

To What Ministries Are We Each Called?

To what ministries are we each called? Let's begin this time of reflection with prayer. God of all, we give thanks for the gift of being freely gathered for worship today – via live stream and in this house of worship on land loved by First Nations and other people long before us and which we hope will be cherished long into the future. Be with us now, encouraging us to see ourselves more clearly within the body of your whole creation. Help each of us to sense the purpose you have for us. We pray this as followers of Jesus. Amen.

Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde, the Apostle Paul, Jesus. Friends in faith, these three prophets are speaking to us today. It is often said that a prophet is someone who speaks truth to power. They speak the truth as they know it (based in intellectual, emotional, and spiritual clarity). They share that truth with those with power (often power based in privilege) – those who have the option to freely respond to truth-telling. Any one of us can also speak prophetically, having a powerfully encouraging impact on our community as have Jesus, Paul, and Bishop Budde.

Alongside a capacity to be prophetic (speaking truth to power), I witness in their words another thread that connects them. That thread is the practice of interdependence. Simply put, interdependence in mutual dependence on one another (emphasis on the mutuality).

Interdependence is the glowing core of my faith in the love of God and my approach to ministry, motherhood, and life. I do not always practice interdependence with excellence and ease. Yet the realization of interdependence everywhere is my deepest longing and inspiration. We will return in a moment to Jesus, Paul, and Bishop Budde – to glean lessons that might strengthen our own experiences of interdependence.

Interdependence may feel like an overly intellectual term. We don't hear it bantered about nearly as often as its opposite, which is codependence. Let's take a moment to explore codependence – both as a concept and in the ways it touches our lives. I first heard the term “codependent” when I was about twenty-two years old and working at a Lutheran camp and retreat center in central Texas, on the edge of the hill country. One weekend, I served as host to a retreat of a group called Texas Co-Dependents Anonymous. Several guests graciously engaged with me in conversation, sharing insights about codependency.

Here is a description of the experience of codependency as share by the umbrella organization, Co-Dependents Anonymous. They write, *“What is codependence? Somewhere along the line, we learned to doubt our perception, discount our feelings, and overlook our needs. We looked to others to tell us what to think, feel, and behave. Other people supplied us with information about who we were and should be. It became more important to be compliant or avoidant rather than to be authentic, and we adopted rigid beliefs about what ‘should be.’ We believed that if we could just ‘get it right,’ things would be okay. When we ‘got it wrong,’ our sense of security and self-worth evaporated.”*

You know how I love my dictionary and Merriam Webster offers a succinct definition of codependency: *“a psychological condition or a relationship in which a person manifesting low self-esteem and a strong desire for approval has an unhealthy attachment to another often controlling or manipulative person...”* and an even shorter definition as *“dependence on the needs of or on control by another.”*

Perhaps you can relate either directly or indirectly to the human experience of codependency.

Maybe you have codependent tendencies. Or maybe you struggle to relate healthily with another in your life who has such tendencies.

Here is a list of signs of codependency in straightforward language (psychcentral.com):

- *“a deep-seated need for approval from others*
- *self-worth that depends on what others think about you*
- *a habit of taking on more work than you can realistically handle, both to earn praise or to lighten a loved one’s burden*
- *a tendency to apologize or take on blame in order to keep the peace*
- *a pattern of avoiding conflict*
- *a tendency to minimize or ignore your own desires*
- *excessive concern about a loved one’s habits or behaviors*
- *a habit of making decisions for others or trying to “manage” loved ones*
- *a mood that reflects how others feel rather than your own emotions*
- *guilt or anxiety when doing something for yourself*
- *doing things you don’t really want to do simply to make others happy*
- *idealizing partners or other loved ones, often to the point of maintaining relationships that leave you unfulfilled*
- *overwhelming fears of rejection or abandonment”*

Let’s open ourselves honestly to the reality that there are cultural patterns surrounding us (past and present) that would lead us into codependency. **Which culture in your life has pushed you toward codependency (being dependent either of meeting the needs of another or on being controlled by another)?** For you, is it our national politics, the culture of the school through which you grew up, the household that

raised you, your workplace, the household of which you are now part? What cultural circle pushes you toward codependency?

I invite you to grab a pen and write out the numbers one through eight somewhere on your worship bulletin. You will only need enough room to right a single letter next to each number. And, then, here is a code that you might also want to jot down: O is often, S is sometimes, and X will be hardly ever. So you've jotted 1 through 8 and you've left space for each question to be able to write O – often, S – sometimes, or X – hardly ever. Now, as you listen to these questions from an organization called Mental Health America, jot your response of whether it is true often, sometimes, or hardly ever for you.

- 1. "Do you avoid arguments by keeping quiet?"*
- 2. Do you worry about what people think of you?*
- 3. Have you lived with someone who was addicted to alcohol or drugs, or someone who was violent or verbally abusive toward you?*
- 4. Do you value other people's opinions more than your own?*
- 5. Are you humiliated when someone close to you makes a mistake? When you make a mistake, do you feel as though you're a bad person?*
- 6. Are you worried that people in your life would be in trouble if you didn't look out for them?*
- 7. Do you have trouble asking for help, or saying "no" to other people when they ask for your help?*
- 8. Is it hard for you to tell people how you really feel?"*

I imagine that many of us responded with a mix of often, sometimes, and hardly ever.

I wasn't given a rubric for scoring this and I'm not a psychologist, but I would say that if your responses skew more toward often than toward hardly ever, I encourage you to learn more about codependency. It can diminish our energy for managing life in God's interdependent web.

Psychology Today offers this nugget of wisdom about living interdependently: *"Healthy relationships are mutually beneficial, providing love and support to both parties."*

So how do the prophets speaking to us today demonstrate interdependence – a deep understanding that we are each whole and good as God created us and that we need to give of ourselves and receive from others in a spirit of mutual benefit?

I find that the prophet **Paul models interdependency for us through his heightened awareness**. Can we follow him in coming days in the example of noticing how gifted how each and every one of us is in such different, quirky, wonderful ways? Can we heighten our awareness with Paul?

I think **Jesus models interdependence today through his deep introspection**. An interdependent person knows themselves and then is able to be in community because of knowing themselves. It is sometimes said that we know what we know when we know it. And it strikes me that the scripture tells us that the Spirit was with Jesus. He went into a normal routine of reading scriptures among elders in the synagogue. And then you could feel it when he sat down and rested with how the scripture had just resonated with his understanding that God was absolutely calling him to a ministry of justice and healing – right then, right there. So can we follow Jesus' model of being introspective enough that we know ourselves well – such that we can come from a strong place when gathered in community?

And this week in our nation, **Bishop Marianne Edgar Budde** seemed to **demonstrate interdependence by showing courage to act based in the clarity of her convictions**, which came from the scriptures of our faith. She reminded me very much of one of my lawn signs that says United Church of Christ clergy and, on the other side: Show up! Rise up! Speak up! This week, with Bishop Budde, can we practice interdependence by gathering our courage when we have clarity in our conviction of a way we need to act?

Well, I do have two more prophets to share. One is the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from whom I shared a snippet at the beginning of our worship services. He talks about interdependence. He says, *"In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the inter-related structure of reality."* Says Dr. King.

And when an opportunity to act out of my convictions for justice or love faces me directly, I often lean toward these words which I share often from 19th century Unitarian minister, historian and author Edward Everett Hale: *"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do. What I can do, I should do. And what I should do, by the grace of God, I will do."* Words of loving wisdom from Edward Everett Hale.

Friends, to what ministry are you called? I encourage you to wonder with Hale – what do I realize I can do?

And to wonder with Paul – what is my part to be and do in the body of Christ in this time and place?

And to wonder with Jesus – what can I feel the Spirit calling me to do?

And with King – let's weave this interdependent garment of destiny toward love and justice because Love is counting on us. Amen!

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January 26, 2025 | 3rd Sunday after Epiphany
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a, Luke 4:14-21