

## **Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Epiphany (February 8, 2004):**

### **Answering the Call**

**Ms. Sharon Sutton**

The readings of today and last week continue to focus on those who have been called by God to be God's particular servants. There is a common theme in their response: reluctance. When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet. Jeremiah's response was "I can't". Today we see Gideon, Paul and Simon each responding to God's call with struggle and question.. Even Moses himself was a reluctant lawgiver.

The question we ask ourselves is "Why should a call from God evoke reluctance?" A large part is because we focus our human limitations. We make them a necessary condition of our "acceptance". Jeremiah had three strikes against him. Firstly, he stuttered. His society placed a high value on eloquent oration. We all know of people who speak extemporaneously spontaneously and eloquently on a variety of subjects. For most of us, though, public speaking is a harder job. Secondly, Jeremiah's age was against him. He was young - in his late teens, perhaps 20. His society valued wisdom, wisdom that came from age. And finally, his family had been expelled from the temple in some political upheaval. Clearly, in his mind he could not obey God's directive.

Today, we see that when the angel approaches Gideon in God's name, Gideon launches into a lengthy complaint against God and the way the Hebrews have been treated. But then the angel points out to Gideon how big and strong he is and why doesn't he lead the fight against the Midianites and all the other groups that have been attacking the Hebrews? Gideon's answers: "my family is insignificant and I'm even more insignificant than my family. What can I do?"

As we think about this, we might recognize the anatomy of the call. First a direct call is made from God or his messenger. Second, the call is met with resistance. [Part of becoming a deacon is discerning my call. How does God want me to serve? .... my reluctance] But there follows a transition period because a seed has been planted, and now the servant sees the possibility, albeit remote, of answering the directive. Gideon says "I might be able to help IF you show me that you are a true messenger from God". And we see Simon Peter reluctantly recast the fishing nets and then being overcome by the abundance of the catch. This transition then is the third part. The last part, of course, is the acceptance of the call. In all cases, once the servants have made the decision, they go forward with firm resolve and determination. The angel, of course, offered Gideon a new way to act and see what was happening to his people. Gideon was not physically changed in any way, but he was transformed into no longer seeing himself as a victim. He has been infused with hope. Likewise, God told Jeremiah in no uncertain terms " You will not fail because I am with you".

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When I read the story of Jeremiah, I immediately thought of Joan of Arcadia, a weekly television show about a 16-year old girl to whom God speaks, commanding her to carry out his directives. Joan like Jeremiah is young and not a necessarily powerful person. But Joan is a servant much like we are. God speaks to all of us, but He speaks to us through the things that are familiar to us, so most of us will never know the display and power at an angelic level. We see some of the ways that God speaks to Joan - as a person who stocks vending machines, as a cafeteria worker, as a stranger on the bus, as a substitute teacher. Imagine if you will going to you favorite bakery and the person behind the counter says "I want you to do a,b,c".

Remember, through our baptism, God has already called us as servants. And because of this reason, we must remain open to the possibilities that God has for us. Here, at Grace Church, I'm sure you have jobs in the church that remain unfilled for a number of reasons or roles that people are reluctant to take on. This happens in all churches. I also know that at Grace Church you have a wonderful course on identifying spiritual gifts. Perhaps you think that you talents aren't particularly noteworthy (reluctance). But not only does this course help you identify new gifts, it also allows you to assess and appreciates the gifts you currently have.

No, we may not be called to influence legions of people, but God starts with each one of us. Our sphere of influence emanates outwardly. Probably first to our families, then friends, community, coworkers.

When we leave this sanctuary today, let us remember as we go through the week, that each of us can do something to help one another, and especially as a church to support one another, and strengthen and complement each others gifts.

Let. us also start preparation for our Lenten spiritual journey with this prayer for reaffirmation:

Almighty and ever living God, let your fatherly hand ever be over us thy servants; let your Holy Spirit be ever with us; and so lead us in the knowledge and obedience of your Word, that we may serve you in this life and dwell with you in the life to come; through our Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.