



*This is a reflection given by first-year student Febri Kristiani of Indonesia in chapel on January 16, 2018. All of this year's chapels are based on texts that include the words "I am."*

A couple years ago, I started to make a New Year's wish list. I usually write down what my hopes and dreams are for the coming year. On December 31, 2016 I remember praying and writing down what I hoped for during 2017. I prayed that God would lead my way to seminary. I prayed for good health for my parents, and every other good thing.

By the grace of God, I became a seminary student here at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and have finished my first semester. It was hard, but it was good. I have learned so much, and gained new friends. The challenges and struggles have really been worth it.

However, there were also unexpected challenges, including my dad's death in December. This kind of news I did not expect to happen, especially when I am far away from my family. It hurts. It really hurts.

In Matthew 10:16, Jesus says, "I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves." Jesus warns his disciples that doing God's calling is not easy. It is quite difficult. In accepting this calling, we are not sure what is coming our way. It could be a new opportunity or it could be a new challenge or difficulty.

My experiences in coming to AMBS last year brought me a new understanding of the challenges that come from following God's calling. I have learned that what is new is sometimes uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and unexpected.

Barbara Brown Taylor says in her book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*: "New life starts in the dark whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb. It starts in the dark."

The darkness is not really the end. It is a start! Even God's salvation through Jesus started in the dark. It is the beginning of new life. We may walk in the valley of darkness—going through hard times, losing our loved ones, facing challenges and difficulties. It hurts and it is hard. Sometimes we feel like we cannot take it anymore.

What then should be new while we are struggling where God has called us? It's the hope that should be new. God—who sent his only Son to redeem us and set us free from our sin, who loves us so much, who adopted us as God's children—will never leave us alone in the valley of the unknown. God's love will carry us out of the darkness and give us new life. God's love is unfailing and his hands are strong enough for us to hold onto. That is enough to help us make it on the journey of living into God's call on our lives.

Following our calling is difficult but Jesus promises that we are not alone and the Spirit is always with us. The valley of the unknown can be an opportunity for us to encounter God's presence and unfailing love. This kind of encounter transforms us to have a deeper relationship with God and transforms us to be more Christ-like.

Let's give thanks to God, who has helped us make it through the good times and the hard times. Let us not be afraid. Let's keep praying and hoping for the blessings that God has prepared for us this coming year. Let's be prepared for challenges and hardship that will come our way as a cost of following Jesus. Whatever we may face in this coming year, let our hope in God be new and let our faith be stronger.