



Welcome to MomenToUs! I am Pastor Rebecca Grate, the Pastor Mission Developer for MomenToUs and the host for our weekly podcast.

At MomenToUs, we believe that God is present with us in each and every single one of our moments.

We believe that our stories are connected to God's story and to one another's stories.

We believe that this connection and relationship changes our lives and our entire world.

Before we begin, I invite you to take a deep breath in, hold it while you count to three, and then slowly release that breath.

In Episode 2, we learned a bit about how I wrestled with my understanding of being called anywhere, including church camp.

And, in Episode 4, we learned a bit more about the story of how MomenToUs came to be.

But, this week it occurred to me that I haven't shared the portion of my story that happened before that first summer at church camp and fills in some of the time in between those two stories.

For me, the call to ministry was a long process, beginning when I was in preschool and it continues to evolve even as MomenToUs grows.

So, to tell this story, we need to back up a few years, back to when all of my grandparents were still living, back before the household I grew up in attended worship regularly, back before I knew much about church beyond it being that building across the street from my grandparents, where we would go once a week and all of the grandmas of the church would dote on me and my friend Amy as they sewed and tacked quilts together while we played underneath the tables.

From spending those days with the quilting ladies, I had gotten to know who the pastor of the congregation was. He regularly made time to stop by the quilting group to check on them, get their health updates or the updates of the ones not there, and made a point to talk with me and Amy when we could be bothered to stop playing.

This portion of the story gets a little fuzzy for me; I don't remember most of this as a true memory, more as a collection of the memories the grown ups had remembered for me and retold, over and over again. At some point, my grandpa's health became the topic at the quilting group; he had gotten very sick very quickly.

This was in the 1980s when hospital protocols were a little more lax about allowing preschoolers in the Intensive Care Units, so I remember visiting him in the hospital. I remember walking from the hospital to one of my grandma's friends' houses so she could take care of me while the older members of the family stayed at the hospital in shifts. Eventually, my grandpa died.

Now, my grandparents literally lived across the street from the church. If it was a day that ended in "-y," there was surely a reason for one or both of them to be at

the church. My parents and I had not attended a worship service regularly; I don't think we even attended on Christmas Eve or Easter. But, after my grandpa died, we started attending with my grandma.

At that congregation, they celebrated communion during every worship service. I knew the pastor from being at the quilting groups with my grandma and her friends; he wasn't a stranger. And those first few weeks, I apparently threw enormous yelling & stubborn fits when it came time to go up for Communion. So, I stayed in the pew.

I wasn't a kid that was super prone to throwing tantrums, so I think one of my parents finally asked me what the fuss was for. And I apparently answered something along the lines of, "I don't want them to take me, too."

And it was soon after that that I remember sitting in the pastor's office explaining that I saw angels in the church, surrounding the altar and they had been in the hospital with my grandpa and I wasn't ready to die like he had died. I wish I could remember the conversation with any of the grown ups and with the pastor, but I don't. I do know that after that conversation, I was content to be at church, and to go up for Communion, and a few weeks later told the pastor I wanted to be a pastor when I grew up so I could help other people not be scared of God, too.

Now, let's flash forward several years to when I'm in college. Throughout my undergraduate days, I was incredibly active in the Lutheran Campus Ministry at West Virginia University. During my senior year, it was time to begin applying to graduate programs. I had the grades, the teaching experience, the extracurriculars, the letters of recommendation, the research experience, and my undergraduate thesis was

selected to be published in a journal. To quote The Simpsons, everything was coming up Millhouse.

Except there were no acceptance letters.

A year or so prior, the chaplain at the time asked me if I had ever considered that God might be calling me to seminary. And I promptly laughed in his face in front of everyone gathered after worship. He was persistent in explaining the options within our denomination at the time and I would not be moved. No thank you, seminary and the ministry were for the actual church nerds. I just liked being there, thank you very much.

There is an entire book of the Bible that is devoted to a prophet named Jonah. A few weeks ago, I mentioned that Habakkuk is my favorite book in the Bible (and I promise we are coming back to that book). Jonah is a very close second, because of how it parallels my particular call story to being called to be a pastor. And, I am also confident that every single one of us has embodied Jonah at some point in our lives. This is a book that tells us: If God's grace is wide enough for everyone we meet in this really short book in the Bible, then God's grace is wide enough for my cranky & resistant to God's call self, too.

Instead of reading this book to you, I'm going to paraphrase it. It's only 4 chapters long, so if you're looking for a book of the Bible to read that's fairly easy to understand and follow along in the plot, this is one of the good ones to start with.

Jonah is different from the other Old Testament prophets. Most of the other prophets were in disbelief that God would have chosen them, but they went, because they knew God had called them and so they followed. But, this isn't what Jonah did.

Jonah flat out ran away, not just to the next town. Jonah went down to Joppa (a city that was a few days' journey away) and then got in a boat and made it all the way to Tarshish, which is near where the Rock of Gibraltar is today. Jonah almost made it to the Atlantic Ocean before a storm came up, a storm so terrible that the only possible response was to throw Jonah overboard. And, along came a big fish, that swallowed Jonah to take him on the three-day journey that would spit him out on the beach.

And God AGAIN told Jonah, "Go to Nineveh." Covered in whale vomit, Jonah begins the long walk back to Nineveh, the place he didn't ever want to go, to deliver a message from God that he didn't want to share with the Ninevites. So when Jonah finally arrives, he decides he is going to fulfill the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law. That means he is going to proclaim the exact message that God called him to deliver, but he is not going to put any excitement or urgency into what he proclaims. If you've ever had to make siblings apologize to one another, you've seen this complete un-interest in saying words someone else has given you. This is the point of the story we read today. But, there's more to it, if we're going to see ourselves in the Jonah story at all.

Despite Jonah's frustration and apathy, God is at work. The Ninevites repent and turn from all of their evil ways. The entire city proclaimed a fast, to turn back from the evil they had done and were doing. EVEN THE COWS work sackcloth, so great was the Ninevites' repentance. When God saw this, all of the destruction that was to come to Nineveh was called off and Jonah is furious.

He yells at God, "THIS IS WHY I FLED TO TARSHISH IN THE FIRST PLACE. WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DESTROY THEM?! THIS IS NINEVEH FOR

CRYING OUT LOUD! NIN-E-VEH. THIS is the very reason I didn't want to come here – because I KNEW you would be gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love. I KNEW you didn't really want to punish them.”

And behind all of this is Jonah's anger and hurt and pain and grief at what the Ninevites had done to his people. These are the same people who came in and conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And, after this, they then heavily taxed and dominated the Southern Kingdom of Israel. They wrought havoc all over the present-day Middle East and boasted of how violent they were in their conquests. These people were not an ordinary military power; they were the vilest, cruelest, most inhumane army of the world. So, it's no wonder that Jonah didn't want there to be any chance of grace and mercy for them.

And so, Jonah -- who is furious enough and angry enough that he agrees it would be better for him to die than to live in a world where the Ninevites will be spared – storms out of the city to wait. And God cares for him by providing a shrub to shade him from the heat ... but then also curiously takes the shrub away in the morning. And Jonah is furious AGAIN because now it's too hot. So of course, it's better for him to die than to live.

I wasn't quite so dramatic, but my call to ministry, in general, was my Nineveh. I wanted no part of this call. I tried furiously to work my way into graduate programs. But it didn't happen.

So, I reluctantly applied to seminary, was granted admission almost instantly. I had bargained with myself that I would go, but I wouldn't ever preach. I would do the

bare minimum, become consecrated as a Deaconess, and then go to graduate school for psychology and serve the larger church as a psychologist.

This is when I tell you, that I learned in my first weekend of classes that preaching was a required class for those becoming pastors and those becoming deaconesses. So, then I bargained with myself that I would take the stupid class and do enough to pass and then I would be done with it. And within that class is when I finally got out of God's way to more faithfully discern what God was doing. I figuratively sat myself down by the tree, just like Jonah, and said, "Okay God. I'm listening."

My call story is important because it's my call story. I know it's not so unusual that it's the only way calls can happen. Every single person has a call story, including those who aren't pastors, bishops, deacons, or elders.

And, I'll let you in on a secret: while I was living this portion of my call story, it was really difficult to discern whether or not God was calling me to something, if my friend was calling me to something, or if I was just doing something I sort of wanted to and saying that it was God. I was only confident God was present and at work as I looked back on it. Sometimes, the clarity comes through hindsight and reflection. And that is okay.

I wonder if there are times where you've felt something particular in your mind or in your heart or in your gut tugging you to do something or to not do something. Looking back on it, could that have been God?

I'm going to now invite you to take another few deep breaths to center yourself in prayer.

A Prayer for Discerning Hindsight

God who is always near,

If you can send a big fish to scoop Jonah up and spit him up on a beach, it's possible you may be calling for me to do something, too.

And that makes me want to run.

I think I need another reminder: your voice through a friend's voice, a storm, a big fish, to scoop me up and set me on course again.

I'm scared, but I know you are right beside me.

Amen.

Thank you for joining us for our weekly MomenToUs. We are looking forward to growing with each of you and are so grateful you are a part of the MomenToUs community.

Thank you to our Mission Partners, the [Southern Ohio Synod](#) and the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#). Their financial contributions and prayer have been instrumental in bringing this new ministry into existence.

This week, I want to make sure to thank the people at [Faith Lutheran Church in Whitehall](#), one of the neighborhoods in Columbus. They have called me to preach and lead worship with them and also lead their Adult Sunday School class. They aren't currently livestreaming their worship services, but they are on social media, so you can check them out later today! Inviting me to supply preach or lead an education event or retreat or simply be present with you all for worship and to answer questions are additional ways that congregations and ministries can partner with MomenToUs.

And, I want to thank everyone who helped us with planning our Fall podcast series by answering the question on our Facebook & Instagram stories: What confuses you about God, the Bible, the Church, or Christianity? The theme will get announced later this summer, but there are clear themes in the responses of things that are weighing on our hearts and minds.

The big announcement for this week is: [MomenToUs is on TikTok!](#) We'll be posting regularly there and you can find us using the handle: [@dailymomentous](#).

However you are engaging with or discerning partnering with MomenToUs, we hope that it means you are growing in your faith and noticing God's presence with you. You can always share moments when you noticed God's presence by sending us an email at dailymomentous@gmail.com, sending us a direct message on our social media accounts, or sending us a voicemail. There are some tips and tricks for how to submit a voicemail located on [our website](#), as well.

Every time you interact with us online through social media, or sharing a podcast episode, or leaving us a review on a podcasting platform, it helps the algorithms know that this is resonating with you and noticing God's presence is something worth sharing online. Each interaction helps our community reach even more people, through your profiles and for how each platform engages with your friends and followers. As of recording this podcast, our online community has more than 430 people connected and following.

If you aren't connected to us online, find us on your preferred platform. Our handle is @dailymomentous on each platform. If you're already connected with us on social media, we'd love it if you invited your friends to join our community, too!

If you want to support the ministry of MomenToUs, know that engaging with us online is one way to do so. If you are able to give financially, you can visit our website and use the donate link. Each one-time or recurring gift combines together to ensure the MomenToUs Community continues to grow.

We give thanks for every single one of you, for being a part of the MomenToUs community, for listening to God's call to try something new, and for beginning to notice God's presence even more frequently in your life, in our communities, and in our world.

Until our next podcast, remember to breathe deeply and to remember that God is present with you every single moment.

Music:

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