

**“Blessed and Sent Forth”**  
**Gen 12:1-4 Luke 10:1-7a**  
**First United Church of Arvada**  
**Rev. Karin Kilpatric**  
**July 20, 2014**

Throughout the Bible we find story after story of those who have been called by God and sent forth to serve God’s purposes in the world: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, David, Elizabeth and Zachariah, Mary, John, the twelve apostles, Paul. In Christian history and tradition, the stories of calling continue with the stories of saints, martyrs, and prophets that extend into the present time. These “callings” all come with a turning of the heart and soul—a change in one’s being that manifests in a profound--sometimes 180 degree—turn in a human life. The Greek word for this turning is “metanoia”.

In these stories, God speaks out of a flood, through a command to begin a journey, from a burning bush, through an angel’s voice, through sudden deafness, through a dream, through the birth of a child, through an invitation to fishermen to simply walk away from their nets and follow, and even by knocking a man right off his horse into sudden blindness. These dramatic callings transform cruelty into compassion, fear into courage, disorientation into purposeful living, bringing forth capacities for understanding, service, and leadership that had not previously seemed to exist. “Metanoia”, the turning of mind, heart and action is brought into being through the spirit of God.

Saint Francis of Assisi, before he began the order of monks that spread the message of the simple and charitable living and love for all creatures, had been a selfish spoiled young man living the life of the well to do merchant class. Julian of Norwich emerged from grave illness with the strength to enter into a cloistered life of prayer and writing. Ignatius of Loyal, a Spanish knight, a warrior wounded in battle, had a spiritual conversion leading to a life of prayer, poverty and commitment to God. He

founded the Society of Jesus and developed spiritual exercises that continue to lead people, even today, more deeply into their faith.

Victor Frankel a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp did not succumb to the death forces around him but emerged from this experience into new life. From this Holocaust survivor and the author of the powerful book of hope, *Man's Search for Meaning*, came these words. **"What is to give light must endure burning."** From this time until his death, Frankel taught that "Everyone has his (or her) own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated, thus, everyone's task is unique as his specific opportunity to implement it." I say it like this, "We must seek to be livin' what we've each been given, humbly but wholly." It is an individual's job to discover what this is. You might be fortunate to have found inspiration and encouragement from others, but the task is finally yours. The late author and Presbyterian minister, Frederick Buechner, once wrote, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Our true calling asks much of us, but it is also the source of our greatest joy and the motivation behind our greatest energy. Our gratitude is the point of contact that guides us to our place of unique connection with our world.

In 1997 a woman named Jody Williams won the Nobel Peace prize for her work founding an international campaign to ban land mines. In countries such as Afghanistan, Cambodia, Bosnia and Angola, these unexploded land mines left behind after war continue to kill hundreds of thousands of people who come upon them unawares. According to Global Issues of the United Nations , 80% of the victims of these accidents are civilians. Many more children than adults are killed by land mines. Land mines are quite inexpensive to plant but are very costly to remove. For every 5000 mines that are removed at least one worker will be killed in the process and several injured. Despite this danger, according to Global Issues,

Today some 14 UN agencies, programmes, departments and funds are active on the ground in mine-related service. They find and destroy landmines and explosive remnants of war, assist victims, teach people how to remain safe in mine-affected areas, destroy stockpiles, and encourage universal participation in the Mine-Ban Convention.

To date, 161 nations have agreed to be bound by this Convention and have banned landmines.

In a book titled, *We Speak as One*, Jody Williams and 11 other Nobel Peace Prize winners speak about their calling into their world changing work and each expresses his or her vision for peace. As an example of these I will use Jody's story. She was born in Vermont in 1950. She grew up, studied hard and received a Masters in International Relations from Johns Hopkins University. She grew up in a Catholic family but it wasn't until she was working in El Salvador during their Civil War (1980-1992), where she observed the dedicated priests and nuns and relief workers walking in solidarity with the poor, that she felt her deepest inspiration from her faith. Some of these men and women were slain by the death squads along with the people they had come to serve. It was hoped by the government that these deaths would create terror that would make the people shut up and go home. But the memory of another's martyrdom had the opposite effect. It inspired others to join in. Jody Williams had also grown up with a schizophrenic brother who had violent episodes and she believes that it was coping with this that helped her build the inner resources to face what she was seeing in Central America –to have the strength and the compassion to work for change.

Thursday, there were two headlining news stories. The first, of the Israeli ground invasion in Gaza and the second, of a terrible accident that happened when a passenger plane carrying over 300 people including 80 children was shot down over Ukraine, killing all the passengers. The ability for someone to stand on the ground and launch a missile at a flying jet and bring a sudden and terrible death to 300 innocent people, is almost more than we can bear to think about. It brings deep

grief for those directly affected by the tragedy and an unnerving insecurity in the hearts of all of us.

Jody Williams believes that true security requires that we leave behind our “selfish, nationalistic tunnel-vision and begin to think of others, of their security and the well-being of all.” It is only with a collaboration of nations and peoples that true security can be found. Ms. Williams is surprised that many people cannot “make the links” that we all need to join in this kind of thinking.

When I fight for human rights, I’m fighting for a new vision of human security. When I protect our environment, I’m fighting for a new vision of human security. When I seek to reduce the poverty in the world, I’m fighting for a new vision of human security.

She concludes her remarks with these words;

When I look into the future, my greatest hope is that enough people will realize that if we work together to make the world a better place, we actually can succeed. A handful of truly committed people can continue to change the world. It has happened so many times. I think if there are enough people who see things differently and are willing to take action, then there is hope....

When we are blessed by God to be a blessing to this world, miracles will happen. When each of us begins to trust, with humility but also with confidence that our “task is as unique as our specific opportunity to implement it” we can join with other committed people on the journey to change this world.

Last Sunday we commissioned 14 youth and adults to embark on a mission trip, blessing them and sending them forth. This past week, the young people of our church helped flood recovery victims in Longmont. Adults and youth worked hard, cooperatively, and cheerfully. They showed respect for the work, the homeowners, each other and the devastating power of nature to threaten and destroy at times. The amount of chaos and trauma that this flood,, so close to home, had caused in people’s lives became real to them. One homeowner expressed her gratitude for the

help of our youth through tears. She and her husband had been working hard at putting their life back together for the past 10 months, but the overwhelming task of tackling a garage packed so full of muddied contents that there was way to even walk in, was proving to be too much for them. They did not know where to begin. Our help, moving, and setting up and throwing away and washing and organizing gave them the boost they needed, both physically and emotionally, to return to the job of getting their lives back together. Our youth made a link between their lives and the lives of others, who had been complete strangers only the day before. Sunburned, tired and dirty, they had a peek at how their deep gladness could, and had, met the world's deep hunger.

God speaks out of a flood and from a burning bush, but also through the tears and hugs of an overburdened and grateful couple. And our youth, receiving this...turned... back to their lives, maybe not quite 180 degrees, certainly not becoming saints or prophets, but definitely changed. Metanoia. Thanks be to God.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Divine Source of all life. We call you by many names and experience you in many ways. You empower us and heal us and bring us into new life over and over again. Your sacred power is both within us and around us. Help us to know who we are, as painful as that can be at times, to accept our limitations and our disappointments and to believe in our potential to achieve dignity, and to flourish in our relationships and our work on this earth. May our gratitude for your presence in our lives be expressed in our own generosity and compassion toward others. May our hopes for the future find full expression in our daily prayers and attitudes and actions. Help us believe that each day is a gift, each moment an opportunity to reach out in love and service.

Be with those among us today who are in special need of your grace—those who suffer illness or grief, or disappointment or confusion. Give them the courage, energy and heart for action in the coming days.

We offer special prayers for those who have been named aloud this morning and for those we hold in love in the silence of our hearts.

We pray these things in the name of the One who taught us to pray saying, "Our Father,...