

Pastor Ann Camber Testimony shared at St. Paul's, January 4, 2015

I am very privileged to share my testimony with you. It is especially a blessing at the beginning of a new year because each year at this time I like to spend some time in focusing in on God's work in my life and visioning and placing my hopes and dreams before God.

I have always been part of God's family. My dad and mom devout Anglicans, I was baptized in a “bells and smells”, high Anglican church at age 3 months, we were raised in the church, I remember saying grace at every supper, having an advent wreath at home and lighting candles for the four weeks before Christmas, having a lenten box to put pennies in before Easter. My first personal encounter with God that I remember was at age four. The bishop came to our church for a confirmation service. I was caught up in the service and refused to go to Sunday school. I remember saying to God that I believed in him that day. After that I was hungry for more and more of God. I would never let my parents out of taking me to church even if there was a snow storm. My upbringing was very loving, secure with my parents and brother and sister in Toronto. I have always been active in a church family from joining the church choir at age seven, to attending Anglican church camp to youth group and continuing through my adult years as musician, pastor, and servant leader. If I stopped at this point it would be easy to say that my journey in faith has been easy - a “silver spoon” Christian.

But in the midst of this fairly ordinary life, I have experienced some very challenging life situations that have tested my faith and yet, in the midst of those I have experienced the miraculous.

At age nine, my family survived a house fire, only being saved as a result of my mom's waking up in the middle of the night and smelling the smoke. We all suffered from smoke inhalation, the firefighters said ten more minutes we would have all died. I believe God preserved us for a purpose.

My best friend Michelle died of an undiagnosed brain tumour when I was eleven. I was with Michelle the night before she lapsed into a coma and she had told me an angel was coming for her. At that young age it was hard to cope with the grief. It was not until many months later I came to see the blessing of my friend sharing her vision. That was the day while at Anglican church camp I first felt the call to ministry – that too was a vision, I saw myself ministering at the altar as a priest. I knew my life calling.

I cannot think of a stage of my life where my faith has not been important to me but we all get off track even though we really want to do right. After university despite my strong sense of call to seminary I allowed myself to be convinced that it would be too hard for a woman to be in ministry so I went another route – teaching. I got a job in Saskatchewan in a small town and I found myself quickly engaged then married to a young man who I found out too late was from a very dysfunctional and abusive family. Our marriage struggled for most of our eighteen years together and then ended. Life was difficult during that time, but I persevered with God's help and a loving church family –

St. Columba's Anglican Church in Kenaston Sask. I was active in my community, loved being mom to my two children Kim and Steven and continued with my work, and often the call to ministry would come in my prayers. Finally I talked to my rector of the time, Rev Murray Still, and he confirmed that he too felt that I was called. It was time, I began the process to move into ministry and I began seminary first in Saskatoon and then a year later in Regina, Sask.

When I entered seminary, God met me there with such healing, I learned a great deal about theology, church history, Biblical studies even learned Biblical Hebrew and Greek even more importantly God taught me about forgiveness, about finding my identity in Christ, about leaning on Him for strength, about being a servant, and about my calling. He gave me back my joy. I was in a hot house of Christian learning and it was the perfect place for me. I thrived and did so well in my studies that I graduated top in my class in my M.Div studies.

After graduation I began to pastor in a small Baptist church in Manitoba. Two years later as I was ordained in that community I thought this was the fulfilment of my life vision. I enjoyed preaching and serving this church but four years later I was on the move to Calgary and ministry in a larger church there. My most recent move to Thunder Bay was a complete blessing, I am now living close to my daughter, son in law and four grand children and I have a wonderful ministry in counselling. While I understood this to be the main reason I relocated, I believe that my return to the Anglican tradition has been part of His plan in bringing me here to Thunder Bay and St. Paul's for another type of blessing. The vision of that 12 year old at Camp Artaban those many years ago was of ministry as a priest. God willing, that may happen in the future.

So if I were to sum up my life it would be found in the verse from Romans. “ The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” I have and always will be in love with the Lord. He is first in my life. While life has had its difficult times I have found that leaning into God has sustained me through trials. He gave me that firm foundation of early training in the family of the Anglican church and now at age 60 I have so many blessings and so many reasons for joy. You folks at St. Paul's are a big part of that and I praise God for this His body of Christ.