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A Mother's Sermon at her Daughter's Ordination

Patricia Simonson¹

Texts: Isaiah 55: 8-11; Psalm 103;1 Corinthians 1: 25 – 2: 5;John 1: 1-18

I am in an odd position today, being both Sarah's mother and the pastor called to proclaim the Gospel at her ordination. I could tell you stories – and fill up my allotted time with anecdotes, recounting tales of how, at three years of age Sarah insisted on going to church (which was only three doors down from our little house) and into church all by herself without me. She explained that she didn't want anyone to think that she only went to church because I made her. "It is my church, too, Mummy!" she'd say. So I'd watch from behind the curtains as she trekked off down the sidewalk and made sure someone was waiting to greet her at the church door.

She was as determined then as she is now. I could tell you stories of how, after high school, sensing that she might be called to Ninevah, Sarah took off for Tarshish (a.k.a. Vancouver) with a vengeance and lived for a time, with her best friend Clara, in a dark and dank basement apartment not at all unlike the inner belly of a whale. Yet, unlike Jonah, Sarah was never angry at God for being "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Sarah counted on this reality. She tested it. It was as if she was trying to see if there was any limit to God's abounding grace, love and forgiveness.

I could spend my time talking about Sarah, but I am not going to, because, as she and I both know, what we are about to do today, is not about Sarah, or me, or even all of us. It is about God, about the Word of God, about the mystery of God, about the promises of God, about the (apparent) foolishness of God. To the world, to much of the world, it is utter foolishness to believe in a god at all, let alone to believe in a God who, with a Word created all that is (the extent of which scientists are still striving to discover, let alone understand). It is foolishness to believe that this God (in the vastness of all that is) should care so passionately about us that the Word through which the universe is ever being created should become one with us, incarnate in our flesh, living our life, dying our death, for love of us. It is not at all reasonable... or sensible. It is utter foolishness that, if God exists at all, God should pay any attention at all to us on this insignificant planet third from an otherwise unremarkable middle-size star, the sun, let alone that God should care.

Yet, we assert that God does know and that God does care. We cannot explain. We do not pretend to comprehend our relationship with God, or, more particularly, God's relationship with us. We are always left with more mystery than understanding. Yet we must proclaim what we know to be true – the promise (not the threat) that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are God's ways our ways; that with us and through us, or in spite of us, God's Word will accomplish that for which God purposes it and succeed in the thing for which it is sent – that God's judgment on us is God's unconditional love for us and that God's wrath is incurred (not by our petty peccadillos, but) when we will not accept God's judgment, when we refuse to accept God's comprehensive forgiveness and unwavering,

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unconditional love. The utter foolishness of God is that God will not give up on us.

There is nothing we can do to get rid of God's Word – God's paradoxically steadfast, yet dynamic, immovable, yet flexible, constant, yet ever adapting, powerful, yet empowering tender, yet burning with justice against any oppression, never pompous or pretentious, but passionate and playful, abundant love. God speaks this life-giving Word for us. This is what it is about. It is not about us. It is for us – for you, for me, and for all of us, each and every one.

And this, Sarah, is that to which you are called to be ordained – to be preacher, priest, prophet and pastor to and for God's people. It is a humbling call, an awesome call, a terrifying call – but a call to you and for you, through God's people, from God. God has gifted you for this service, God will find a way for you to use every step of the circuitous route you took to get to this day, and God will empower you to keep God's Word. (To paraphrase a line from the Knight's Tale -) God love you, Sarah, and so do I.

Amen.