

Lent 3 – C
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My husband and I have a very close family friend who has been struggling with a call to the priesthood for many years. He is the son of a priest, knows more about the church than many clergy and is as faithful as anyone could be. Those of us who have known him all these many years have listened to his thoughts about his possible call for longer than we can remember. Finally someone said to him: “What are you waiting for? A burning bush!”

Call can be complicated. Some of us have had burning bush or road to Damascus experiences in which God has intervened in dramatic ways and changed our entire life. Most of us, however, experience call in much more subtle ways and in order to discover that call, we have to do some careful listening. In whatever way we experience call, whether in a dramatic intervention by God or through the still voice which Elijah heard, one thing for sure is that an uncalled life is a life that lacks meaning and substance.

Today’s reading from Exodus picks up the story of Moses in-between the dramatic stories with which we are so familiar. Moses has escaped from the Egyptians, fleeing into the desert and like his forebears before him meets his future wife Zipporah at a well. Moses marries Zipporah and settles into a nice life working for his father-in-law Jethro. No more hassles, no more Egyptians, just a nice comfy life with his new wife. He had it made!

Moses was a killer on the run who had managed to fall into the right family at the right time and make a nice life for himself. And then! God intervenes. Now God is telling Moses to go back to Egypt and work on behalf of the Israelites who are still enslaved. The problem is that the call involved incredibly dangerous work. Freeing slaves was a huge risk in and of itself but we also need to remember that Moses had killed an Egyptian overseer. Never mind that the overseer was dishing out cruel treatment to the Israelites. In the eyes of the Egyptians, Moses was nothing less than a common murderer.

If we listen carefully to the story of Moses and the burning bush, we will become aware of several things. One is that God calls unlikely people. Moses was not a strong candidate for leadership. Moses’ response to God is: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” In other words, this certainly was not Moses’ idea nor was he very happy about it. He had other plans such as helping his father-in-law Jethro. That was Moses’ plan. What could sound better? But God had other things in mind.

There is radical difference between call and desire. Desire more often has to do with things that will make our lives more comfortable. There are the basic needs of food, shelter, education and health care. Those are needs that all of us have and that no one should be without. But then there are desires. We desire harmony within our families. We desire things that will enhance our lives, things such as a car. We also desire things that will not necessarily enhance our lives, in fact they often do just the opposite, creating

both clutter of our hearts as well as clutter in our homes. Beyond necessity and desire there is call. Call often conflicts with desire because call can make us and many around us very uncomfortable. Moses did not desire to go back to Egypt but he was called.

Call is not always convenient. In my own life, I resist call a good bit until I can no longer. A recent example for me has to do with the war in Iraq. I have felt called to somehow offer an opportunity for people in our church and the larger community of Plymouth to pray about this war, to walk the fine line of praying for an end to the war but also praying for the troops who are already there. As a long time adherent of non-violent resistance, I have opposed this war from the day we invaded Iraq. However, I also pray daily for those who are fighting in this war. We have members of this congregation who are on the front line. Our nephew who is a major in the Marines is as we speak in the thick of it. Another nephew and niece were in Iraq at the beginning of the war. Our family is imbedded as much as any family could be.

Despite the complexities of the interpersonal, political and responsibilities of being the rector of this church, I have been listening for a way to offer a place for people who feel concerned about this war to come together and pray. When I saw the plans for a nationwide witness connected to a prayer service being held at the National Cathedral this Friday evening, I knew having a simultaneous service here was the right opportunity for us. So we will gather with whoever shows up. We will pray for the troops who are serving and for all who have died on both sides of this conflict.

In the life of a congregation, all parishioners are called to participate in the life of the church. In fact the definition of a communicant in good standing or an active member is that of attending services on a regular basis, financially supporting the church and the giving of time.

There are wonderful, faithful leaders in this congregation, people who have listened to God's call to serve. We are so very blessed. From time to time, we commission those who have been called to positions of leadership. A couple of weeks ago we commissioned most of the vestry. Today we are commissioning a few more leaders. More people are being raised up. More and more people are saying yes rather than no. If you have not found your niche yet, talk to someone who is in leadership. Answer the call because you won't really feel ownership of this community until you answer and follow God's call.