

Bishop Jim White preached at the Diocesan Ordinations in Holy Trinity Cathedral on Saturday 29 November 2014. Three deacons and four priests were ordained.

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.' Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.'

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Peter, Brenda, Jay, Alan, Gordon, Johnny, Petra – today is a good day. Some of you have taken circuitous routes to get here but it feels really good to be at this point. I want to say something about calling and vocation this morning. Most of what I have to say bounces out of the Jeremiah passage and a rather wonderful but dense book by Edward Hahnenberg called *Awakening Vocation*.

I know there is a high risk that someone out there, some one who has come to support one of you, who is here simply because he or she loves you but doesn't get with all the churchy stuff, who at this point is thinking, "*Oh, no. Talking. More talking. Let's get on with it and make them reverends.*" Well, soon enough.

There is lots of shilly-shallying around because it is no small jump. You will understand this if you ever have stood on a high point and thought about jumping in – sometimes there is an amount of talking, rehearsing, and paying attention that needs to go on before the final jump.

Actually, if you are new to Anglicanism, and you have never been to the cathedral before, let me put you at your ease and explain some of the whole thing. To do this and to honour the great theologian and comic, Robin Williams who died just a few months ago, he explained the top ten reasons for being an Anglican thus:

10. No snake handling.
9. You can believe in dinosaurs.
8. Male and female God created them; male and female we ordain them.
7. You don't have to check your brains at the door.
6. Pew aerobics. (*we've practiced some of that already this morning*)
5. Church year is color-coded.
4. Free wine on Sunday.
3. All of the pageantry - none of the guilt.
2. You don't have to know how to swim to get baptized.
And the Number One reason (and the one we angst about a lot)
1. No matter what you believe, there's bound to be at least one other Anglican who agrees with you.

(So, back to you seven.) Ministry can be a bit like frying bacon naked. It is wonderfully exciting but you know you could be stung. [I need to say this isn't an exact biblical image –

scholars think that frying locusts has a similar drawback and that is why John the Baptist wore camel's hair to protect himself because of its flame retardant properties.]

Seriously you get the idea from Jeremiah who is very reluctant about the call on his life – *Oh, I am only a boy* – and you get the same kind of reluctance and anxiety in most of the big calling moments in scripture. You want to think twice.

Ordained ministry – by ordained ministry I mean, preaching, propheting, pastoring, priesting – mostly ministry is crazy risky (and possibly thrilling) like frying bacon naked. So, you might like to think carefully before calling on the fire of the Holy Spirit to get things going.

Calling. What do we mean by that word? This morning I want to pay attention to some aspects of calling.

Calling was once something that really only applied to the religious and clergy. They were special. Bernard of Clairvaux, from the 1100's once said,

"In crossing the turbulent sea of life, the Daniel like religious use a high bridge above the water; the prelates, following Noah, take a boat; and the Joban laity, the plebs Domini, wade and swim."

A hierarchy of specialness – monks and nuns, clergy, laity. In fact this kind of thinking led to a view that the only ones who had a calling and a vocation were those who entered holy orders. Laity had no such a thing as a calling and a much diminished chance of salvation. Martin Luther and the reformation corrected this error. Luther wrote:

Therefore I advise no one enter any religious order or the priesthood, indeed I advise against it – unless he is forearmed with this knowledge and understands that the works of monks and priest, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ on wit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic labourer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone ... Indeed, the menial housework of a maidservant is often more acceptable than all the fastings and other works of a monk or priest, because a monk or priest lacks faith.

Luther broadened and flattened the notion of calling. I don't know if Diocesan School for Girls still has their old Baptism register – in it there are various boxes to fill out: name of child, name of parents, and calling of parents. Every one had a calling. On this view, every act, and every life lived in faith and love could be holy. God was concerned with the intent not the actual act. It is wonderfully affirming of all – especially those who don't feel special because they do ordinary tasks. It opens the ordinary task and ordinary life to holiness. (Which I might say, is no bad thing for you seven to be reminded of because every priest in this room will tell you that Janitorial Studies 101 and 102 and Chair Stacking 200 are essential papers not taught at St John's College.)

The problem with this view, however, is at least two fold. First, people living the worst kinds of lives are told to suck it up because it is God's will for them. So, theology can support oppression. Second, and related, we can lose sight of the fact that God can and does call us beyond the familiar and out of our station in life; God sometimes, for the love of the world, calls us to do crazy things. God is the one who can transform lives; God reforms who we are and what it is we are to do and be for the world.

When we talk about call, therefore, we have to hold onto the notion that **God calls**. God calls all Christians in and through baptism and then God sometimes lays upon some particular and specific calls. It is always the case that **God calls**. We, you, have to always be open and attentive to the call that comes from beyond ourselves. That is life of prayer.

Yet God calls ... me. You. We look today to you seven. God calls you Peter, Brenda, Jay, God calls Alan, Gordon, Johnny, Petra.

There is deep truth in Thomas Merton's statement, "*For me to be a saint means to be myself.*" There is a profoundly **personal** dimension to vocation and calling. As Hannenberg says, "*To speak of the God who calls without at the same time attending to the person who hears the call distorts the divine-human dialogue.*"

There is something very intimate about the way God relates to each of us. God knows us so well that he knows each hair on our head.

I think there is something wonderfully reassuring about this being known. It is there in the call of Jeremiah "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you;*" I take this to be an indication not just of the vastness of God's brains but also the vastness of God's heart; hoping, dreaming and yearning for each of us in the way I can speak poetically that I knew of my daughter before she was born. May you this day and forever be open and attentive to the way God holds you, knows you, loves you.

Which brings me to say something about relationships. We know that we are not made as islands unto ourselves but we are formed in and through relationship. God calls us **through others**. I think this most often occurs to us as we think on our parents and how like them we are or wish we were or weren't. Through other lives and through the loves we have known we have been shaped and moulded; through the hurts and healings we have known, through the stories we have been told and the stories we tell, our world view, the very way we frame reality takes shape. Each of you seven has come this far by God's grace but God's grace is delivered most powerfully in love made incarnate - in and through real human loving. May it continue to be this way. Today we give special thanks with you for those who have shaped your life and brought you to this moment. May you be forever open and attentive to the ways others - lovers, family, friends, enemies - shape you, make you, bless you and show you God's grace.

All this so far makes "calling" sound like nothing other than a recipe for personal development. But that would be a frightful mistake.

God calls.

God calls **you**.

God calls you **through** others.

And God calls you **for** others.

Call has always indicated a kind of conversion, an interruption in life, an interruption that has one turning out and beyond self-centredness. Call is a kind of opening for others and otherness. The radical demand of calling is probably best and most often taught to us the parable of the Good Samaritan. In a world beset by suffering and besieged by violence that parable has us going over and moving outward, going to the other side for others. This is how to do and be the basic and most holy thing - be a neighbor - it is how to do and be

everything that matters. This is a life of solidarity and love. This is what today is about God calls you for others in a new and deep way. I pray you will be this day and forever open and attentive for others.

Calling and paying attention to that calling.

God calls.

God calls you.

God calls you through others.

God calls you for others.

The Summer Day – *Mary Oliver*

*Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean-
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth
instead of up and down
-who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention,
how to fall down into the grass,
how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed,
how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?*