

## “A World of Difference”

Meditation on Jeremiah 1:4-10

Aug. 21, 2016

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

*Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’ Then I said, ‘Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.’ But the LORD said to me, ‘Do not say, “I am only a boy”; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.’ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, ‘Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.’*

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I came back from the Montreat Youth Conference, and everyone asks, “How was Montreat? Did you have a good time?” And I answer, “Yes, it was great!” But then you start to talk about what happened at this huge PC (USA), 5-day youth gathering, and you don’t know where to begin!

The setting is so important. The people you come with are SO important. Your attitude is SO important. It takes faith to listen for God’s voice and commit to the Spirit’s work, to have your own identity and calling as a child of God--loved by God, used by God for God’s glory--confirmed. It feels like magic when you’re there; I don’t know how to explain it, except that it’s the Spirit of God that draws us, embraces, refreshes, heals and challenges us in our comings and goings, year after year.

The theme was “A World of Difference”--emphasizing the acceptance and embrace of differences in the Body of Christ and the great diversity of the world! It was also a call to discover and live out our different callings--every one of us, but most of all, the youth--and Make a World of

Difference TOGETHER, loving and serving God and people in new, creative, and bold ways.

“Prophecy!” one speaker urged us. “Prophecy to the Church!”

We *only* had 1 youth from MIPC go this year--a young man who has attended youth group faithfully and has happily gone to Montreat several years in a row. But we all proudly claimed Jacob as our own! At times, I think Jacob looked after us as much as we looked after him. Since this was my first Montreat Youth Conference, I was always asking Jacob questions--especially how to get to where we were going. He led me and his mom, Leslie, on footpaths (shortcuts) we would probably not have found on our own! He'd walk ahead of us with his long, youthful strides up and down steep slopes--grassy--rocky and sometimes paved, but usually not. We would follow, more slowly and carefully, behind him, sometimes struggling a little to keep up. He'd smile and toss helpful phrases back at us: “Don't fall!”

We had a zillion jokes about how there were 4 adults to watch over 1 youth--5 if you count Elizabeth who went as a small group leader and stayed in different housing. Larger youth groups filled up entire pews during worship and keynote. We had plenty of space to spread out on MIPC's pew! Cindy, our back home leader, organizer, and driver, would say, as we prepared for worship or another activity, “Let me check and see if everyone is here.” She would pretend to look around, before pointing to Jacob sitting right in front of us. “One!” she'd call out. “OK, we're all here!” But sometimes we'd get overconfident about Jacob, who is really a young adult. He graduated from high school this spring and works full time. Sometimes, we would be talking to each other and we'd

suddenly realize that Jacob wasn't with us.

We'd look at each other and say, "Where's Jacob?" And laugh-- because here there's 4 or 5 chaperones--and we've lost track of our one youth!! He was usually ahead of us and we'd meet up with him soon after. He has the confidence of one shaped by Montreat experiences and the Spirit of nurture with his family and his church!

Worship happens every morning and evening at the conference. Worship is active, begins with something called "Energizers!" which are difficult for uncoordinated, middle aged people like me! But they get us all up and moving and bring smiles to our faces. I loved that worship was packed with visuals, such as video clips, photos, and skits. Youth are involved in every aspect of worship --flying banners, carrying lit candles, bearing pieces of a heart that come together and other symbols of the Spirit's presence and uniting, healing, u power among us! Worship leaders played piano and guitar with traditional and contemporary pieces, including original compositions, such as the theme song for our week, "A World of Difference." The words to every song--original, modern and traditional-- were projected on two large screens on either side of the stage.

Twice a day, youth and some adults led or participated in small groups. We studied scripture and discussed serious topics relevant to teenagers raised by the keynote speaker or evening preacher. One teen shared how she had stayed up late the night before listening for 2 hours as another teen shared a problem he had, a struggle he had never shared with anyone else. She had tears in her eyes as she described how they prayed God would heal him--as God had healed her, when doctors

and counselors could not.

I celebrated my birthday at the conference with my back home group that gave me, among other gifts, a Montreat T-shirt and an adorable card with kitty voices meowing “Happy Birthday.” And I celebrated my birthday in my small group, bringing cookies to share. They made me a beautiful card and signed my Montreat shirt--so that I would remember them by name and pray for them by name. I promised I would! :o) They let me take their pictures. Here are some of my new friends!

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The Jeremiah reading fits perfectly with the day we celebrate youth and share about our annual trip to Montreat. What a powerful passage this is--the call of Jeremiah, coming just a few years before Jerusalem is destroyed, and Israel is captured and exiled to Babylon, about 600 years before the birth of Christ. The call is more like the call of Moses than the call of Isaiah, who has an elaborate vision. Moses, who has a speech problem, hears God’s voice plainly, but like Jeremiah feels unworthy and unable to do what God wants him to do. Jeremiah protests, “I’m just a boy! I don’t know how to speak!” But the Lord doesn’t say, “Oh, yeah, you’re right. You’re just a boy. What was I thinking?”

God says, “You’re the one I want. No one knows you better than I! I have known you since before I formed you in your mother’s womb! I’ve been planning this all along; you are consecrated--set aside as holy--to be my prophet to the nations!!”

The call of Jeremiah brings to mind the call of Abraham, as well, for the Lord doesn’t specify Abraham’s final destination. He says, “Go, to a place I will show you!” The Lord assures Abraham that He will be with

him wherever he goes; he needn't be afraid! The Lord, in a similar way, assures Jeremiah, "*You shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.*" God's mighty word will lead to the "plucking up, pulling down," and destruction of nations. But the promise is there for God's people, though they will suffer greatly in their captivity and exile of about 50 years. Our God of mercy will also "build" and "plant." In Jeremiah 29:11-13, we are assured of God's wonderful plans that are still true for us today! "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart."

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Someone asked me what I liked best about Montreat. "That's easy," I said. "Getting to know the people from my own church!!" We had lots of uninterrupted time together, in between scheduled conference activities. We stayed in a 100-year-old house without a/c, TV, radio, or Internet. It was a simple life, except you had to go outside and down a flight of stairs to go from the bedrooms to the kitchen, dining and family room where we ate meals, played Uno, and snacked endlessly. The bathrooms were interesting. Glad we didn't have to use the heat; it was ancient! Also for entertainment, Jacob and Mike played a rope game on the back porch. And an orange kitty came to visit one afternoon.

I was sad when I had to leave a day early. I needed to get back to prepare for Sunday worship and a funeral Sunday afternoon. I was sad

to leave Montreat, at all. For at Montreat, our group was united and renewed in faith; we had our callings as children of God, loved by God, used by God for God's glory, confirmed! We grew to know and love more the Lord and one another. I missed the last night when Jacob and all the other high school seniors gathered around Lake Susan. They lit candles. Then the adults and other youth laid hands on them and prayed for God's blessing. That Friday night, I was with them in spirit. And I continue to pray for Jacob and the youth I met at Montreat, the youth of our congregation, and the youth of our community we haven't yet met. My prayer is that they will seek the Lord and hear God's voice as clearly as Jeremiah heard God calling to him when he was "just a boy."

I pray the Lord will continue to lead us and all our young people to make a WORLD of difference, as we sang in our theme song at Montreat.

*"Oh, what a world of difference it makes  
To know that we belong to a God of mercy  
And Oh what a world of difference we make  
When we all come together; and belong to each other in God's love.  
For every person, for every face  
Made in the image of the God of grace  
For every soul, every life to live  
A different calling and a different gift to give  
Spirit lead us, may we hear the call  
To love and glorify the God who claims us all.  
Cause Oh what a world of difference it makes  
To know that we belong to a God of mercy  
And Oh, what a world of difference we make  
When we all come together,  
And belong to each other in God's love."*

Will you pray with me?

Holy God of mercy, thank you for claiming us, calling and equipping us to love and serve you with our lives! Refresh and renew us by your Spirit, filling us with the gifts we need to do your will. Awaken in the hearts of every believer a better understanding of your plan and purpose for them, a plan that you have had for us since you formed us in our mother's womb. Restore unto all of us the joy and peace of our salvation. Lead us to boldly and creatively reach out to the children and youth in our community with your love. In Christ we pray. Amen.