

“What do you do?” It’s a fair enough question when meeting someone for the first time and attempting to get to know them. It’s of course not a perfect way to understand who the other person is, but it’s a start. And for better or worse, what we do is (for most of us) an important part of who we are. Our occupations, how we occupy our time, reflects some of our interests, our values, the way we choose to relate to the world.

I only get asked that question when I’m not wearing my clerical collar. I cringe when it’s asked – I’ve had 17 years of practice answering “an Episcopal priest,” but there is inevitably an awkward silence that follows, as they size me up and (not infrequently) glance to my left ring finger.

For the few who decide to remain engaged in the conversation, there is (after a considered pause) an immediate shift to how I knew I was called. The question is asked in a tone of either incredulity (‘You, a woman, called to the priesthood?’) or genuine curiosity (‘Tell me how you knew God’s intention for you so I might recognize it when/if God speaks to me.’)

Either way, I admit I’m always a bit flummoxed by that question, “How did you know you were called?” not knowing exactly how to respond.

On the one hand, I know I am ‘called’ in the same way that I know I am a child of God – because everyone who is a child of God is called to a vocation of relationship with and service to all of God’s creation. That is the vocation that all of us have signed on for. My response to that call began not on the day I was ordained, but on the day I decided to be baptized.

Vocation is less about the specifics of the work being done, and more about the spiritual center of gravity that motivates how one goes about doing that work. It is about the *why* of what you do. As such, I have lived into the vocations of being a student, a babysitter, a file clerk, a

hausfrau, and a whole host of other meaningful ways of living out my relationship with God and community.

On the other hand, I think the question behind their question of how I knew I was called (what they're really asking) is how I have come to have a clear awareness of divine purpose ... If only! I have plenty of days when I question where God is leading me and to what God is leading me ~ when I feel no clarity whatsoever whether I'm doing God's will or just bumbling along doing my thing ~ and other days when I know I'm in my exact right place doing precisely what I needed to be doing.

There's a story about a farmer from a rural part of the country. And this farmer comes to visit a relative in a major city. They're walking down the busy and noisy main street, amidst the clamor and confusion and traffic and general hubbub of the city at rush hour. A fire truck goes by, siren blazing, a cabbie is honking his horn, a construction crew is pounding nearby. And the farmer says, "Listen: I hear a cricket over yonder." The relative — the carefully conditioned city dweller — replies, "How can you hear a cricket in the middle of all this?" But the farmer, unfazed, says, "I figure you hear what you're listening for." And with that, he takes the spare change from his pants pocket and drops it on the ground. And at the almost imperceptible sound of a few coins hitting the sidewalk, children and adults alike stop in their tracks, turn their heads and take notice.

"You hear what you're listening for."

As we heard last week from John's Gospel, when Andrew and Simon were called by Jesus, Andrew had already been a follower of John the Baptist ~ Andrew had been spiritually seeking, had been hearing John's preaching, had been taking seriously John's words of repentance and that the Messiah was soon to come. Not unlike the farmer listening for that cricket, Andrew had been listening for God's voice, and once he heard it, he was ready to respond.

Clearly, word of Jesus had reached this area in Galilee, and so it is not surprising that Peter, James and John all are eager to follow Jesus at the first opportunity just as Andrew was.

John the Baptist stirred up the hearts of those in the area, and laid the groundwork for Jesus to come on the scene and get to work right away. The spiritual center of gravity had tilted within this portion of the faith community around Bethsaida, opening the hearts of those who were receptive to Jesus' invitation to come and follow. They heard what they were listening for.

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

Note that this ‘call’ is not to a future salvation, but to contemporary action. A call to a particular vocation in the community is not about earning one’s way into eternal life with God, but rather a boots-on-the-ground building up of God’s kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

They are not being called away from the meaningful work they have always known, rather that work is recognized by Jesus as being valuable, and is being transformed so that it applies to a larger context. A call is never away from something, but toward relationship with the larger community. Afterall, God does not call us to mutually exclusive vocations – for example, I am not called to be either a mother or a priest, but both. Not that it’s always easy to balance multiple vocations, but an authentic call to one vocation does not mean the abandonment of the other. I am also called to be a wife, a sister, a daughter, a friend ... and as such, I am constantly trying to reorient my spiritual center of gravity so that I may live into my vocations with my entire self.

I once heard someone say, “When Jesus calls you to follow him, he doesn’t do it because you’ve been wasting your life, or because he doesn’t value what you have been doing until then. Rather Jesus calls us to follow him precisely because of what we have been doing, and who we have become.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus knows how to use our skills, our unique gifts, our desires (and even your wounds), in deeper relationship and service for the building up of God’s kingdom. Afterall, a call to vocation is one

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Dr. Micah T. J. Jackson, at [day1.org](http://day1.org)

in which an individual's unique skill-set intersects with the needs of the world.

I think that farmer was on to something: 'You hear what you listen for.'

During this Epiphanytide, this Season of Light, let us recognize the light in our own hearts, enkindled by our God who calls us Beloved. That, after all, is our primary vocation as God's children: to fully live into our belovedness, and help others do the same. Everything else flows from that. That is the divine purpose behind our vocations.

What areas of our common life stir your heart? Has God been tugging on you in some inexplicable way, to some new spiritual territory? Have you sensed a disconnect between your spiritual center of gravity and the life you lead? Does what you do align with your vocation? If not, to what may God be calling you? To what new relationship is God inviting you?