



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send? And I said, here am I. Send me." Amen.

Who here remembers their baptism? A couple of late bloomers were appreciative of that. For many of us, we were too young to remember being dressed in a white robe, perhaps passed down through generations, thrust into the arms of a person we didn't know who dumped water on our heads.

In case you don't recall that, I'll remember it for you. You probably cried in surprise. You possibly added your own gift to the font, as sometimes happens. You likely blocked the trauma from memory. It probably did not feel like the important moment that it was either for your family or for your community.

All right then. Perhaps a few more of you might remember your confirmation? All right, more head nods. But if you don't, we can blame that on your teenage years. Perhaps you were told that your grandparents were coming to town specifically for this, so you better go through with it. You might not remember kneeling in front of the bishop being called by name and confirming your commitment to Jesus.

Fortunately, whether you recall these moments or not, whether your path to initiation in the Episcopal church followed an entirely different course, you were never alone. Your family, friends, designated guardians were there with you. Your community of faith, the people around you were with you. And the communion of saints, the vast host of Heaven, they were cheering for you in that moment. They all were asked if they would support you in your path, and they answered, we will.

A few weeks ago, in early January, the church celebrated the baptism of Jesus, recalling that moment that the Son of God went into the River Jordan to be baptized by His cousin John. On that Sunday, and I understand you celebrated baptisms last week too, so it's fresh in your mind, you were given the opportunity through the liturgy to renew the baptismal covenant, the confession of our faith and the questions that form our Christian vocation to ministry. Each of those questions is answered with an affirmation, "I will with God's help." Each of these questions is called, and each of these answers is an answer of yes, this is your call.

The moment when you joined in the covenant was a milestone on the journey of your call. The thing about calls is that they come from an ancient tradition. As long

as people have felt a pull to examine mystery, a push to make things better for their community, an inspiration to create something beautiful or useful, folks have been experiencing the call. From the first story of creation when God called on chaos to find order, God has been inviting us, inviting you to find the call.

I first experienced the gentle tug of my call right here in this place. As an angsty teenager looking for something beyond the fundamentalist faith of my childhood, which grounded me deeply in scripture but left me longing for love and justice, I was brought to this church, to this altar rail by my grandparents. And when I had communion from the chalice that we will all share later, I felt it for the first time. It was a warm spot in my stomach, which was more than my first taste of communion wine. It radiated out, bringing a foretaste of something amazing, inspiring, frightening.

First my call was about exploring my faith, and then it led to acting on my faith. My call was about recognizing love, and then it was about finding compassion. My call was about finally understanding why people kept calling the gospel “good news.” And then it led to me wanting to share that good news with others. My call scared the heck out of me because I knew following it was going to lead me out of familiar places, disappoint people I loved, change my life.

Our first reading today is the story of Isaiah's call, and it's a classic call story. These stories in the Bible follow a formula which sets up the listener for what's coming. A miracle happens to indicate that this is not some random act. A call is issued and a response is given. You might remember some other well-known calls, Moses, for example, who receives his call through God's voice delivered through a burning bush. Moses argues for a while, but ultimately goes to confront Pharaoh.

You might remember Jonah. He does not like his commission to preach to people he thinks are irredeemable. He tries everything to escape his call. Ultimately, three days inside the belly of a whale help him to change his mind. This is to remind us that it's okay to wrestle with your call, to argue. Maybe you don't accept it the first time it's issued. That's okay because God will keep calling.

Jesus' call was issued while He stood in the river and submitted to being baptized by John, and God responded. By speaking through a dove, the call was confirmed. There are many others, prophets, judges, disciples, whose calls and responses are mentioned in scripture. They all follow this same pattern.

Here's another truth about calls. We have no idea where they're going to take us. The one thing I can guarantee is that our call will lead us into a place, into a moment, perhaps places and moments where we encounter the unfamiliar, the thing which goes counter to our culture, where we look around us and realize maybe we're alone. Maybe I've stepped out too far. Maybe I rode into deep water.

Isaiah has the benefit of immediately hearing what God has in store for him when he accepts his call, and I wonder if he is as enthusiastic to say, "Here I am, send me," after he hears God's plan for him. From the exuberance of acceptance, Isaiah is immediately told what he'll be doing and frankly, it does not sound like fun. He must go to his people and tell them that their cities will be laid waste, that even the tenth of the people and lands which remain and have been spared will be further burned and cold. That doesn't sound like good news.

And it's true. Within 20 years of the beginning of Isaiah's prophecy, the northern kingdom of Israel will fall to the Assyrians. And in another 60 years, Judah exposed, alone, surrounded by enemies will also fall all. If Isaiah had known what saying yes would bring, would he have said yes to his call? Well, we have to believe that Isaiah had more good days than bad ones. He also tells the people, "Comfort ye, my people," and, "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed," and, "For unto us, a child is born."

There's beauty in what Isaiah sees for his people. But that future will be hard won and several centuries away. Isaiah issues his call in 640 BC and that's 640 years away from the revelation of his prophecy. Still Isaiah had to speak against his own people and customs, defy the kings who called him to be a part of their courts, speak truth to power, risk it all again and again, always choosing God, always going where God sent him, always saying yes.

So it was with Jesus, whose call we explored a few Sundays ago in the River Jordan. It followed the pattern. Jesus had a choice. He gave His answer. A miracle happened. Did Jesus know what His path would be? That saying yes to being the agent of forgiveness, not just for Himself, but for everyone who had ever lived, was living, and would ever live, would carry a cross weighted burden? Would He have known that He'd be led into traps? That He would have to crisscross ancient lands on dusty roads, that His followers would betray Him, that He would have to confront the most powerful geopolitical empire of His day, as well as the dominant religion of his people?

And if He had known all that, would He have still said yes? I wonder about that, and I wonder how the disciples that we hear about today, the first apostles, Peter, James and John, how they would respond. Now, their call story, it's familiar to those who heard it proclaimed the first time in the squares and the villages throughout Galilee. A miracle, a voice, an acceptance of the call.

First century listeners would've drawn in, eager to hear the story of a call. What those first listeners of the story possessed that previously hadn't existed in other generations of prophets was a clear knowledge of how the story ended. Because by the time the story is told in those town squares and those villages, and long before it's written down on parchment fragments in Luke's elegant Greek, Peter and Jesus were dead, having been executed by the Romans. James the survivor,

was leading a new church in Jerusalem. John was somewhere on an island in the Aegean.

They had to have known there would be good days. Pentecost comes to mind when the church was confirmed by the Holy Spirit. The conversion of Paul, who turned from persecution to preaching. And there were bad days. Lots of those. Earlier followers of the call knew where the call could lead. Uncertainty, disappointment, struggle, execution. They could have gone on fishing for fish, Peter, John, and James. They could have lived a simple life on a lake, good days and bad ones being defined by the fullness of their nets rather than torture of execution.

But what we know is that they accepted Jesus' challenge. They left their nets to fish for people, and we, inheritors, offspring of these people who first heard that story of their call, have the very same choice. Whether you made your baptismal promises or they were made for you, every time you participate in the baptism of a new Christian, you renew your own call. You have the choice to make all over again.

Where does your call take you? Will you speak truth to power? Putting yourself, your fortune, your safety in danger? Will you follow the more difficult path of maintaining your integrity even when it makes others uncomfortable? Here is what is so countercultural to our call and our response to it. Our faith asks us to share what we have worked so hard to acquire with those who need it. The hours we have put into our education are converted into wisdom and skills that we can share with our church, with a nonprofit, with a school channeled to make the world a better, easier place for others.

The emotional, intellectual and physical toll of our careers give us the opportunity to teach others our skills, to mentor, to offer a helping hand. The children we have so lovingly raised and nurtured are eventually turned out into the world to seek and find their own calls. The wealth we have stewarded is used to fund the mission of the church and ease the burden of our neighbors who call on us.

The hours we spend volunteering in our community make ministries and good work possible for people we may never meet. The way we express our call, the way you, I, each of us follow the invitation of God to go into the world and change it is through the sharing of our gifts. This defies a world that tells us to build bigger barns and to look out for our own interests.

God's call leads us into new places, surprising places, often uncomfortable places. But the choice to follow God's call is always yours. Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers? We will with God's help. Will you cast your nets in deep waters, in unexpected places looking not for fish to sell but for people to help? Yes, I will leave everything and follow Jesus. Whom shall I send? asks God. Here am I. Send me.

“The Call”- The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany - 2/9/25

Amen.