

**Sermon preached by Rev. Nancy Stewart at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, June 19, 2011  
Ordination Service for Rev. Helen Franssell**

**CALLED AND COMMISSIONED  
TO BRING GOD GLORY**

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

The sanctuary was radiant with light streaming through the multifaceted stained glass window. The variegated colors of the 15 ft. tall cross within the window seemed to dance with energy that Sunday morning. A young flute soloist, Katie Nunner was introduced. Katie, 17, is a member of our church, in Naples, Florida. She would be playing the prelude. But first she spoke briefly about the mission trip coming up this summer, in which she would participate.

Somehow I wasn't prepared for the prelude that followed. Are we ever prepared for God entering our space? Even in sacred space, the church, the cathedral, how expectant are we that God will enter and touch us with his holiness. Katie played her flute, accompanied by piano. It was an unfamiliar prelude to me. It was stunning and melodic. As I listened and watched Katie, it was like entering into God's Holy place. God's holy presence was almost palpable. During those three minutes it was as if "a tiny window" opened to the heavens. Katie might as well have played "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD God Almighty, Heaven and earth is full of God's glory", as the seraphim did in the scene from Isaiah.

Now as if we were in Isaiah's time, let us peek through "a tiny window" into the throne room of God. As the scene opens, and the drama begins we learn that it is in the year that King Uzziah died. Isaiah sees the Lord God seated on a throne, high and exalted. The train of the Lord's robe filled the temple. Imagine! There was glory all around. The seraphim, the six winged heavenly creatures, were flying around filled up with praise, honor and glory to God calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory."

At the sound of the praising seraphim's voices the doorpost and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. I'm reminded of the earthquake and the renting of the curtain of the temple when Jesus drew his last breath. The smoke might remind us of the cloud that followed the Ark of the Covenant, a sign of the glory and holiness of God.

What a regal scene, one of holiness, glory and power and Isaiah was there. But Isaiah had no comfort level in being there. In the presence of God Isaiah realized the deep sin and unworthiness of his life. He was humbled and horrified. He had seen The Lord Almighty with his own eyes. The glory of God had been revealed. No one who saw The Lord lived.

How Isaiah entered the throne room of God we do not know, but there was no escaping. “Woe is me! I am ruined!” he cried. “For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” If he were speaking today he might have said, “I’m a goner, I’m lost, there’s no hope, no turning back, I’ll never recover, or I’m wiped out. I am a human being, contaminated with sin and live among people who are contaminated with sin.”

Can you now imagine the next action in this holy drama? One of the seraphim flew to Isaiah with a live or hot coal in his hand. The seraphim had taken the coal with tongs from the altar. With the hot live coal he touched Isaiah’s mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” Now Isaiah was cleansed and healed by the power of God.

In Isaiah’s new state of standing before the throne of God, Isaiah is ready when God calls. Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Scripture indicates no hesitancy on Isaiah’s part. With clarity of words and intention Isaiah speaks out, “Here am I. Send me!”

There may be some similarity between Isaiah’s response to God, and Jesus’ Incarnation, his entering this world to take on flesh. Jesus is the Glory of God, The Incarnational presence of God. One of the most majestic passages in the Gospels is where Jesus turns to his Father in prayer, as recorded in John 17. It is often referred to as his high priestly prayer and it occurs in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest and subsequent crucifixion.

From John chapter 17, we might imagine a conversation between God the Father and Jesus the Son. It might have gone like this somewhere in the heavens. God the Father says to his Son, it’s time to go to the world to reveal our love for the human race. I have given it considerable thought and there is no one but you, Jesus Christ, my one and only Son, to do the work on earth that will bring glory to me. Will you go for us, with all the dangers, persecution and threats ahead? Will you lay down your life that they may have Eternal Life, and know me the only true God, and you, Jesus Christ whom I am sending? I will give you authority over all people. I would guess that Jesus’ reply was, “Yes, Lord, Here am I. Send Me!”

Jesus was sent and willingly came into the world to give glory to his Father. That Glory Jesus had before the world began. Jesus brought glory to God by completing the work God gave him to do. In his prayer to his father, while on earth Jesus said, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” He was speaking of his disciples.

Today we are here to affirm and celebrate the Ordination of Helen Franssell to the Gospel Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Helen has been sent into the world, as Christ’s disciple to minister God’s love at Capitol Caring in Arlington.

The CALL to the Gospel Ministry of Word and Sacrament starts with God. Ministry is God’s work and God’s choice of the individual to fulfill his purposes. Though God

knows who the person is, sometimes it isn't all that clear to the one who is chosen, but God will continue to reveal his will to the individual and to the body of Christ on earth, the church.

As Helen has journeyed on this path toward ordination there have been some highlights for me as her friend and colleague. Some years ago at a Presbytery of the East retreat for women at Messiah College, Helen was leading the singing and worship that evening along with the Faith Praise Band. I was blessed by the worship music and Helen's comments, probably from Scripture. There was a momentary sense, like the Lord was giving me a nudge about Helen that the ordained ministry might be in her future. Sometime later, I believe at church, I shared that thought with her. By Helen's response she wasn't thinking along those lines at the time, but was seriously exploring where God wanted her in the future. She had been laying her life on the line for God to shape and mold her. As Helen cooperated and opportunities unfolded God moved her forward.

My second memory is when Helen, at her request joined me for most of a day at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital in Rockville, MD, where I served as a staff chaplain. For much of our time together Helen and I made rounds in many areas of the hospital. I remember especially the neonatal intensive care unit for newborns in critical condition. Helen's natural and comfortable presence with each nurse, parent, and tiny infant was a joy to behold. She had no formal training in the hospital at that time. In chaplaincy we call what Helen offered that day: Being the incarnational presence of Christ to the other person. I wished I could have kept her for more than one day.

Helen had been taking steps of faith, gaining experience and beginning seminary studies. She added courses, accepted the hard discipline and the sacrifice of study. Her journey evolved as she moved into God's future plans, not knowing if what she was beginning to imagine would ever come to fruition. To her vision of God's call, clarity came.

As Isaiah said to God and we imagine Jesus said to his Father, Helen has said to our Lord, "Here am I, send me." Helen said yes to God over and over, step by step, year by year. After graduation, much to her surprise the call came from Capital Caring. And she has lived out that call as a hospice chaplain during this last year. We are here today for this new commencement, Helen's Ordination. May Helen bring glory to our Lord on earth by completing the work God has for her to do.

Lest we think that Helen's step-by-step, year-by-year walk of faith has been uneventful, unchallenging, all peaceful and calm, let me share an experience that epitomizes for me Helen's journey of faith.

Earlier this month my husband Steele and I visited the Hawaiian Islands. While on Maui Steele wanted to explore the northern coast by car. A four wheel drive was strongly recommended. The drive would take us high into the mountains with steep precipices and rugged roads. Steele promised me, if the conditions were too hazardous, he would turn back. Pretty quickly a sign said, "Ends state maintenance." Then the road narrowed in places to one lane and you couldn't see oncoming cars around the hilly protrusions on

the driver's side. We were driving at the edge of cliffs. As we proceeded, I paid more attention to other signage including "Falling Rocks" and we encountered a number of those rocks on the road. Then came "Warning, no shoulder, one lane next two miles." It was a stressful ride for me, but I kept reminding myself that Steele was calm, an excellent driver and he knew what he was doing. On one hand the ride was a harrowing adventure, on the other, I, on the passenger side had the spectacular views, down into the mountain valleys below, on out to the magnificent blue Pacific Ocean.

For Helen there was no turning back. The call to God's purposes and plans compelled her forward. Today does not represent the end of the road for her but a new beginning in the sacred Call of God to the Ordained Ministry in the Presbytery of the East of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

Let me share some of the insights Helen has gained as God has been preparing her to be an effective chaplain. Helen told me, God had worked to invigorate a more dormant side of her personality. Helen said to me, "God's call had primarily to do with what he wanted to develop in me." She identified that her natural inclinations are to be pragmatic, thinking situations through and following a logical pattern for a solution. She said, "I found myself drawn in life to one of the places with the exact opposite, chaos, the chaos of illness and death, the emergencies where the emotional part of one's self is all there is." So she shared, "I am going into that realm of chaos with others. It is such a privilege to walk with them in that sacred place of illness and death, and to be allowed to be present at that hinge between earthly life and eternity."

A final quote from Helen gives a clear picture of her call and ministry: "My call is to proclaim the peace of Christ in every way a patient or loved one can receive it. If not by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then by offering a compassionate, listening presence, or by offering some guidance and support in a tough time. And if not that, then maybe just a drink of water, or some music. There are lots of ways to proclaim peace!"

Helen may be saying today, on this her Ordination Day, "O God, you are doing in me, more than all that I could ever ask or imagine." It is by God's Sovereign call and by God's Grace that Helen is here. Helen is Called and Commissioned to bring God Glory at Capital Caring, in the church and in the world.

We have peeked through a tiny window into Isaiah's encounter with Almighty God. We have imagined a possible conversation between Jesus and his Father in heaven. Now thanks to Helen's candor we have peeked into her life, her call by this same Almighty God. We have learned of God's transforming work in Helen the person, and of the privilege and opportunity she has had in responding, "Here am I Lord. Send me."

As this service began with the lovely prelude offered by Dan Franssell, Jonathan Franssell and Pam Osborne, I was reminded of the prelude played by Katie Nunner in Naples last month. God has touched us here with his holiness. Here in this sacred space we have the beautiful wooden cross that has graced this place for many years. The cross was hand crafted by Dan Franssell. It has reminded us ever since, that Jesus is alive, risen from the

dead. Jesus is present in our worship this evening. Jesus invites you to become Christ's own disciple. Jesus invites you to offer your life as Isaiah did, as Jesus did, as Helen did for God's purposes and plans, for God's glory on earth. May the words of your mouth and the prayers of your hearts be, "Here am I Lord. Send me!"