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"Imposter Syndrome"
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Have you ever heard of impostor syndrome?

It's that that feeling or even a pattern when some people doubt their success or their abilities and feel like a fraud, even though there's proof that they are capable.

For me, it shows up and says, "I'm not good enough. I'm not right enough. I'm not smart enough to be a pastor."

And honestly, this is not something I ever envisioned that I would be doing. All I wanted to do was get a little bit more education in youth ministry, maybe get a certificate, and then keep hanging out with kids and talking about life and God.

I didn't want a master's degree. I didn't want to learn two more languages. I didn't want to stand up here—really far away from you, by the way. Instead, I would really rather just be sitting next to you so that we could chat. I didn't want to be up here every week preaching, talking at you, but talking with you instead.

These things aren't things that I would have considered to be my strengths. And yet, oh my goodness, next summer I will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of my ordination.

Even though I have been doing this for over 19 years, I still get impostor syndrome. What authority do I have? Who am I that anyone should listen to me? I am not the perfect model of what it means to be a Christian.

But I have known those pastor people. I have known those very upright pastor people, perfect pastor people, pedestal pastor people—the pastors who say, "Look to me as the example. See how it is done."

And honestly, I don't measure up. To this day, and even already today, I have already stumbled over words, inverted words, and I ramble. And when I even look at my classmates from seminary, I fall short. I fall into that phrase from Philippians: "Regard others as better than yourself."

Because who am I that I should be called pastor next to them?

So many of them can quote chapter and verse to counter any theological debate. So many others can sing so beautifully that it makes your heart melt. So many others have minds like flypaper that when they hear something, some history of Lutheran tradition, it is forever in here.

And me? I might not read my Bible every day. I have tried to chant, and it's not good. I have to look up what the Diet of Worms was. (And by the way, the Diet of Worms was the formal trial of the Holy Roman Empire in Worms, Germany, where Martin Luther was forced to recant his writings, and instead he said, "I will not, I cannot," but rather, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me." And yes, I had to look that up.)

So who am I to stand up here?

Maybe that's why I am standing up here.

I have known and have encountered these pedestal pastors many times in real life. I even grew up with one. He was held in such high esteem. He could do no wrong. Folks loved his sermons, loved

how he grew the church, loved how comfortable they felt because of him. As a youth, I was in awe of him and I feared him. There was a cloud around him. He was so perfect, so above me.

And then I got to know him a little bit. During our second year of confirmation, he took over the class from our youth pastor who left to take another call, and I was terrified. There was no longer a barrier between us. I couldn't hide in anonymity anymore. He was going to get to know me in our confirmation classes, and I feared that he would see what a horrible Christian I was and that I would be looked down upon, that he would judge me from atop his pedestal.

But he wasn't that bad in real life—not during the classes, at least not that I remember. Because shortly after the beginning of our second year of confirmation, he left, too. He was forced to resign.

And that is when everything fell apart for me.

This was a man of God. This was a man that was God's mouthpiece to us mere mortals. This man had God's ear. This man was anointed by God to lead and to form and to cultivate the faith of others—my faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. If this perfect pastor can't be a faithful Christian, how could I ever be—me who is rough around the edges, me who is very much a normal person? If he couldn't do it, what chance do I have?

And so I ran. I ran away from God, I ran away from the church. I was so over the whole God thing, the whole hypocritical church thing. I was over it. Not only did this pedestal pastor fall from his pedestal, he took out quite a bit of people's faith on the way down, including young me's faith. And that's when I traded my Sundays at church for Sundays at St. Mattress. In other words, I slept in and was at St. Mattress.

And one of the main reasons that I am standing up here today is because my mom was persistent and stubborn. It took years, an invitation from my mom, and an unexpected plane ride that brought me to a community of people who were just like me—normal, rough around the edges, who swear a bit, who have a drink or two, who watch really stupid reality TV, and who love God, and who try to be who God has called us to be.

And it was being in the midst of that community that I learned, where I was wholly accepted, that I learned and discovered that God calls each one of us. The things that we think that would keep us off of the pedestal are, in fact, the very things that can sometimes help others to see and experience God.

My insecurities, my quirks, my running away and finally listening and hearing my call—it has been because of these things that I have been able to sit and listen and chat with people, to be present with them as they walk their faith journey, as they struggle with the call to love the Lord your God and to love all of your neighbors as yourself.

It's because of this uniqueness that I am able to sit crisscross-applesauce on the ground with everyone else and assure them of how much God loves them and affirm that they, as uniquely and wonderfully quirky people that they are, are also called to love the Lord your God and to love their neighbors as themselves.

I also learned in this community that accepted me for who I fully am that my pedestal pastor and all faith leaders aren't perfect; they're human. They fall short, they make mistakes, they let things fall through the cracks, they get stressed out, they experience all of the human emotions, they can inadvertently hurt people, and they really aren't up on pedestals—at least most of them don't want to be. They, too, would rather be sitting crisscross-applesauce on the ground with the rest of us.

I had to learn that. And when I learned the truth about these "perfect" pedestal pastors, I was finally able to listen and hear that God had been calling me—me with all of my screw-ups, my quirks, my weird sense of humor, my random interests and loves. God has been calling me to walk

with others as they stop—as they stop listening to the world that tells them that they are not enough: not good enough, not smart enough, not rich enough, not fit enough, not enough—and then listen and hear that God is calling them right now, right where they are, right as they are. So, by what authority do I stand up here? It's definitely not by my own authority. When we follow God's call, God's will for our lives, when we live into the challenges that we face, no matter how hard or how intensely we try to run away from them, when we truly feel God's loving embrace at this table, when we truly feel and experience God's claim on us in that font, when we truly respond to God's full acceptance of us by going out there and stepping off of any Christian pedestal that is out there—which should not exist—and sit crisscross-applesauce on the ground with someone else, then we are doing God's will, and we do it with God's authority.

You, beloved siblings in Christ: You are worthy. You have Christ's authority. You are beloved. You have Christ's calling. And when we live into those callings—our individuality that God has given to us, that God is calling to us through—we say, "God, let your will be done through me. Let your will be done in and through me."

So [raspberry noise] on, you know, impostor syndrome.

You are exactly who God needs you to be. You are wonderful and capable enough, and you, just as you are, is who God needs out there to show that there isn't a Christian pedestal, that we sit crisscross-applesauce with others who need to hear that they are accepted for who they are, and welcome them as they fully are, as they are as they are loved as completely as they are by God and by us.

So, siblings, go. Go with God's blessing. Go with God's will. Go with God's authority and share God's love and acceptance with others. Amen.