

**2009 Ordination Sermon**  
**In The Midst of New Dimensions**  
**John 15:1-8**

This is a high and holy moment for obvious reasons - but also because the Lord is here! That's right; the head of the Church is here! Behold the Son of God walks among us tonight! So take a moment to personally acknowledge Him, and to humble yourself before Him.

This is a challenging assignment I have on this occasion! Perhaps for many reasons, but particularly so, in that I am convinced that I am speaking to, at least, four audiences here tonight.

- The first audience is this class of Ordinands - those of you who are stepping into an awesome responsibility. This threshold will give you additional privileges but it also brings with it great responsibilities.
- Then there is a second audience of the class of Provisional members – those of you who are stepping into a new relationship with this annual conference. Without apologies, you are entering into a period of close examination and mentoring regarding your “fitness for ordination and your effectiveness for ministry.” #325.
- Also among us tonight is a third audience of those of you who are thinking “this is not about me!” You have come out of courtesy or necessity and, in fact, you are probably hoping that this time will pass quickly.

- Then there is the fourth audience – those of you who have earnestly prayed for this time and you believe Jesus has a word for every person, every need, and every heart in this place tonight.

Ordinands, I've been in your audience. Provisional members, I've been in your audience. Those of you who just came, I've been in your audience. And those of you who came hoping Jesus would do business with everybody, I'm in your audience tonight and I've been praying that He would take these human words and empower them for His glory in each of our hearts tonight.

If time permitted tonight, I would preach a seven point sermon. But you can relax, because I am not going to do it! But I will give you the points. Be a life-long learner, empower your laity, preach well, invest in persons (especially your family), always have a mentor, make ministry to children and youth a high priority and pursue God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength.

But this sermon is about what I believe is the most important of all of those points - the last point. About fifteen years ago, Julian Rush wrote a hymn he titled, *In the Midst of New Dimensions*, it's in our hymnbook, The Faith We Sing and we will be singing it tonight. The first two stanzas are provocative questions certainly current for our day – V.1. *“In the midst of new dimensions, in the face of changing ways, who will lead the pilgrim peoples wandering in their separate ways?”* V. 2. *“Through the flood of starving people, warring factions and despair, who will lift the olive branches? Who will light the flame of care?”*

We are in the midst of a new and not-yet understood time. We are face to face with breath-taking changes in every niche of our world. Literally and figuratively, people near and far are wandering, starving, warring, and despairing. And, what I want to say to you tonight Ordinand - you are the one called into the midst of these new dimensions! Provisional member, you are the one God has called into the midst of these uncertain times! Fellow pilgrim, whether you are 18 or 89, you are the one God has called into the midst of these very uncertain times! As Ordinands and Provisional Members, you have told the Board of Ordained Ministry that you have heard that summons. And the summons went something like this in your heart – will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know and never be the same? Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known, will you let my life be grown in you and you in me? In some form, don't we all hear that call? And is it not humbling to think that the God of the Universe who has such a heart for this world is convinced we are what He needs for these times, these new dimensions?

Now, because we live in the midst of a narcissistic, egocentric, self-absorbed society I want to be careful how you hear what I have just said – you are hand picked for these troubled times. Please notice that I did not say, “You are THE answer. And I did not say you have THE answer - to every problem in the world, or in the church, or in your family, or in the community!” Let me assure you this calling, this journey are all about you – and your abilities, and your skills and your gifts – you have misunderstood the calling! If this is your thinking, I want to assure you that before your days on this earth conclude, you will bring more pain than you bring

blessing. You will bring more discouragement than you bring encouragement! You will bring more confusion than you bring direction. You will not be what God is looking for!

It is at this point that I want to return to Rush's hymn and remind us of the chorus, **"God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar, we your people, ours the journey, now and ever, now and ever, now and evermore."** That's it! That's the answer to the questions! God is looking for partnership! God is looking for persons who want to be in covenant with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who want to be guided by God, and who want to be led by God - into these new dimensions.

I am more convinced than ever that God is not looking for someone with THE answer, or even someone who has exceptional skills and talents. God is looking for persons who want to be in relationship – relationship with God and with others! Relationship with the God of the rainbow – you remember the story of the rainbow? It's about covenant! Fiery pillar – you remember? "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light." Ex. 13:21-22. God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar, we your people, ours the journey!

Our Gospel lesson tonight from John 15 is all about being in relationship with that same God! I know that we're all very familiar with this passage but be careful, this passage is not a little shallow pond around which we can stroll! These verses have the surgings of eternity in them, deep calling unto deep. Oh, I long for these words to sweep our feet from beneath us and

carry us out into the great waters - far beyond where the natural eye can see - where we are invited to swim in the unfathomable riches of God's life and presence.

This passage is so full of love and promise. Knowing all that he knows about you and me, even the very worst, our Lord is not daunted, in the least, to proceed to offer us his tremendous promise – “you will bear much fruit!” “Bear fruit” appears seven times! And “abide” appears eleven times! This God of rainbow and fiery pillar is saying to you and me - like the vine does for the branch, I will keep you alive and vital, green and growing, heavy with fruitfulness and loaded with usefulness. That's my promise! Jesus gives only one condition to all of this: We must remain in him, receive from him, and reproduce for him. He is the source, and all that is needed in these new dimensions flows through us, it does not come from us.

And I hasten to say that we must never forget that the “YOU” in this passage is both plural and singular. We are in this together - “Ours the journey.” We are called into community together with God – as well as individually with God. This journey is never really “all about me”; it is, rather, all about “us” and our relationship to God.

We are on the journey together! We are to “abide” together! We need to practice the disciplines together! We your people, ours the journey! The crisis in our churches today is not rooted in dwindling numbers, or aging membership, or outdated facilities, or the financial crises. Today's church crisis stems from one thing: what Leonard Sweet calls a Jesus Deficit Disorder - the loss of a communal hunger to walk with Jesus and love him with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength.

We have been too busy focusing on other stories instead of God's story, and dreaming other dreams than God's dreams as revealed by Jesus. When will we come to believe that God's dream for us is greater than any dream we may dream for ourselves. When Zechariah wrote (4:6), "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord" he uses two Hebrew words that cover all human resources. One is used to speak of human strength, human ability and personal power. The other is defined as strength, valor, wealth, and military force. What God wants to achieve in and through us is determined not by our 'stuff' but by God's "stuff"!

So, here's the offer - Will you leave *yourself* behind, if I but call your name? Will you go where *you don't know* and never be the same? Will you use the *faith* you've found, to reshape the world around, through *my* sight and touch and sound *in you and you in me*?