

Ordination Sermon
Thomas Hathaway
June 29, 2013
Exodus 4:10-13

Am I Up To the Task?

Please join me in prayer. Oh Holy God, we thank you for this moment, a quiet time of contemplation. A time when we might all consider your presence in this world and our call to know and serve you. So guide us in this moment, calm our hearts and quiet our minds, so that you may always be our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

What a great day this is. An important celebration where we are all gathered as part of this community to respond to God's call, a day of thankfulness and celebration for the ministry of Thomas Hathaway. Today is great because it is here in this moment that we realize that God is present and alive, moving in our midst. Yes, today we say together, with all people of faith, God is good.

God speaks to us through the centuries through scripture. We all know the story of Moses' insecurity. We have all lived it. How many times in each of our lives has God called us and we have countered with the excuse that we are just not up to the task. "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." The message of today's Scripture is that you may not have what it takes but you have a God that does. And God will not send you alone. God will be at your side and will send others who will help you and support you as you respond to God's call.

Today we celebrate the movement of God in the world and give thanks for Tom who has been met by a love that could not let him go. From the time that Tom was a young man he was

blessed with faith. Starting out with a rather conservative viewpoint Tom grew to maturity and faith through the experiences he has encountered in his life, over the years opening himself more fully to God's presence in his life.

Tom began his faith journey early in his life when he attended a small church near where he lived while growing up. It was a place where God launched Tom on his journey. Tom describes it as a conservative church. This church, which may not represent Tom's theology today, gave him a certain viewpoint that, while nurturing his faith in God during that time, later called him to question who and what God was and who does God love. After college Tom traveled to Japan to teach in a Japanese school. It is here that he encountered a family whose faith was different from his. It was difficult for Tom to reconcile that this loving, kind, nurturing and good family was not part of God's kingdom as he understood it. This family is one of the gifts that God sent Tom to guide him and help him to understand that God's love extends to everyone. That Christianity is an all-inclusive faith. It is not surprising that it was in a Buddhist temple that Tom realized his call to ministry.

Tom came to the Harvard Divinity School and began to practice ministry right away by organizing and leading student worship services. Tom realized early that ministry is not just the books he read and the papers that he wrote, but the active worship of God in community.

During his time at the Divinity school Tom came to North Prospect Union Church as a student intern. I remember that day well. He seemed to be a shy man and a bit uncertain about himself. Struggling to answer the questions that he was asked. But he was not afraid to be

honest in his answers. During the year he spent here at North Prospect Union Church he raised our consciousness to the needs of others. He enlivened us with his deep faith in God and his love of Jesus. He engaged us with his sermons and provided ministry for our children.

While attending Divinity school, and doing an internship at this church, Tom modeled for us that ministry is about loving God and caring for all people; even if that means standing outside in the rain, or the snow, or the freezing temperatures. "Feed my sheep." For Tom, those words are not only literal in providing food but in a commitment to feed and nurture the spiritual needs of the people in the Congregation of the Outdoor Church of Cambridge.

Tom, when I asked you to select a Scripture passage for your ordination sermon I wasn't surprised that you chose this passage from Exodus. Throughout chapter three Moses protests his call from God with one excuse after another. Patiently God provides Moses with the wherewithal to achieve his call. Moses continues to protest. God will have none of it and points out to Moses, saying "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute, or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Still, Moses protest. He offers one more excuse saying, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent," then asks God to please send someone else. Tom has expressed some issues around his eloquence in relation to his call to ministry.

Now, after all the things we know about Tom and all the gifts that he brings to ministry there are a few things that Tom shared with me along his journey that he gave me permission to share with you. In Tom's words, "why would God call me, I'm way too sarcastic? I have a perverse sense of humor. Why would God call someone as crass as me? And my favorite

question from Tom was during one of our many conversations about ministry. Tom looked at me and said, "Corey, don't you think you have to be a little off to go into ministry? After all look at you and Dudley."

Tom, your fear that the call to ministry is bigger than you can bear and you may not be up to the task is a fear that is natural, but not true. As God sent Aaron and Miriam to help Moses, God will send people to help you and God will keep calling you and growing in your soul as you continue to open yourself more fully to God's presence.

Today is a day that we celebrate God's life among us and how we are also all called to help Tom's ministry continue. As we celebrate and give thanks for Tom today, I want to point out that this is a service of ordination not coronation. Because it is here that we recognize most fully that in the United Church of Christ we proclaim the ministry of all believers. It is this day, as we celebrate and give thanks for Tom's faithfulness, that we might all think, talk, wonder, and imagine with God how we are being called to be faithful. How we are being challenged to respond to God's call in new ways; in our church community, our work environment, and our families. Welcoming how it is that God is beckoning us to reach out to those in need, to help unity and peace grow in this world. Today we all have the opportunity to answer God's call.

Tom, listen and judge the things you hear by the teachings of Christ and by the spirit that is within you. Examine the events around you and pray about them. Then do as you feel or believe you have been called to do, and if it is a true word, you will experience the power that is

behind that word, behind that call. Remember that God is calling you, Thomas, by name. God calls to you in the voice of those people who are trying to help you find your way.

As you ponder these words Tom, remember that a child once dreamed that God called him by name—"Samuel, Samuel." Fishermen from the Galilean Sea once met a young man who told them to lay aside their nets and follow. A Samaritan woman, drawing water from a well, once spoke with a prophet whose words sent her back to town in a rush to tell the people to come and hear Jesus. Moses stood before a burning bush, protesting God's call upon him: "Who am I that I should go to pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? ...what will I say when they ask who sent me? ... O my Lord, please send someone else!" Mary stood before God's messenger, amazed at the news she was hearing; and she questioned, "How can this be? ... And yet she heeded God's call and she said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Jeremiah stood in despair before God who had appointed him a prophet, while he was still within his mother's womb: He said, Ah Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." And from Isaiah, "then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'"

As with all those who have been called, the power behind the call of God is discovered by the one who decides to listen to it. Thomas as we greet God today saying, "Me, you're talking to me." Yes, Tom, you give witness that God is talking to you and to each of us so that we may be transformed and touched anew from this day on. Amen