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## *Here I am, For You Called Me*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Second Sunday after the Epiphany**

Samuel said, "*Here I am, for you called me.*"

How many telephone calls do you get during the day? How many e-mail messages do you get? How many pieces of mail?

Many of us are doing amazing things just so that someone can call us. We buy the latest answering machines and automatic e-mail systems. We don't want to miss that call.

I saw a man walking through the mall the other day who had two cellular telephones strapped to his belt. They were in holsters, like guns. Outside the Chick-Fil-A two weeks ago, I saw a car with nine antennas on it. I assumed it was an unmarked police car, but it might not have been.

We take our cell phones with us in the car, to the beach, to school and even to the church. How many of you have your cell phones with you this morning?

Here's mine! I always have one with me. [Here, Dean Candler held up his cell telephone in the pulpit; the phone rings.]

What's this? A telephone call!

"Samuel. Samuel. It's for Samuel. (That's me.)

"Follow me," the message says. "Can anything good come out of a cell phone message? Come and see."

Follow me. Come and see. I wish the call of God was as simple and direct as a cell phone call. Unfortunately, despite all of our antennas and satellite reception and special answering machines, most of us are missing the call.

We receive the calls from everyone else, but there is one person calling whose call we usually miss. Yes, that is the call of God. The call of God.

Our frantic, always-in-touch western culture has reached a strange point. The more anxious we are about trying to be in touch, trying to be available, the less we are actually available to God. We make ourselves available to everyone else, but not available to God.

When the earliest disciples were hanging around Galilee, the odds are they were looking for all sorts of salvation. Some were looking for the messiah. Others were expecting a new King of Israel. Some were seeking the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Some wanted the greatest rabbi. Some yearned to meet the one about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote.

Somehow, the holy person of Jesus satisfied all these various expectations. Each of us, today, has needs and desires that

differ from one another; but somehow, Jesus is the One who unites and answers all those different desires. Andrew found Simon Peter. Philip found Nathanael. They were all seeking something.

And when that Savior appeared, they were not afraid to use their networks to tell one another. "We have found him!" they might have typed into their Blackberries. Would that we had a message like that to type into our e-mails. "We have found the Messiah; let us follow him."

There are lots of messages clamoring for our attention these days. There is no lack of persons who want us to follow. Like young Samuel, we eagerly present ourselves to the wrong person, the wrong answer, the wrong message.

But our God calls us to something deeper than what the world has to offer.

I believe that God calls us today by speaking truth to us. Where we find truth and love, justice and righteousness, we find God. If we are looking for where God calls us, notice where truth and love are not. Where we find truth, love, justice, and righteousness lacking, there we find the call of God.

How did the first apostles know that Jesus was worth following? Because he spoke the truth in love, and that truth dug deep into their expectations; it answered needs they did not even realize they had.

What is our calling? I hear that question from parishioners and friends every week. What am I supposed to be doing?

Say I do hear something in my moments of silence and meditation. Say I do hear something from my friends and family. How do I know it is of God?

We do well to study the lives of people whom we know heard God's call. Study the life of Samuel the prophet. Study the ministries of Andrew and Simon Peter and Philip and Nathaniel, and all the disciples of the Church who have followed the call of Jesus. That is how we learn how God acts and speaks and works in us.

And those disciples of the Church continue into our own time.

So it is that I want to remember this morning the words of a disciple whom our entire country remembers this weekend. Martin Luther King, Jr., Atlanta's own, was certainly a man who heard the call of God, at a certain time and place. The way he answered that call, however, gave him a stature that towers over any particular time and place.

If each of us can answer the call of God, faithfully, in our own time and place, we will be contributing to a kingdom that transcends time and place. That kingdom is the kingdom of God.

Two months before he died, Martin Luther King, Jr. preached these words from an Atlanta church just down the street, Ebenezer Baptist Church. The sermon was titled, "The Drum Major Instinct." He concluded by speculating about his own funeral, and his own life.

"If you want to be on the right hand or the left hand of Jesus," he said, "you serve." You serve. "It's the only way in." And then he said,

"If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. I'd like somebody to mention that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day, that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day, that I did try to feed the hungry. And I want you to be able to say that day, that I did try, in my life, to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say, on that day, that I did try, in my life, to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity."

,"Say that I was a drum major for justice, for peace, for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind."

"All that's all I want to say, if I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show somebody he's traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain. If I can do my duty as a Christian ought, if I can bring salvation to a world once wrought, if I can spread the message as the master taught, then my living will not be in vain." <sup>1</sup>

Amen to Martin Luther King, Jr. today. And Amen to all of us, to all of us who are willing to answer the call of God. Our God is calling today, calling us to walk in truth and love, in righteousness and peace.

Amen.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

<sup>1</sup>From *The Drum Major Instinct*, a sermon preached at Ebenezer Baptist Church 4 February 1968, as printed in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Edited by James M. Washington. Copyright 1986 by Coretta Scott King. Harper: San Francisco., page 267.