

CALLED LIBERATED, ORDAINED FOR SERVICE”

ADDRESS BY THE RT. REV. ELLINAH WAMUKOYA, BISHOP OF SWAZILAND AT THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY BANQUET CELEBRATING THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO HOLY ORDERS IN THE PROVINCE OF THE WEST INDIES, AT THE JAMAICA PEGASUS HOTEL, NEW KINGSTON ON OCTOBER 24, 2014

Preamble

I cannot begin to tell you how delighted I am to be here in the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands to be part of this esteemed gathering and to share with you as you celebrate and commemorate the 20th anniversary of the ordination of women as Deacons and Priests in this part of the Anglican Communion.

As I sat and listened to the women share their joy yesterday at Bishop’s Lodge, I could not help being taken back to Egypt, and the very first chapter of Exodus where the Pharaoh (who knew nothing about Joseph and what he had done – that’s for another day) gave this order to the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah, “*Watch as the Hebrew women give birth, if the baby is a boy kill him, if it is a girl, let her live*”. “Yes Sir, instruction understood” they responded. But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the King’s orders, they allowed the boys to live too. Because of this God was good to the midwives and the Israelites continued to grow more and more powerful.

But the story continues to Chapter 2. Pharaoh’s daughter came to Moses’ rescue even though she knew that he was one of the Hebrew’s children and took him in anyway. It took the collective effort of women from different backgrounds to save Moses, who later was used by God to deliver the children of Israel from slavery. The Nile was supposed to be a place of death, but Miriam and her mother saw it as a place of life. It took Moses’ mother to discover that he was a special boy.

I am sure that the women of this Province, for some time, hopefully practiced all sorts of ministries on the fringes of the Church while nursing, and in a way satisfying, that inescapable call from God they felt in their hearts, until the time was right. Today, we have come to say thank you for your patience! There is hope in the Caribbean Islands, the Kingdom of God, like the Hebrew nation. will continue to grow.

My Early Life and Call

I thought I could bring some life to the story of being **Called, Liberated and Ordained for Service** by sharing with you a little about myself, my life's journey up to the priesthood and episcopacy.

Born to parents who did not have much education, my mother went up to Grade 8 and taught in primary school for a few years. When she married my father, she abandoned teaching and followed him to South Africa where he worked as a shop assistant. My father left school in Grade 2 or 3 and he taught himself through night school. One thing in common between them, they wanted their children to have an education.

I started school in South Africa during apartheid and went through what was called "Bantu education", a system of education of inferior quality to that of the white people and all subjects were done in vernacular. I came back to Swaziland in 1961 in grade 6. I was gifted in school, adjusted quickly despite the fact that the medium of instruction in Swaziland was English.

After graduating from primary school, I went to high school in a Nazarene Mission School. This was a very strict school. I graduated in 1969 and almost graduated from church as well. At University I was on an off in terms of church. By the time I married my husband in 1976, church was no more a priority in my life. However, it was through my husband that I became Anglican.

My mother-in-law was a staunch charismatic catholic. She was very patient with me, encouraging me to become a committed Christian in my husband's church (Anglican). I told her I was afraid because my husband would take advantage of me if I became a committed Christian.

It was not until we had a rough patch in our marriage that my aunt introduced me to a group of women, not so educated compared to me, but very committed Christians and serious intercessors. Then I discovered that for me to have peace in my life I needed to go back to Christ. I forgot about all my fears, all I needed was a way out of what I was going through.

Remember the Vineyard Story in Matthew 20: 1-16. A story I like to see as Jesus teaching us about being called by God and staying close to Him when called. The landowner went to the market place to hire labourers, the marketplace where the unemployed hung around hoping for someone to come to their rescue. God can only call us and give us his gifts when we are open to receiving God's gifts. For some, it may be easier to hear God speak when they are in the market place, with nothing else in life, when life appears to be in turmoil. When we are not in control God will take over and direct us. Paul spent three days in darkness, on an intense retreat, to prepare him to receive the Word Jesus wanted to give him, to be a missionary to the Gentiles. He received his call to work in the Vineyard when he was thrown on the ground and blind for three days. I had to be down to hear God's call but thank God, now I am "**called, liberated and ordained for service**". All my fears are gone.

It was not long after that I re-committed by life to Christ, my husband followed suit. He fell very ill; I think it was a way of God calling him back.

Answering God's Call

My call came through Ezekiel, Chapter 2:1 –

“He said to me; O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, mortal I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day; The descendants are impudent and stubborn.

I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them “thus says the Lord God”. Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be dismayed at their looks for they are a rebellious house. You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house ...”

I was scared and confused. I had never in my life thought of serving in the church. I was a Town and Regional Planner/CEO of a Municipality, period. I had even run away from teaching because I found people very difficult to handle.

But in Matthew 4: 18-20 Jesus calling his first disciples, He was not just calling them to leave something behind, he was calling them to pick something up, to start a new vocation and to fish for people. In terms of ordination of women in Swaziland, I was number 3, but into the episcopacy it was very frightening. Serving in Swaziland was not so scary. All my life I had served among men; and as you know, the higher you climb the ladder, the fewer women you meet, and I was used to Swazi men and our culture.

But I was thinking more about the wider community. The prejudices that have been used to bar women from priesthood, namely: women considered less than men in every respect, physically, intellectually, and emotionally. And, of course, being a non-stipendiary priest, I

was contented with my diploma in Theology, and my secular job had made lots of demands on me. But, here I was to sit in the house of learned Bishops with doctorates and what have you. Thanks to my Archbishop's encouragement, I now have my Honours in Church History and Polity and I am working towards my MA degree.

It is believed that Eve caused humankind to fall from grace, and every woman is thought to carry the curse of her sin, and therefore they are marked as sinful creatures. Women are considered impure because of menstruation and, therefore, are to be kept far from the altar and sacred services. I have been travelling around Africa, West, Central and East, making sure I am very careful how I conduct myself, but making sure that, that given an opportunity to minister, I do my best. My people skills and experience from the corporate world have come in handy. I have been resource bishop in Trinity at workshops dealing with sustainability in the Church which, in my opinion, should be run on corporate principles, not just a free for all, and there should be accountability.

When a situation calls for my tears I shed them, not before human beings but before God.

We are called and given the challenge to change the world. A tough task indeed. We therefore need to equip ourselves spiritually, especially as women. My biggest challenge is that most people want to see what it is she will do differently from men. All eyes are on us. We are called to go out to the battle field, to the front line to advance the Kingdom of God. Not as women, but as children of God who are women. Remember, there are casualties out there. The forces of evil gloat every time a minister resigns, or succumbs to temptation, or becomes the subject of media ridicule. There is war on the spiritual front. There is no time to be compromised by the delights of this world. (Ephesians 6: 10 – 13 should be uppermost in our minds. In our calling, we have to uphold, truthful integrity, righteous character, purposeful proclamation, tough faith and commitment to the word of God. All described by Paul as "*whole armour of God*".

Women and Ministry

As women, we have something to contribute to the church. Having been in the pews themselves, women bring a wealth of previous experience and involvement in the local church – experience which serves to enhance their ministry in diverse ways. Most women who have received the calling bring not only their Christian understanding of relationships to God and neighbour, but the particularized dimension of feminist and other liberation theologies as well.

This brings in their leadership styles that are a departure from tradition as they embrace a “shared involvement” and “mutual pilgrimage”. Because women themselves have had to struggle to arrive at ordained ministry, they often bring a heightened awareness of the dehumanising experience of being “shut out”. Drawing from their own pilgrimage as a resource, they are able to invite and enable others to affirm and value their own uniqueness, gifts and resources.

Women’s leadership styles acknowledge the pain of ignored talents, dual standards and narrowly defined roles. Their styles are less hierarchical and more fluid than those of their male counterparts who have come to leadership as a matter of fact.

In Christ we are free (liberated) so we are to stand fast and not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1), that is Christ’s will for our lives. Sometimes, we are bogged down by the dilemma about God’s will and worry about decisions that are simply not a great issue with God. We are to orient our lives on the clear statements of scripture regarding God’s will. And here is one: “For freedom, Christ has set us free. Christ’s will for you and me is that we enjoy freedom (liberation). What job you do, where you live, are not nearly so crucial as whether you stand fast in freedom. The Bible’s command on freedom is very explicit. So our enjoyment of our freedom is much more important to God than many of the day-to-day decisions that fill us with so much concern. *“Stand fast and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery”*. This is the will of God for you. Uncompromising, unrelenting, indomitable freedom. All the debates about the ordination of women and women bishops...

you name it... we have been called and given work, we are no more slaves to church doctrines but Christ has given us freedom/liberation to serve, not to be served.

When you have received grace you have experienced freedom, including freedom of eternal life. Slavery is what happens when you fall away from the power of grace, when you take it upon yourself to achieve your own righteousness through the law. In Galatians 5:4 we are assured that the key to freedom is depending on grace; it means that the key to freedom is God's rescuing and caring exertion in our lives here and now. We are free when God freely comes to help us and live joyfully trusting his help instead of turning to the yoke of law.

The Will of God

This freedom received from Christ leads to service (Luke4:18-20). The effectiveness of Jesus' ministry is a model for all leaders. We know Jesus found joy in His Ministry, despite conflict, disappointment and suffering. In John 17:13 Jesus prayed that He would communicate the joy he found in his work to his disciples so that they, in turn, might communicate it to others.

If what concerns us, concerns him, then what concerns him should concern us. Like Christ, therefore, we are ordained to:

- Preach the gospel to the poor
- To heal the broken hearted
- To proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind
- To set at liberty those who are oppressed
- To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord

According to Job 31: 18, Job feels that, to omit to do good to any fellow human being of whatever rank or class, would be a grievous offence to God. Fulfilling the desires of the poor does not mean just meeting the basic needs for food and shelter, but includes turning the poor person's life into a delight. Doing justice to the poor includes not only the righting

of wrongs but generosity and social concerns, especially to the poor and vulnerable, thus reflecting the character of God.

Doing justly includes, fair and honest dealing with people in daily life to regular, generous giving of your time and resources, to activism accompanied by discernment that seeks to end particular forms of injustice, violence and oppression. We are called in the words of Luke 4:19 and Isaiah 61:2 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, where the year of God's favour is a day of salvation when God has compassion on his people.

Jesus' ministry was one of deliverance, healing and redeeming. He passed that ministry on to his disciples who sounded the trumpet of salvation that still reverberates today. We are His hands and feet. He has entrusted this ministry of binding, healing, proclaiming and delivering to us the Church, may I add us women ministers with our special and unique gifts and talents. Let me leave you with Paul's words to Ephesus before he left for the final time (Acts 20-35). *"And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember that words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

So good people let us go out there to God's people and give and give and give whatever we have received from God even though:

- There are still those places and gatherings where women who are ordained know what it is to be seen as unusual, even at this day and age
- We know what it is to be accepted in some places with curiosity and caution
- Some still deny our calling because of our gender
- We however share that pain, with those who find themselves marginalized for things that are an integral part of their being and are blessed by God.

To God be the glory who has allowed us to be co-labourers in his vineyard at such a time as this. AMEN!!