

The Call

I grew up in a Lutheran church where my dad was the pastor. Going to church every Sunday was a given. On Saturdays I liked to follow the church sexton around, so I got to know the building thoroughly, all the nooks and crannies and what was in every closet. While in college I sang in the choir of a Congregational church, and was even asked to be the student representative on the church council. That church, too, became a familiar place.

In the Lutheran church one learns that *everyone* has a call from God, not just clergy. I still firmly believe that. By the time I graduated from college I knew that my call was to teach botany. That's what brought Raisin and me to Davenport in 1982. It wasn't long before we ended up singing in the Trinity Cathedral choir.

Those who were at Trinity during those years know how limited the roles were for women in Sunday services. For a long time they were not even allowed to step inside the altar rail. By the mid-1990s Raisin was experiencing a call to church leadership, and discovered that St. Peter's not only had a female rector but strong women leaders, including a State Senator and a State Supreme Court justice. So she migrated there while our son, Noah, and I remained for a time at Trinity.

In the midst of that I had a serious bicycle accident that landed me in the hospital for two weeks and a wheelchair for two months. With one driver in the family, we typically went to St. Peter's. One Sunday soon after I was able to walk again we came here to Trinity. As I was kneeling at the rail, waiting for communion, I thought I'd look at that High Altar that to me represented all that was driving us away from the cathedral. Still weak, rather annoyed, and in this familiar place, I experienced something totally unfamiliar. I felt an overwhelming pull to the center of the altar, so strong that I thought I would flip over the altar rail. There was no mistaking that. God was giving me another call, from plants to priest. I had no choice but to say yes to God.

Today we heard two other calls that came through unfamiliar experiences in familiar places. Isaiah's was by far the most dramatic. Most likely he was taking part in a temple liturgy when he had an extraordinary vision. He was taken right up to the throne of God. Among clouds of incense he heard the seraphim calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." "Woe is me!" Isaiah cried out, surely the right response! His unclean lips were burned clean by a coal from the holy fire. Then he was ready to respond to God's difficult call, to prophesy to people who would not listen.

Simon Peter was also in a familiar place doing something he had done hundreds of times – washing his nets, cleaning them of debris, checking for rips. He was willing enough to take Jesus out in his boat so he could teach. When told to throw the clean nets out into the water again, however, he balked. It had been a futile night of fishing. Yet he did, and caught so much that the nets threatened to break, even with the help of James and John. The extraordinary catch terrified him. Jesus said "Do not be not afraid" and then called him to a new life, one of catching people.

Sometimes I think that hearing such stories about Simon, Isaiah, or even mine gives the impression that God always acts dramatically. Perhaps God *has* to act dramatically for those who aren't listening. The classic example is St. Paul, whom God had to knock down and blind before Paul could get his massive head turned around right. On the other hand, dramatic conversion stories don't have to be the norm.

Sometimes God acts quietly. Often God works through people who know and love us and can nudge us in a certain direction.

One thing is certain. God calls each one of us to do God's work. And we are called to do it within a community of believers where we can nourish and support one another. In this fragmented world where the voices we listen to tend to sound like us, we need a place where not all agree on the issues of the day, where we find common ground by worshipping together, following Jesus Christ.

I never dreamed on that day in November 1998 that I would fulfill that very vision, standing at the High Altar at Trinity Cathedral celebrating the Eucharist. Once again I see it as a sign of God's humor. Simon had no idea what would come of letting an itinerant teacher preach from his boat. God is already working in your own life, though you may be only dimly aware of it. Maybe it is time to ask yourself, what *is* God calling *me* to do?

[Epiphany 5: Isaiah 6:1-13; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11.]