morning of the 8th but I called out to two trusted prayer warriors for Christ’s strength and anointing and God did just that as I was in the church today. It was His story! The additional unexpected blessing was that Keith was able to join me and be fully present and involved in the whole service. That hasn’t happened for months. So here is that sermon – in its new revised version!!!

Sermon: **The Adventure of Responding to God’s call**

This morning I would like to share part of what it has been like to be a woman on an adventure with God. So let me open with the humor needed to go on any adventure with God – These are true excerpts from the Flight Announcement on Alaska Air flight #438.

 ‘Hello and welcome to Alaska Air Flight#438 to San Francisco. If you’re going to San Francisco, you are in the right place. If you’re not going to San Francisco you are in for a long evening. . .We’d like to tell you now about some important safety features of this aircraft. , .If you are sitting next to a small child, or someone who is acting like a small child, in the event of loss of cabin pressure, please do us a favor and put on your oxygen mask first. If you are traveling with two or more children, please take a moment now to decide which one is your favorite. Help that one first, and then work your way down. . . There is no smoking in the cabin on this flight. There is also no smoking in the lavatories. If we see smoke coming form the lavatories, we will assume you are on fire and put you out. This is a free service we provide. There are two smoking sections on this flight, one **outside** each wing exit. We do have a movie in the smoking sections tonight. . .It is Gone with the Wind. In a moment we will be turning off the cabin lights and its going to get really dark, really fast. If you’re afraid of the dark, now would be a good time to reach up and press the yellow button. The yellow button turns on your reading light. Please don’t press the orange button unless you absolutely have to. The orange button is your seat ejection button. . . Thank you for choosing Alaska Air and giving us your business and your money. Enjoy your flight.” (GCFN 12/30/05)

I think a Christian’s walk with God is a lot like the flight described by that flight attendant. Sometimes we think we are on the wrong plane going to the wrong destination! Sometimes we feel like we are sitting beside those who act like small children! Sometimes we chafe at all the rules and restrictions in church or in our families who assume we are on fire and they need to put the fire out! That was true for me when I first became a Christian as a young college student. I am the first Christian in my family tree. My parents were strongly opposed to my new life choice and wanted me to ditch it as soon as possible! They wanted me to push the orange button and eject!

But I am here to tell you what happens when you don’t eject. What happens when you learn to trust the voice of God in the scriptures and He does lead you safely on your path. When you walk with other believers and they hold you up and counsel you and pray that the Spirit will enable you to become all God designed you to be. Sometimes there are fun and clear instructions. Not always. But the God we can know through Jesus Christ does speak to us directly through the Bible when we choose to study it and do what God says. God has promised us His Spirit to guide us safely through all the twists and turns of life when we try to live out his calling. This is what He has done for me and can do for you.

**My story**

I got my calling as a woman in ministry in Singapore when I was teaching a large group for World Evangelical Fellowship. Before my talk I was studying in Ephesians 3. In v. 7-8 Paul said 7**I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. 8Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ**, As I read those verses, the Lord said to me, “This is your calling.” We do have a God who communicates with His people!

I listened, but I couldn’t imagine it – my husband didn’t believe in women preachers, I had not been ordained, and in the 1980’s the evangelical world was not endorsing women’s leadership, except to teach small children and other women. So I said, “I hear You, Lord, and I know my stature in certain people’s eyes was “the least of all the Lord’s people.” But if this is from you, you will need to make it happen.” I wrote the date in my Bible next to the Eph. 3 passage. That was in 1986. Over the next ten years I taught on spiritual formation and cross-cultural issues in two different seminaries, was on staff with InterVarsity for internationals at U of C, , published a cross-cultural journal and argued with God about his calling from Ephesians 3: I was the wrong gender (wrong for the job he wanted), had the wrong gifts (culture said they were male gifts in leadership etc.), and wrong marriage (but that was water over the dam!) I think I read every book on anger that was published!

But when God calls us, He makes a way =, as the Don Moen song says, “God will make a way when there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see, He will make a way for me. He will be my guide. Hold me closely to His side. With love and strength for each new day. He will make a way. He will make a way.” And He has. In 1992 I not only got my PhD from Northwestern (in Asian American identity issues) but I was also ordained and at the ordination service my husband Keith testified to everyone how he had seen the Spirit work through me and did not want to hold me back any longer. It was like turning an ocean liner around. It had seemed impossible but God did it!

**The joy of living under stewardship to God’s call**

I started fulfilling my pastoring calling in 1997. Since then, in various contexts, I have had the wonderful privilege of preaching the boundless riches of Christ. I get to listen to God in the Scriptures and walk beside people in their struggles and celebrations and share how Jesus’ presence and love and wisdom and power and forgiveness and mercy relates to them. He is the One who holds the universe together by the word of His power. (Col. 1:17).That in itself is astounding, but in the same way when our own world seems to be breaking part or we are having a meltdown in our physical or emotional well-being, He can hold us together by His love. He has given us His Holy Spirit who provides us with His grace and strength and all we need to be God’s hands and feet and voice and presence for others. He is the One who sees and covers our shame, who bears our struggles with us, who speaks through the Spirit His words of hope, who sustains us in every struggle. And friends, let me tell you, I couldn’t do what I do today with the daily stress of my own husband’s terminal fight with Alzheimers without the boundless ministry of God and His people on my behalf. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd, and He is that and so much more. In fact, after Christ’s resurrection and ascension, the author of Hebrews in the New Testament (we think it may be Barnabas) gives this benediction to his Hebrew Christian readers:

Now may the God of peace— who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood— may he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him.  All glory to him forever and ever! Amen. NLT

Jesus Christ **is** the Great Shepherd of the sheep, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Every knee in the universe will bow to Him and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. He is the One who opened wide the gates of heaven through his own sacrifice for us. In his death and resurrection He conquered every power of evil and rose victorious over the entire satanic realm and he gives us that victory and authority in His name. His boundless grace is our oxygen and reason why we can live an effective life in the Spirit as God’s history makers in our generation. He is who He said He is and my Lord and my God. The boundless riches of Christ.

So, throughout all the years since I became the first Christian in my family tree in 1958, I can tell you story after story of how God has given Keith and I two children who have grown up to follow God with all their hearts. But He also told me that when I die, I am to come before Him and say, “here I am and here are the children of many cultures whom You have given me. They belong to You.” These sons and daughters and colleagues in the faith are an additional precious family of believers to belong to and cherish. They have cared for me, as I do for them and it is the joy and strength of my heart. But the center is Jesus Christ. As the Chris Tomlin song says **God is my all in all** and out of His fullness has helped me to fulfill his calling on my life, just as He will do for you.

**The Challenge**

So, friends, whether you are a man or a woman, here is my challenge to you. Do you know Jesus’ love personally, the love Linda talked about as a mother and father for their children? (She also spoke in this church’s service today.) Do you recognize God’s call on your life and have people around you who can help you reach that call? Are you willing to buckle up your seatbelt and go with God on His adventure for you?

He will not fail you. Just don’t press the orange seat ejection button. Stick with God and His people and discover day by day the boundless riches that are available to you and this church in Jesus Christ. Not just for yourself. But for all the people around you who desperately need His help and healing and hope in our lonely, insecure world.

God wants to use you to embody His love and presence by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. Walking with Him is the most worthwhile adventure in our life. So, as the Nike commercial says, “Just do it!” He will never leave you or forsake you.

Amen. Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson,

Pastor New Hope Global Fellowship,

sermon given to The Prodigal Network, May 8 2022 in Wheaton IL