

CALLING
Randall Tremba
January 22, 2017
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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This is the third Sunday in Ordinary Time and the first Sunday after the inauguration of a new President. Many, though not all, are disheartened and distressed over what the future portends. If you are one of those, take heart. And, please, take to heart these lessons appointed for this third Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Isaiah 9:1-4

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.

Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested [and I should note, arrested by the Empire for speaking out against it]—Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested he withdrew to Galilee. [It was, as we are about to see, a calculated retreat not resignation to fear or despair.]

One day as Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee he saw Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

They didn't know what that meant or what it would lead to. And yet they left their nets and preoccupations and followed Jesus on the greatest adventure of their life.

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Sixty-one years ago this month on January 27, 1956, the phone rang in Martin Luther King's house. A sneering voice on the other end said: "Leave Montgomery immediately if you don't want to die."

Martin hung up the phone and sank into a chair. He had just begun speaking up for civil rights and equality. And now this. He was ready to give up. The risks were too high. The shadows too dark.

He bowed over the kitchen table and prayed. "O Lord, I am taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I can't do this."

And then an inner voice said: "Martin, stand up for justice, stand up for truth; and I will be at your side forever."

Now that's a calling. Jesus comes along and says, Hey, you, leave fear and despair behind. Follow me. Bring your little light along. I want to show you possibilities for love. You can be a light in the darkness.

Twenty or so years ago a young black man came to see me. He was a child of this town, good hearted, warm and friendly and easy to like. He was a friend of my sons. They liked him and felt sorry for his plight.

While my sons had the wind at their back this young man, like so many persons of color in this society, faced headwinds constantly. It was hard to get ahead or stay on track. He bounced from one home to the next, always at the mercy of one relative or another.

He had dropped out of high school. He was often in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was known to the town police. But he was no hardened criminal. Just a wayward soul wandering in the dark.

I listened to his halting and stuttering voice telling of his frustrations. I was ready to hear a request for financial help. But he made none. Apparently he had nothing more in mind than telling someone his story.

Before he left I asked if there was something that he'd like for himself, something to help him get on track. *Yes, he said, I'd like to get my GED. But I have a hard time figuring out how to do it.*

And just like that a light went on.

As it turns out I knew of a recent new member of the church with an extraordinarily kind heart. He had just retired from the field of engineering and knew how to solve problems. Would he be interested in tutoring this young man?

Yes, he would. And he did.

That young man got his GED and his tutor stayed with him through job applications and interviewing processes. He got a full-time job driving a delivery truck.

A few years ago I asked his tutor if he knew what became of that young man. Yes, I do, he said with a smile. *I've been his surrogate father ever since you matched us up. And then he told me—without the slightest tone of regret or resentment—about the many rocky roads they had navigated together.*

Now that's a calling. Jesus comes along and says, *Hey, you, leave your retirement nest behind. Follow me. Bring your little light along. I want to show you possibilities for love. You can be a light in the darkness.*

When Debbie Irving was a little girl her mother took her often to the public library. Debbie was intrigued by a large mural portraying colonialists, her ancestors, standing with several Native Americans. One day she asked her mother, what ever happened to the Indians who once lived here. Oh, said her mother, they destroyed themselves with alcohol.

That answer stuck in Debbie's mind. Years later she learned the real story of genocide and began to wonder what else about the American story she'd been weaned on in New England might not be true.

As she made her way along the track of her inherited white privileges that question nagged at her. Why did so many doors open for her and slam in the face of people of color? Why did she enjoy tailwinds to success while people of color battled headwinds? Why did her efforts to fix and save the lives of black people in the ghettos of Boston make things worse?

And then a light went on. She had focused on saving the world without exposing and examining the assumptions and entitlements of her own life that blinded her to the truth, to the harsh realities of systems and structures that long had favored her white skin and disfavored others.

She woke up and began a long and arduous inner journey—a journey of self-discovery and repentance that led to her book, *Waking Up White*.

And that's a calling. Jesus comes along and says, Hey, you, leave your white presumptions behind. Follow me. Bring your little light along. I want to show you possibilities for love. You can be a light in the darkness.

Once upon a time, when the Empire was out destroying life and casting a dark shadow over the land, Jesus walked along the seashore and called out to hard working fishermen, going about their daily, repetitive business. Hey, you. Leave your preoccupations behind. Bring your little light along. Come and follow me and I will show you possibilities for love. You can be a light in the darkness if you walk this way.

The Beloved is still calling out, not just by the seashore, but wherever hearts are ready to be called into the work of healing and mending the world without neglecting their own inner work of repentance and transformation.

The Beloved is calling. Come follow me and I will show possibilities for love. Bring your little light along. You can be a light in the darkness.

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Hymn 721

“Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore”