

Barrett Payne – Biographical Sketch

I grew up in a loving family that made an effort to be active members of the local PCUSA church in Martinsville, VA. My parents felt it was important that the entire family take active roles within the church. However, some of my fondest church memories growing up were accompanying my grandmother at her church, Rockfish Presbyterian Church in Teachey, NC. I loved it when my grandmother would take my siblings and me to the cemetery behind the church and point out family members and old friends. As I reflect on these times, I believe my grandmother was teaching us what it means to be part of a church family and that the body of Christ is made up of both the living and the dead.

Seeking to understand how I was called to be part of this body was put on hold while I attended college. During my college years I only attended church while visiting my parents or grandmother. However, a few years after college I felt the Holy Spirit pushing me to join a church family. I eventually joined the First Presbyterian Church of Raleigh, NC. While attending First Raleigh I was asked to assist with the youth group. I enjoyed my time with the youth and equally important my faith grew stronger. As the youth asked me hard questions, I too began asking difficult questions about God, faith and the church. As I searched for answers, I worked more with the youth group leader and dove deeper into learning about what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Through these conversations with the youth group leader, she encouraged me to consider going to seminary. The idea of going to seminary and becoming a pastor scared me because I had anxieties about school, unrealistic expectations of pastors and idolized my own goals. I drowned myself into work over the next decade and ran from God's call.

Although I ran from this call, my eyes had been opened to a seed in me that I believe God planted a long time ago. However, I wrestled with God for over a decade on why I should answer this call. Over this time I got married, moved to Asheville, NC, had three children, became a ruling elder and opened a business with my dad. As I continued to make sense of how God was calling me to follow and serve Jesus Christ, my wife and I researched various PCUSA seminaries, talked to many people and began regular meetings with our pastor. These years were very informative for me and my journey as I began to realize that pastors are not any different than other members of the church community and as members of the body of Christ, Jesus sends us all out to baptize and teach the nations.

However, my anxiety and my doubts of attending seminary and my desires to follow my own goals continued to turn me away from seminary until a mentor from childhood passed away suddenly. Since I was eight years old, I heard my mentor tell me to just B Natural. This was his motto in life, but I never truly understood it until his funeral. After preparing to say a few words and listening to others speak about his life, his love for all people and his desire to follow Christ,

I realized for the first time what he meant. For 30 years he was telling me to be who God was calling me and made me to be. As I sat in the sanctuary I knew the answer because for 10 years whenever I closed my eyes and prayed about where God was calling me, I always heard God calling me to ministry. After the funeral I changed my language from “if” I go to seminary to “when” I go to seminary.

Over the past 3 years of seminary, I felt blessed that my journey worked out the way it did. I was thankful that I wrestled with my call before seminary and while in seminary was able to focus on learning. One thing in particular I enjoyed learning about was the sacraments. As I continue to reflect on what the sacraments mean, I am intrigued by God choosing us as infants and with the help of the Holy Spirit the church family raising us up to follow Christ. I am also intrigued that Jesus meets us at the table and through the power of the Holy Spirit and love of Jesus Christ we are connected to God and to each other. I love that at the Lord’s Table we are equal and one body and perhaps we are joined not only with the living but with the dead.

I look forward to joining the Coastal Carolina Presbytery and Lillington Presbyterian Church and being part of this church family. I also look forward to joining Lillington Presbyterian’s journey of seeking to follow Christ in this changing world.