
Responding to the Call Upon Your Life

[Click here for the podcast.](#)

A sermon by The Rev. CanonCarolynne G. Williams

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-23

During the mid to late 1960's, 1967-68, 1968-69, I was on the campus of Spelman college, here in Atlanta, a typical student anticipating the future with brightness and following the plan that had been set by myself, my advisors and others.

Enjoying the fruits of my labor, as far as class work was concerned, not necessarily looking for a husband, although that may have been a part of the agenda on the part of some of my classmates, that is looking for a husband, although they would never admit it; but just being a good student in the truest sense of the word. My circle of friends was complete and life was good.

The protective world of college campuses during those days was truly different in the sense of being protected and having boundaries in place. Those boundaries were put in place by administration and a board of that spoke volumes to those who did not belong, whom ever that may have applied to at that particular time.

Within that secure, inviting and ever present challenging environment on many levels there was always a sense of being connected to what was happening outside the gates of the college. There was a sense of the environment responding to the call of the alumnae, (the college is all girls,excuse me- all women) the faculty, the community, locally and abroad that was evident in all that we saw, touched, and were exposed to and became involved in, for better or for worse a students. We were being shaped, formed, being given options that would affect us all in our bright futures and beyond. I shared with some of you before my close observation and involvement of being on campus at that time, sitting in my dormitory window in Rockefeller Hall watching the lines of people who came from all over the world to pay their last respects, by viewing the body of Martin Luther King, Jr.(this was in the spring of the year) as his body lay in state on the campus in Sisters Chapel. People came day and night and day again. And after the viewing had ended and people, all manner of people, ordinary people, dignitaries, children and elders, Jews, gentiles, Pentecostals, Episcopalians, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Southerners, Northerners, Muslims, just people, who stood in a line that stretched the length of two football fields, these people represented every difference, whether it be politically, ethically, or in basic belief, thousands upon thousands walked behind the casket of Dr. King . On the day of his funeral thousands walked behind his mule drawn wagon to the place of his entombment, where his body remains today.

On that day as I sat in my window for hours and others sat in their window, my classmates and I became a part of history. We could see those faces in line without them necessarily seeing us. As we sat, there began yet another calling upon our lives that still affects us today. I know this because I read about my classmates in different parts of the world and what they are doing or we have our reunions and we return to the campus and other places about the city and the country and beyond. Someone will inevitably mention why they are doing what they are doing and in most instances there are mental traces of that one catastrophic turn and influence in our lives that we observed for the most that influences our lives today.

We don't all agree upon everything and how that came about and we don't all have the same political views, nut somehow

that beloved community then, affects us today as we continue to carry out the calling upon our lives. You see we all have a calling. Circumstances that shaped our lives and pivotal events have brought you to a place today that dictates how you view the world and the people in it continues to influence you as my circumstances influence me.

Are you an observer of life picking and choosing what you will become involved in and looking only at what will benefit you and your loved ones or are you a person of action who examines all that interest you and perhaps others and put your beliefs and convictions into action?

Are you responding to the call upon your life? Or are you doing as you please and ignoring that something that is life giving and more involved?

Some of us are sailing through life without giving a lot of thought or attention to those outside of our circle. Some of us are in circles that intersect with many others circles and the outlay of action is immeasurable in a positive manner.

Others are extended only to a point that stays defined and is reinforced with barriers that say only this group is a part and no one else. And for some that is how it has to be.

Others of you are expanding your response to your call upon your life into places and territories that are yet unknown. And even with the response that you will give to your being called being unknown to you, that call attracts the sense of adventure. That sense of adventure that propels you into a place of trusting and moving forward. And in your moving forward you believe that all will indeed be well.

Your moving forward within your circle that encompasses others is allowing you to make one transition after another, because you are recognizing and accepting the presence of God. You are seeking a continued presence of the grace of God. You are being propelled in such a manner that your actions are not reckless or unfounded, but your actions, your responses to the call upon your life is giving life to those within your circle, within your community and within your realm that says, I am responding to the call upon my life.

And for those lives whose lives are not touching anyone's else's life but your own, there remains opportunities and time, there is time to become one who is indeed responding to the call. There is time for you to respond to the call that says I am living and am anticipating being at the beginning of something that represents adventure to me and perhaps will transcend my fears and insecurities.

During these days and times , the year 2011, holding hands and singing Kumbaya is not going to achieve much. We can do it and it is uplifting, however, these are the days of individualism on many, many levels. But in the midst of these days, as it was over two thousand years ago, are reflected in the words of Paul, " Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose."(Matthew V.10)

Community that is united serves a purpose especially when the point of being united moves one away from self and toward beloved community that reflects the body of Christ and all that is in it.

On that day sitting in my dorm window on Spelman's campus and seeing the differences in people and what they looked like and how they spoke and I imagined what they may believe and suspected that it was different from what I may have been taught, yet to see their witness to what they had shared or even had in common with all others who stood in line that day to pay their final respects to Dr. King and his family. I wondered if the kingdom of God really reflected and could hold all of the factions that I saw that day. This was from the mind of a nineteen year old.

During those moments when I thought about the Kingdom and what that implies, it has changed considerably; thank goodness.

My sense of belief at this point in my life says that the kingdom of God is reflected by all who have the mind, and heart and spirit to seek God in all persons and we begin by respecting the dignity of every human being.

There are some 20th century theologians, such as Reinhold Nieber who through their written works challenge the possibility of how the kingdom of God is influenced as to who is in and who is out of the kingdom, in my opinion.

However, the overarching response collectively and consistently comes to each of us who are a part of the beloved community. Each of us who stands and responds to the call upon our lives especially within our circles of life and living.

In the gospel of Matthew, there is a suggestion that says our center, that center of gravity that propels us and also keeps us in balance is asking that "we shift from a story of self to one that will mean something in the larger text".

When we extend ourselves into a circle that is greater than we imagined ourselves being a part of, this adventure takes us to places that will always be bigger than we ever imagined. Not for our own aggrandizement, but for the Kingdom of God.

From the time that Jesus began to proclaim with these words, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is come near" he was on a mission. His mission set before him by his father, our father was to spread the good news. The good news was that the community, the beloved community of which you are a part says that even though you are a part of this community, are you going to be an observer or are you going to take a more active role and live out the call of your life.

Jesus invited James, son of Zebedee and John to travel with him. He invited them to be his boys and become an integral part of the circle that he was inviting them into. Come and be a part of this circle, this group, this community. And you will find, he said, that you will not have wasted your time. You will not have wasted your time because if you join me in my circle, that will change our life and perhaps how you see this world. Not only that you will find that your circle will invite people in that you may not have noticed before, or when you join my circle it will give you a sense of adventure that you did not know even existed.

My classmates and I, as we sat in our windows on that spring day and watched people who had become part of the part of the community, the beloved community who shared views and beliefs and some foundations that only God could understand and as we watched their faces and heard their words, we the students became aware of something. We became aware of the spirit that says the world does not revolve just around you. There is something bigger than you and it may touch you if you allow it to.

Well, my dorm still stands, Rockefeller Hall, it is one of the homes for students on campus today as we speak. While I certainly am not sitting in the window at Spelman, I can still see in my mind's eye, those who are a part of the Kingdom of God standing in line. Going to pay their respects. The line however, has expanded to many places. The dominant line, in my mind's eye leads to the altar, the line leads to churches and places all over the world, it leads to synagogues and emerging churches and to mega churches and to storefronts and to Mosques and small groups and homes where fellowship takes place. The line extends to children holding hands and walking together. The line reflects and says I am a child of God too. Those in the line are coming to receive the gift that is there for all who believe. In the Christian tradition, the line leads to the cross that says: I am responding to the call upon my life. I am responding as best I can. I am responding in ways that I never imagined and I trust that God is at the center.

Bishop Keith Whitmore, assisting Bishop for the Diocese of Atlanta, said these words near the close of our Diocesan Council this past November held here at the Cathedral. He said, "The opposite of faith is not unbelief, the opposite of faith is fear. We are to walk simply by faith."

To God be the Glory.

Amen.