

LIVING LIFE IN A KEY OF PRAISE

(Exodus 15: 19-21)

Ordination of Christa J. Fisher

There are those among us Christa—including yourself—who wondered at some point if we would ever have the privilege of being ushered into this moment we are now in the midst of; this moment where you are being ordained, *set apart*, to do Word and Sacrament ministry in the midst of God's people, and in the midst of God's world. It is a people and a world that you already recognize as being *intertwined and connected* by the divine presence and energy that inhabits everything that exists. Therefore this moment we have been brought to is not just ours, but belongs to the whole of existence. The path that God carved out for you that has allowed us all to be in this moment has been, to say the least, a long and winding road . . .

But because of God's grace, *today* is the *tomorrow* that you could only dare to dream about *yesterday*. In your travels on your long and

winding road, there have been many ups and downs; many doubts and fears; much debt and despair; lots of tears and disappointments.

But, through being *renewed* by God's spirit; through being *led to see new light* by God's guidance; through being a *partner with the church* in some unusual paths and processes; and through *never letting go* of God's unchanging—but always surprising—hand, you have been able to invite us into this time and place, to offer intentional gratitude to God, and to share in this moment of celebration of God's transformative presence in your life!

II.

And make no mistake about it Christa: as one who has been called by God, and whose call has been attested to by the church, you *have been and will continue to be* touched by the transformative presence and spirit of that *very same* God, in the midst of the ministry that you will be called to by that *very same* church. The Spirit of the Living God will always be seeking to pour out *transformation* upon your life and your

ministry. Because the Spirit of the Living God is *always seeking transformation*; is always about *new possibilities*; always about moving toward something *different, broader, fairer, more inclusive, more just, more balanced, more relational, more honest*.

Those transformations and their accompanying transitions will take place in both your life AND your ministry, as they both will constantly inform and build upon each other. Because your call to ministry is not just something that affects only one part of your life. As one who has been wrestling with a call from God since around the time you were a toddler, I have been sent here to tell you this afternoon that your call is something that affects your WHOLE life, and that intertwines with every ASPECT of your life, every DAY of your life!

But let me share with you one thing that I hope and pray that a constant presence of your call in your life teaches you: I hope and pray that it teaches you to *sing your song. Your OWN song. YOUR song of testimony and YOUR song of praise about what you know God has done*

for YOU; about where God has brought YOU out from, and where God is leading YOU; a song about what God is doing in front of YOU, and within YOU; and how what God is up to is blessing YOU, and transforming YOU! My hope and prayer for you is that you will

continually learn to sing your song of praise by rehearsing it *every day!*

Because *every day* of your life and ministry, in *every aspect* of your life and ministry, God will be seeking to *transform* you, and to *use* you, and to *show you* some stuff... and in the midst of it all—whether it ends up being *easy* stuff or *hard* stuff—you always need to be ready, willing and able to give God all due praise!

And since we know that God is *always worthy* to be praised, then being ready, willing and able to give God all due praise, is gonna take living life in a *key* of praise!

You know, many musicians will tell you that there are some songs that need to be sung or played in a certain *key* for them to sound the most natural and be the most sing-able. I want to suggest to you this

afternoon that there is a key called *praise* that transcends the pentatonic and harmonic scales, and lands us in the realm and reality of our own particular ways to give thanks and praise to the God who has provided us with *divine deliverance* on our long and winding roads . . .

III.

Our scriptural example this afternoon is Miriam, the older sister of Moses and Aaron, who herself—prior to us meeting her in the text this afternoon—has been traveling her OWN long and winding road:

- ✚ A road that began her life as an enslaved Hebrew under the organized oppression of the Egyptian empire;
- ✚ A road that had her as a very young girl helping to save the life of her brother Moses by floating him down the river in a pitched basket, thereby allowing Moses to escape the infanticide ordered by the pharaoh of that same Egyptian empire;

- ✚ A road that watched her brother Moses grow up in an Egyptian palace, among Egyptian gods, helping to oppress his own Hebrew people—whom he didn't yet know;
- ✚ A road that encompassed the daily reality of slavery and bondage; disrespect and despair; being subject to rampage at home and rape in the streets; having no rights that had to be respected;
- ✚ But it was a long and winding road that also included belief in the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob, Rachel and Leah; a road that not only included LIFTING PRAISES to that God, but which also included CRYING OUT to that God for freedom and liberation from bondage and slavery.

You see Sista Christa, even in the midst of the misery and mess of her situation of slavery, Miriam just kept *living her life in a key of praise!*

Because Miriam had seen her God do a thing or two in her time:

- ✚ Like hearing the prayers of the Hebrew people, and providing a liberator for their situation in the person of her own brother

Moses;

- ✚ Like challenging the power structures of Egypt with the Ten Plagues, and seemingly convincing pharaoh to “*let my people go*”;

- ✚ Like starting to bring her and her people out of Egypt, after 400 years of bondage and slavery.

With these encouragements—as well as so many more—despite living through fearful days and nights; despite all of her sufferings in slavery; despite all that her and her people had to bear and endure; through it ALL, Miriam just kept *living her life in a key of praise*, with her hope and her trust and her faith in the God whose hand she wouldn’t let go of, because it was the God who had always seen her through!

You see, it doesn’t matter what situation you may be in. If you believe that the power and pervasiveness of God’s presence is able to *show up*

and *show out* in what seems like an impossible situation, then you just keep *rehearsing your song*, and *living your life in a key of praise!*

Because we know a *secret*: with God, NOTHING is impossible! So a life lived in a key of praise EXPECTS God to show up and show out, ESPECIALLY in situations that seem impossible! WE know that WE serve and praise the God that can make what seems IM-possible, POSSIBLE!

We meet Miriam in our sermon text, *right after* the Egyptian soldiers and chariots that had tried to chase down the Hebrews on Pharaoh's order got drowned in the sea, while Miriam and her people were able to walk across on dry land. In what has been shown to be one of the oldest Israelite poems in existence, Miriam takes up a tambourine in her hand, gets with all the Hebrew women who had just been saved by God's mighty hand, and began *singing her song!*

Sing to the Lord, for the Lord has triumphed gloriously!

Horse AND rider he has thrown into the sea!

Miriam didn't even need to rehearse! She had been training and rehearsing while she was in bondage, knowing that someday, somehow, God was going to bring freedom. So she lived her life in a *key of praise*, knowing and trusting the God of her ancestors; so much so that when God brought them through the highway of the Red Sea, Miriam was *already ready* to sing her song! She *stayed ready*, so she wouldn't have to *get* ready, when it was time to *be* ready. In some circles, they call that "staying prayed up!" Around here this afternoon we're calling it *living life in a key of praise!*

IV.

And so, my dear Sister . . .

You will come across a lot of things in your called and ordained ministry, and God is going to be using you—indeed has ALREADY started using you—in so many lives and spaces and places.

So, as you go forth as Isaiah says go: *Helping the wilderness and the dry land to rejoice with joy and singing.*

As you go forth as Dr. King says go: *“Remembering that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”*

As you go forth as Jesus says go: *Preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, helping to let the oppressed go free, and proclaiming that EVERY DAY God’s love is a free gift—for EVERYONE!*

Don’t forget, in the midst of all the frustration trying to do THOSE ministry items is gonna cause you...

Always remember to sing your song . . . and live your life in a key of praise!

