

## **My Life Journey and Call to Ministry**

I am the third child in a family of five. I have three sisters and one brother. My Mother was a divorced woman with a third grade education. She supported us by working as a domestic engineer. My sisters and I would sometimes get into bed with her and we would read the bible to her. She would always call God the “Man up Stairs”.

My fondest memory and first exposure to God was as a preteen when I became a member of Faith Lutheran Church. The church was situated between two low-income minority housing projects in Norfolk VA. As young girls, my sister and I attended the after school program provided by the Church, which was not far from the school we attended. The Pastor was a very big man; the best way I can describe him is “Herman Munster” like right down to his crew cut hair style. He served as the pastor, youth leader, and choir director all rolled up into one. He presided over my confirmation and later baptized my oldest daughter.

My mother would always send us to church, but seldom came herself. As I reflect, it may have been because of her lack of education. I think it bothered her when it came time to read the bible and sing songs written in the song books. As time passed I strayed from church.

My life seemed to be rushing by. I met my husband at age fifteen and we were parents at seventeen. We were married at nineteen and he soon went off to serve as a Marine in the Vietnam War. After his tour of duty, he returned home and we had our second child. Not able to find good jobs, we moved to Massachusetts hoping for a better life and a fresh start. For a few years my husband and I worked at several different jobs then along came our third child. We were setting ourselves up for tragedy.

A few years later, after being a part of the fast lane of life, we found ourselves totally involved in a worldly lifestyle. I had no time for church, just children, work, and partying. After much struggling and many sleepless nights, I remembered what my mom did. I knew God and I wanted my children to know him and even if I didn't want to go to church, I sent my children. I wanted them to have the same experience at church as I had. I would get up early on Sunday morning to make sure that they were ready for church and off they would go, walking to church as I once did.

My life style was starting to tire me out. I started thinking that there must be a better way. I worked and took care of my kids but that didn't seem to be enough; there was a blank space in my life. After a while I started walking to church with my children. I remember the first Sunday I walked with them, I got a huge blister on the back of my foot from the heels I wore. I found my children were well received at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church in Brockton, MA. My children were happy going to church and I was happy going with them. After attending Mt. Moriah for a few months, on a beautiful summer Sunday morning with the sun beaming through the windows; I remember it like it was yesterday. I found myself walking down the aisles of the church giving my life to Christ.

I was tired of doing it my way. There was something missing in all I did to become a better mother, wife, and person - nothing was working. Rev. Neville, our Pastor, preached about the forgiveness and the love of God. I knew at that moment God was calling me to be his child. I was tired, and I wanted God to take control of my life, and that is what He did. The Mothers of the church always said "Once you meet God you will never be the same," I am not the same; I am new in Christ. It never gets old. I am made new every day in my relationship with the one

true God. When I think about all I have learned and how knowing God as my father, my Lord and Savior, and my friend; I know it has changed my life from a person with low self-esteem to a person with an understanding that with God all things are possible. Under the leadership of Pastor Neville, the Ministers, Deacons, and the sisters at Mt. Moriah, God started to do a work in me that I didn't know was possible. I was excited about being a child of God. In Rev. Johnson's Sunday school class the first scripture I memorized was Proverbs. 3:5-6; "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*" I wanted to know the path God has ordained for me to travel.

My service in ministry began with serving on the usher board; I loved welcoming all who came in on Sunday morning. I also sang in the choir. I was not and am not a great singer but I love making a joyful noise unto the Lord, for all he has done for me.

The Lord continued to open my heart in the knowledge of who he is and who I am in him. One Sunday Sister Aundrea Kelly approached me and said "Hazel would you like to teach Sunday school with me?" I don't remember the exact words I said but, I do know it was not an enthusiastic yes, but none the less I began to teach. Sister Kelley has these key words, (taken from the Letter to the Philippians) Philippians 4:13 *I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*)

I have heard her say, many times to the saints who didn't think they could do something in ministry; in her soft voice with a smile she would always say, "You can do it". This woman of God touched my life by her inspiring words from the Lord. Sister Kelly and I taught new members classes and Sunday school.

Inspired with what God was doing in the women of Mt. Moriah, a woman's study and fellowship group "Koinonia Time" was established. I loved watching the growth in those with a desire to know more about the God they served. God allowed me to be the spiritual leader of the Women's Ministry for eight years. God truly blessed me to share and grow in his grace through these women.

The more I studied the word the more I desired to understand the will of God for me in a deeper way. Consequently, I enrolled in Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary starting a new season in my spiritual journey. In this new season I had no idea God was opening other doors of ministry for me to walk through. After two semesters at Gordon- Conwell with the blessing of Pastor Neville, I joined a new church body, a church plant, Restoration Community Baptist Church (RCBC) where Dr. Ronnie Griffin is the Pastor. Pastor Ron encouraged me to continue in my studies, and my husband of 42 years, Hilton, was and is my biggest support. There were many nights that I was tired of studying. He knew the signs, and he would come to me and say isn't there a book you need to read, or a paper to finish.

At RCBC my spiritual walk with the Lord has grown in many ways. I still teach bible study, but in addition to that, I preach the word of God on Sundays, lead Prayer Service and minister as Assistant Pastor. I received my Masters of Divinity from Gordon - Conwell Theological School in 2010. I thank God for my children Sylvia, Nia, and Hilton III who have been such a great support to me. I thank God for my sister Louise and my niece Michelle what a blessing they have been to me.

God is allowing me by his grace to, teach, uplift and encourage a congregation of men and women who are hungry for the word of God.

## God

God as revealed to us in the Scriptures that he is the only living God. *But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles, the nations cannot endure his wrath,* Jer. 10:10.

God is Holy, separate from sin, and incorruptible. God is just, fair, right, and true in all his judgments. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all present. God is preexistent, eternal, and everlasting. God is love.

God is Triune - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; a single infinite being (*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.* Deut. 6:4), who is living, invisible and sovereign.

God is called "Father" in a more literal sense, besides being the creator and nurturer of creation, and the provider for his children. God, the Father has an eternal relation to his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, which implies an exclusive and intimate familiarity: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).

## Jesus

Jesus the Christ is the second person of the Trinity co-equal and co-eternal. He has all the same attributes as the Father and the Holy Spirit. The apostle John communicates the deity of Jesus Christ in John 1:1- "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" Jesus has a divine nature but took upon Himself a human nature. Both complete in every way; looking at the human nature of Jesus, John 1:14 "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*"

I believe that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the World. He is the only mediator between God and humankind. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the only person who could pay the price for sins of the entire world. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross demonstrates in the fullest sense the love, grace and mercy God has for all humanity. His death was sufficient to pay the price for reconciling the world back to God for all who believe.

Jesus being God saved me, and restored me to Himself. He has given me more than I could have ever asked. I have received all good gifts and everlasting life from my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I know that I am special to Him, not because I am a good person, but because he loves me - plain old Hazel. There have been times, when I didn't think I could make it, then I remembered what Jesus said "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*" Matthew 11:28.

## **Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity; *therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19.* I believe the Holy Spirit is God, co-equal to the Father and to the Son. The bible teaches that the Holy Spirit's power activated both the incarnation and the resurrection. The ministry of the Holy Spirit, through the proclamation and study of the Scriptures, regenerates our faith. The Holy Spirit dwells within us convicting us of sin (John 14:17). In our prayer life, The Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

The Holy Spirit is essential to the life and to the influence of the Church in the world today. The ministry of the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom10:17). The Holy Spirit seals our salvation and reminds us of who we are in Christ and what Christ did for us on the cross so that we would have eternal life. John writes that Jesus taught of the Helper, the Holy Spirit, "*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you*" (John 14:26).

## **Humanity**

I believe that all people are uniquely created in the image of God, and for God's glory. I believe our existence began when God created and breathed His breath of life into Adam and Eve and called his creation good (Gen1:31). I believe God created humanity with both value and purpose.

However, when Adam and Eve were exercising their own freedom of choice (free will) under the influence of Satan, they chose to disobey God. Thus sin entered the world causing a chasm between God and humanity.

Apart from God all of humanity would be lost, without hope for reconciliation. However, God desires that all would be saved. This salvation is freely given to all believers through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Through faith in Jesus Christ we become co-heirs with Him (Rom8:17).

### **Salvation**

John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Salvation is made possible by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Salvation is the deliverance from sin. When we call on the name of Jesus and seek forgiveness our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God is restored. Henceforth, we become new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). This salvation is a free gift from God. Through salvation we are saved from eternal separation from God.

### **Scripture**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* I believe the scripture is the divine word of God. God speaks to us through His

word. Through the scriptures we are encouraged, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. The scripture reminds us we are free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). The scripture is our guide for spiritual growth, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Col 3:16)”.

I believe the word of God is the road map or GPS for my life. When I was lost on the dark road of life the Word lit up the road of life, and provided me with precise directions. When somehow I took the wrong turn, it would recalculate my steps. When I felt alone, the scriptures reminded me that “God will never leave me nor forsake me”(Deut 31:6).

### **The Church**

I believe the church to be one Holy, Christian, Covenant people. A people composed of all ages, tongues, and races. Which, through the Holy Spirit, are united together in the family of God as His body with Jesus Christ as the only head. The Bible describes the church as the bride of Jesus Christ, saved and sanctified by Him for union with Himself (Eph 5:25).

The church is not called to stay in the confines of a physical building, but to carry the good news into the entire world. The church people should encourage one another, love one another, and pray for one another. They should feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and care for the less fortunate. We must go out into the community and preach the God News of salvation through Jesus Christ - in word and through deed.

## **The Ordinances**

As Baptists we have only two ordinances – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. I believe these to be commands from the Lord.

### **Baptism**

“Baptism” *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matt. 28:19).*

I believe Baptism is dying to the old life and rising with Christ, through the Holy Spirit to a new life of commitment and service to God. This ordinance demonstrates to others that one has identified their life with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I believe Baptism is a Christian ordinance, symbolizing once and for all the washing away of sin, administered by complete immersion in the water. Baptism is for believers who express a faith in Jesus Christ. Based on the church and parents, for infants or small children dedication is an appropriate model to follow.

(Ref. John 3:6, 8; Rom 6:3, 4; 1Cor 6:11; 10:1-2; 1Peter 3:19-20)

### **The second ordinance: the Lords Supper**

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the<sup>l</sup> covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Matthew 26:26-28*

I believe the Lord's Supper is an ordinance instituted by Christ. It is a requirement that the Lord introduced at the last supper "Do this, remembrance of me." Jesus was naming himself the true Passover lamb whose death would deliver God's people from the bondage of sin and is an intrinsic element of the Christian walk.

The Lord's Supper is "the communion in the blood and the body of Christ." It is communion effected through the medium of the cup and bread. It is eating and drinking, in the deliverance and joy Christ has obtained for his people. The ordinance is the thankful remembrance of Christ's atoning sacrifice, having become, through their reception and the blessing given by the Holy Spirit, the partaking and anticipation of full future salvation.

(Ref. Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23; 1Cor 11:23-32)

## **American Baptist Churches USA**

In the Baptist faith tradition, individualism in religious matters manifests itself at the very beginning of the Christian life. Baptists insist that saving faith is personal, not impersonal. It is relational, not ritualistic. The knowledge of God is direct, dynamic, and personal; fellowship with God comes by way of individual relationship and not only through creed and ceremony.<sup>1</sup>

Soul Freedom is the historic Baptist affirmation of the inalienable right and responsibility of every person to deal with God without the imposition of creed, the interference of clergy, or the intervention of civil government.

I believe the mission of the American Baptists is to fulfill the Great Commission, make disciples (Matthew 28:19), engage in educational, social, and health ministries, while seeking justice for all persons and providing prayer and financial support to sustain the worldwide mission outreach.

As an American Baptist Minister I agree with and will uphold the American Baptist Council's Code of Ethics.