

Call to be I.

1/24/2021

Our collect today begins "Give us grace oh Lord to answer readily the call...."

Our readings this week continue with the theme of call. Our old testament reading is from the book of Jonah. Who doesn't remember Jonah and the big fish? It's only four chapters, so short. It is God calling to Jonah followed by Jonah choosing to run away and try to hide from God. Note to self, hiding from God does not work well, ever.

We see stories throughout the bible of call and response.

God called Moses, who at first balked and begged off, asking, "Who am I?"

God called Samuel, we learned last week, and his response was, "Here I am!" but he was confused about WHO was calling.

God called Esther and she used her privilege as Queen of Persia to save the Jewish people.

God called Daniel and his faith saved him from the lion's den.

So many calls, such variety of response.

So back to Jonah 's call. In the end, after the fleeing and being swallowed by a giant fish, God calls again and Jonah complies, even though he dislikes the Ninevites. He goes and gives a grumpy short speech, and they embrace the message and repent! Success! God forgives, but Jonah is found pouting and angry they got a second chance. He got a second chance. Our God is a God of second chances. ...and third...and fourth, if we are lucky!

In today's gospel we hear something different. Jesus calls to Simon and Andrew, James and John. He asks them to follow him and become fishers of humans! And they left their nets and the family business to walk into an uncertain future.

What motivates them to go and leave all they have known?

Courage? Faith? Insanity?

I wonder....

What did they see in Jesus that made it easy to say yes? Was it his humanity? Was there a light they could find in Him?

I wonder....

What did Jesus see in these four men? Hardworkers? Loyalty? Was there a light in them that Jesus could see?

I dare to believe there was light on both sides. A light that led them forward and helped them to answer the call. Light.

We see stories through the bible of light.

In the very beginning God calls into being the night and the day. God called and there was light!

When Jesus is born there is the light of a guiding star to announce the arrival of the child king.

Jesus teaches us not to hide our light under a bushel but to set it high to guide others.

In the final book we see Jesus is light. God is light. We are Called to be Light.

I heard God call Me at 17. It took me until 45 to hear the call again, this time three times in a year! I said, "Ok! Ok! I'm in!" And here I am answering my call.

Between 17 and now, I have had many chances to hear call and answer outside of ordination. I was called to be a Sunday school teacher and director, youth minister, special ed teacher and advocate, a friend, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a voice for the voiceless. I was called to feed and clothe and SEE the marginalized and stand with -- and for -- them. I was called to a life of service even before 17.

It can be hard to know about Call sometimes. The bible is full of stories about just that and the way humans fumble through answering. But God never gives up on

us and loves us in our imperfections all the same, calling us to service to each other, in the name of God. Jesus set the example of a servant heart. Jesus showed us How to Do, how to respond to our call. How to serve God and each other.

When and where have you heard a call? I think there are times like Samuel we are confused about whose voice we hear. Sometimes like Esther we need to recognize our strengths and advantages with courage to step into our power.

I am going to share the story of someone who answered God's call and blessed my life.

In 2012 my husband received his second primary cancer diagnosis, five years out from the first. He found a lump in April, had surgery in June, and was to begin chemo and radiation in August. In July, as I was returning home from Relay for Life, a gentle man ran a stop sign in our neighborhood totaling my little car. I sat there saying "Really God?!? Now? We are doing this NOW? Well yes, we were.

As we were looking to replace it, we got a call from someone helping us from our church family. They had a car for us to see but before we could get to it someone else beat us to it. My husband was disappointed. He said, "Oh that must have been a good one." I told my husband God had a better plan. A few days later we got a call from another church family member, Joan. Joan had a car to give us no \$\$\$ as she was repaying someone helping her family in their time of need. I was amazed.

I called her to thank her and make arrangements to get it. This is what Joan said to me when I called, "Donna, God told me I needed to give you a car. I prayed, then I went to my husband [who did not know me!] and said 'we need to give Donna your car or \$500!' He asked, 'Who is Donna and why does she need this?'" She told him and he said, "She needs the car more than the money!" Wow! Wow! What faith is that? To hear the call and to respond immediately without skipping a beat! Amazing. But it gets better. The car was a 8 year old Honda Accord four-door with 42,000 miles on it! It still smelled new! What an amazing gift! What an answer to call! The lightness on our souls to have that burden lifted. Now I will say Joan made sure her husband got a new car. Win-win!

Joan heard and responded with grace and courage. She blessed me in a dark time, bringing light that I might find my way. That we might not lose hope. The car was a gift. The love faith and courage of Joan will always bless my life, every time I tell the story of call and response. The call is not always easy, but It is always a call to action to DO something.

In these two bible stories we see different calls and responses, but let's not forget the most important part...God's will was done in both.

So....

How is God calling you?

How do you hear God?

As the church we are called. Not the building, the church, you and I are the church, called into the light to BE the light. Take your gifts out into the world, letting your Light shine into the darkness. And here I ask you to be still and listen. What is the call that is yours? Go and Do it. Even when it is not your natural gift, I assure you, God will give you exactly the tools you need to do the thing asked.

Amanda Gorman, the young poet at Wednesday's inauguration, who did an amazing job reciting the poem she wrote The Hill We Climb, was asked what her mantra might be before she speaks publicly. If you did not know she has a speech impediment. Her mantra is one that reminded me of queen Esther. It is this:

"I close my eyes and I say: I am the daughter of Black writers, we are descended from freedom fighters, who broke their chains and changed the world. They. Call. Me." I am so glad she answered the call to serve and had the courage to stand and be heard...by the world.

How is God calling you? It is epiphany, a time of illuminating realization, a time of light that can allow you to see.

How is Jesus calling you?

How will you respond?

I hope you each choose to be light. I hope to answer the call to be the light.

May we all be light!