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Session One
Inside Out: Expectations

Opening Prayer

Bless to us, O God, this water—
from the waters of the womb
to journeys taken through stormy seas,
it is a reminder of your grace and promise.
Help us to walk with you.

Bless to us, O Christ, this group—
ready to explore and encounter
new callings and old.
Help us to walk with you.

Bless to us, Holy Spirit, this time—
ripe with potential
and full of your presence.
Help us to walk with you
as you walk with us. Amen.

The Questions

My Name Is . . .

- What do you know about how you got your name?

- What meaning does it hold for your family? For you?

Return to Oz

Sometimes it takes a wizard to tell us who we are. When I was growing up, *The Wizard of Oz* used to come on TV every year around Easter, which is very appropriate since I believe this is one of the most theologically-profound movies ever made. It has certainly helped me to see the good news. Its two big theological themes have to do with getting home and finding out who we are, both of which invite reflection on the vocational journey. Dorothy and her companions in Oz are all desperately seeking something they either have or have the ability to attain.

At the beginning of the movie, a tornado approaches; and Dorothy, the main character in the story, is trying desperately to get home. With the storm coming, everything Dorothy thought she knew is turned upside down. Dorothy has found her house, but the people who make it a home are not there. She's anxious about her life, her family, and the future. The tornado hits!

Dorothy's situation is similar to ours at times in our life. We have a home, we travel far from it, we lose our way, we forget who we were made and called to be, and when we try to get back on our own power we inevitably fail. In the end, we are carried off by forces much larger than we are, and it seems as if we'll never find home again.

Dorothy's house is thrown up into the air. She passes out. The house lands with a thud. She wakes up and goes cautiously to the door. She opens it up, and suddenly a flood of light enters the room. She has gone to the other side of the rainbow and it is a world of bright color and fascinating creatures. It turns out that her house has landed right on top of the wicked witch of the East, who has been cruelly oppressing the Munchkin people. Dorothy, as their liberator, is given a mysterious gift—the ruby slippers of the dead witch. She is toasted and sung to by all the Munchkins. But Dorothy knows that she needs to find some way to get home. What she doesn't know is that all she has to do is click the ruby slippers three times and say, "There's no place like home. There's no place

like home. There's no place like home." But she hasn't been told this. She can't accept it at this moment. She has to take a journey.

So, she sets off down the yellow brick road in search of a wizard who can get her back home. Along the way she finds some companions, all of whom are as misguided as she is. First, there is the scarecrow that thinks he doesn't have a brain, even though in the first minutes she knows him he figures out how to get some nasty trees to throw them some apples and later hatches the plans that save the day. Then there is the tin man who thinks he doesn't have a heart, even though he is the most sentimental one in the bunch. And finally, there is the lion that thinks he has no courage, even though he is finally able to confront the witch of the West and the wizard.

Do you see the common theme here? Nobody knows who they are; and they all set off to see a wizard, who really isn't a wizard, to receive a reward that they already have. And along the way they have to overcome the witch of the West and her band of flying monkeys who threaten them with death and destruction. But the real obstacle in their journey is their inability to see who they really are.

In the closing scenes, it all becomes clear. The wizard plays an important role in helping these characters claim their gifts and abilities. Though he is captive to the expectations of the Emerald City's residents who have acclaimed him as a wizard, he is able to affirm the true strengths of those who have come to him. He recognizes the gifts the companions bring and gives them symbolic gifts: The scarecrow gets a diploma. The tin man gets a ticking red heart on a chain. The lion gets a medal. The wizard doesn't really give them anything that they don't already have. He gives them what they sought by helping them to see who they truly are. A little later Glenda, the good witch of the North, helps Dorothy realize that even she has the capacity she didn't think she had. She has the ability to go home by clicking her shoes.

I've had a few wizards grace my life through the years. I suspect you've had a few, too. They are the people in your life who help you see who you are and what you already have. They look very ordinary

and they don't have any magical powers. But they speak to the place where God moves in our lives and helps us hear all over again just who we are. When we discover who we really are, we also discover that we are at home.

- If the companions already had the things that they sought from the wizard, what was the purpose of their journey?
- How do you understand the theme of going home? What does it mean to you?
- Symbolically speaking, what are the storms or tornadoes that unsettle your life?
- Who are the wizards in your life? Who has affirmed gifts that you already have so that you could claim them?
- If you were going to the wizard, what would you ask for?

The Scriptures

Samuel: God's Voice and a Mother's Prayer

Read 1 Samuel 1:9-18; 3:1-21.

Hannah was a woman who committed herself and her child to God before her child was even born. In a male-dominated society which placed a premium on the security a son could offer, Hannah prayed for a son, not for her own security, but so she could offer him to God. Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2 is a hymn of celebration offered at the time when she gives Samuel, her son of promise, to be raised at the Shiloh temple by Eli. In it, she declares what God will do in the land.

Even though Hannah could see what God was up to, the text tells us that many others couldn't. "The word of the LORD was rare in those days," and even the priest Eli was unable to hear (3:1b). Samuel didn't recognize God's voice either in the early stages of this story, but eventually he heard a message that must have been very difficult for him to share with his surrogate father, Eli (3:10-14). Samuel's leadership as a prophet was marked by struggle and conflict; but despite the difficulties, he responded to the call of the God to whom his mother prayed and who called his name.

Samson: A Passionate Response, but to Whom?

Read Judges 13:1-7, 24; 14:1-20.

This may be a disturbing story for us. It comes out of a context that is very foreign to us. In ancient Israel, marriages between races were rare and women had very little autonomy. But we can recognize Samson. There are still Samsons among us who act out of their passions and who often react violently to conflicts.

Samson was dedicated to God before his birth. The Nazirite vows which the angel announced to his mother were signs that the child

was to be set apart for a different kind of service to God. One of the expectations that came along with Samson's birth was that he was to lead the people out of oppression.

But Samson did not seem interested in the expectations of his parents. He took what he desired and displayed behavior that led to death and division. The passage talks about God's Spirit, but what Samson did seems far from what we expect.

Questions for Exploration

- To what is the child in each of these Scriptures committed before his birth?
- How does the child in each story respond to the expectations placed on him?
- Is there a conflict between the promise of the parent(s) and the will of the child? How do you see that at work in this story?

Your Reflections on the Scriptures

How do 1 Samuel 1:9-18; 3:1-21 and Judges 13:1-7, 24; 14:1-20 speak to your sense of vocation?

Your Life

“For you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

—Saint Augustine

Augustine (354–430) was a bishop in northern Africa in the early Christian church. Looking back at his life in *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Augustine recognizes something very curious. Despite his many wanderings and failings, he was able to see a constant tugging within himself that kept moving him toward God. That tugging came in the midst of all sorts of relationships with people who asked different things of him. Augustine believed that our restless hearts are on a never-ending journey that is an expedition to seek God and our own true selves.

We are created to be related to God and others.

- What difference does the knowledge that we are created to be related make in how we live out our lives and seek meaning?

Core Values and Your Life

What do the Core Values (page 8) say to you about the tensions between your inner sense of values and calling and the expectations others have for you?

Looking Ahead

- When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

- What does that early vision of vocation reveal about who you are?

- What values did you receive from family and others that inform who you are?

Closing Worship

Spirit of life,
who blesses us with water and moves our restless hearts,
you have created us to be related
to you and to the world.
As we begin this journey together,
bless to us our lives
so that we can see patterns of purpose
and respond to your relentless tuggings
filled with grace and love.
Amen.