

Here I Am

**The following sermon was given at Christ Church Cathedral, by the Dean,
the Very Rev. James A. Diamond, on Sunday, February 4th, 2007.**

In the name of God, and of Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What was your call? What was that like? It is a common question that clergy often hear and we almost always give a disappointing answer. There may be a few of us for whom the heavens parted and the Lord came down and spoke directly to us. But for most of us our call to ordained ministry was not like the year that King Uzziah died. It was much more subtle. God's call nudged and pushed us much more slowly and some of us, including yours truly, dug in their heels to resist.

God repeatedly calls us *all* into ministry as a teacher, a lawyer, an actor, a homemaker, a hair dresser, a doctor, a secretary, as a parent, a friend, a volunteer, and as a student. God calls us each to embody our faith in whatever our vocation is and to look for the face of Jesus in each person that we meet. The lectionary for today gives us three examples of a call: in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, "whom shall I send and who will go for me;" in First Corinthians, Paul refers to the call as the appearance of Jesus, first to Cephas, then to the twelve and then to the least of all, Paul himself; and in the Gospel of Luke: Peter, James and John received their call when those empty nets were filled and brimming with fish and they heard, in that, a call from Jesus to become fishers of women and men.

God's repeated call is only part of the action. A call requires a response. Often our response is "no" because we have not been listening. Sometimes our reply is "no" because the task seems too difficult - O God, I cannot do that. Do not ask me to do this. There are some people who say "no" and go on and do "yes". Occasionally, as we heard in the three calls from scripture this morning, there is a straight forward "yes" as in: "here I am, send me." God continually calls us and God is always listening for our response.

There is ample evidence of call and response in our common life here at Christ Church Cathedral. Elizabeth Brown heard a call to establish the Interfaith Hospitality Network, housing homeless families here in the Cathedral. In that case, Elizabeth answered "yes" but it took several years of her persistence and patience before our response to her call was "yes". Several decades ago, the words of the prophet Amos and his plumbline in the midst of the city inspired one of my predecessors, Morris Arnold and several of you sitting here this morning. That inspiration became a call that you heard to assist people with housing and the Plumb Line Ministry. An inspiration transformed into a call continues as a testimony today to the enduring power of that call. We have all witnessed this past year first Rick Cross, and then Mark Sackett and Dave Eschenbach hearing a call to feed people at the Cathedral. That call was the birth of the 5000 Club to which many of you responded "yes" with your time, your care and your effort.

But is there really a call to the Altar Guild, to the Choir, to the Vestry? I believe there is and that we know the authenticity of that call by the nature of our response: when we set

up the altar as our offering to God, when our hymns and anthems are prayers to Jesus, when the guidance we give to the congregation is for the greater Glory of God. There are so many ways that people of this congregation are finding opportunities to say “yes” when God calls us. And yet there is more. In the forty eighth verse of the twelfth chapter of Luke, Jesus says to us: *from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required and from the one to which much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.*

I now speak of the great financial endowments entrusted to this congregation. You know, that great big elephant that lumbers through our hallways, occasionally walks down the center aisle of the nave, but about whom we see and hear and speak nothing. Most congregations in the Episcopal Church, indeed most congregations of any denomination, of any faith, struggle to keep the roof on the building, to keep fuel in the furnace. So let us be honest, because of the generosity of our ancestors, keeping the doors open is not our particular burden. Our burden is even heavier because pledging in this congregation is not to fund a budget but is purely a response to God’s call: for the first fruits of our harvest, for the tithe of our income, for an honest response in gratitude for every blessing of our lives. And our response to God’s call is ... maybe. Our flat pledge income over so many years, blaming the elephant for the restraint of our generosity, means that we are, as a congregation, giving a *conditional* response to God.

Since we do not have to worry about the roof and the heat, we do need to attune our ears to the larger calls of God. I hear God calling. I hear God calling us back into our city, to return to being the Crossroads of the City. There were eighty nine murders in the city of Cincinnati in 2006. Where is our concern? Where is our anguish? Where is our moral outrage? Is our inaction because most of those who did the killing and most of those who were killed are black? Do we think that it is *them* and not *us*? Is it that we think that the murders are *their* problem and not *ours* that we have been so silent? If most of the eighty nine killers and victims were white, I assure you this city would be literally up in arms. We are killing one another in our city. These are my sisters and brothers. These are *our* brothers and sisters in this vortex of violence. WHERE IS THE VOICE OF MY CHURCH? Where is the voice of my church asking why there is such violence, asking what drives us to kill each other, asking what we can do to make a difference?

This morning one of our very own has returned from extended duty in Iraq. Praise God for his safe return and pray for his friends and his fellow troops who remain there to keep them safe from harm and fear and bring them home to us safely. I hear God calling. I hear God calling us to speak to our nation. We began this war in Iraq and now, nearly four years later, with more than 3,000 Americans dead, 22,000 maimed for life, 34,000 Iraqis killed last year, 400 billion dollars spent we now have a proposal to send 21,000 more bright, young loyal troops into the maw of Baghdad. If one of my children were going to be one of those 21,000, I would move heaven and earth to protect them. But these 21,000 soldiers *are* my children. They are your children. Whatever happened to the lesson that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the peacemakers! WHERE IS THE VOICE OF MY CHURCH? So silent, so unresponsive, so afraid of seeming “political” while other Christians fill their churches with sermons about abortion

and gay marriage and stem cell research - and all the while we are sending our children to the killing fields.

I hear God calling. I hear God calling us to address the world. Among God's greatest gifts is our very own earth which we call our mother. Regardless of whether you believe that God created the earth and all that is in it in seven days or many eons, the earth is a gift of love given to us to cherish. Instead, we are smothering Mother Earth with clouds of greenhouse gas emissions and she is wilting under the assault. The earth has been entrusted to us as a sacred treasure yet we are ambivalent about its safety. The fact of global warming was established "unequivocally" this week by the International Panel on Climate Change. Even worse, you and I, all of us, have been named as the perpetrators of this crisis. WHERE IS THE VOICE OF MY CHURCH? Where is the voice of my church gathering our commitments to change our habits and to protect this jewel, our mother, which has been given to us?

My dear friends, we are the voice of the church. We are the voice that our city, our nation and the world are longing to hear. It is our voices raised. It is our feet marching. It is our urging and our prayers that the world awaits, groaning in anticipation. Today, in this time, in this place, in this moment, right here and now, God is calling to you: *Whom shall I send and who will go for us?* Put everything away that distracts you, calm whatever it is that makes you afraid. Join me in standing before the Lord our God and saying: Here I am, send me. Amen.