



January 31, 2010

Epiphany 4C
Listening To God's Call
By Reverend Donna Barr

In reading the Old Testament scripture from Jeremiah I began to recall a time in my life that changed me forever. This is one of the scriptures used at ordinations for priests and deacons. It is the one I chose for my ordination. Jeremiah, the prophet, heard the call from God. The Lord said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you." I thought back on those 10 years that our Bishop talked to me over and over again about ordination to the Deaconate. I remembered the conversation I had in Fr. Jim Burns's office at the Cathedral. I, like Jeremiah, protested that I didn't have the words to speak and basically I couldn't ever begin to be worthy of such a call. Wise Fr. Burns helped me get close to my own fears and reassured me that I was absolutely right in saying I was unworthy. "However that is not the point." he told me, "this call to servant hood had

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nothing to do with worthiness. It has to do with answering God's call for my life."

Frederick Buechner defines vocation by these words, **"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."**

With these words in mind, I then knew I could no longer say no to God.

The Gospel Lesson for today is a continuation of the early years of Jesus' ministry. It should be noted as well that Jeremiah's call in the Old Testament Lesson helps us to see clearly some of the similarities between the role of Jesus in Luke and other Old Testament prophets. Today's Gospel begins with the verse that ended last Sunday's Gospel. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." If you recall Jesus said, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus had listened to his Father and was quite clear about his call!

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The scripture they heard was the fulfillment of God's call in Jesus. And so, the hometown people of Nazareth who hear Jesus' first public message are shocked because they think they know both Jesus and his background. But Jesus now understands all too well who has called him to ministry and for what purpose.

St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians exalts the gift of and call to prophecy, but profoundly reminds us that the gift of prophecy can never be greater than the gift of love. Today's lessons not only beckon us profoundly to remember the miraculous power of God's call to Jeremiah and Jesus, but also implore us to digest inwardly the power and meaning of God's love so that it may be put to use in our daily living. The call to God's service and love is the greatest call and gift given to humankind and that call is to all of us. God calls each of us to a ministry of love. The human struggle to respond to God's call subsides when we surrender to the love God bestows on us through Christ Jesus. The gift of prophecy cannot overshadow this love. The gift of

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knowledge cannot overshadow God's gift of loving others and accepting the love of others. The gift of understanding mysteries cannot overshadow love.

Of all the prophets ever slain in Israel, America or anywhere else, God raised this one, Jesus the Christ, this healer of gentiles and friend of sinners, so we might know that God has forgiven everything, and continues to do so even today. Despite everything, God is patient and kind toward us, not irritable or resentful. God laughs not at our weaknesses, but rejoices over the truth that we are all God's children. For each and for all of us, God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. That love never ends.

My life did, indeed, change the day I could no longer say NO to God, but not to the extent you may think. I still understand that I don't have the words to speak - Those words come from God..... that I don't act in the way God would want me to act.....His actions of unconditional love and mercy are our only hope.....and I

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know that I am still as unworthy as I was 15 years ago - still seeking God's will for my life each and every day. The point of this is that God in his loving kindness is still walking faithfully with me today. Where has God called you? Are you listening to his voice of love? I ask you to seriously consider God's call on your life. **Where are you being drawn to the world's deepest needs.....and where are you in deepest gladness?**

Let us pray

Father, we thank you that you are not a God who is aloof, who keeps yourself at arm's length from us, but has come seeking us out, inviting us in your grace and unconditional love, into a life transforming relationship with yourself. O Lord, may we not let our pride and arrogance get in the way of humbly responding to your invitation and your call. Move our hearts this morning to receive that invitation and to embrace it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

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