

Do You Get It? By Holly C. W. Aastuen
April 25, 2010 John 10:22-30

Yesterday I got word that Rev. Dean Larson had died. Dean Larson was the executive director of Green Lake Lutheran Ministries. I first met him when I worked for a summer at Green Lake Bible Camp near Spicer, Minnesota.

A chain smoking, coffee guzzling man who had built up this Lutheran camp from a small time operation to a well run and well financed conglomeration of three separate camps, Dean Larson knew how to inspire congregations to invest in something that would be a tool of ministry for their kids and families for years to come. His love for camping began when he went to Bible camp as a boy and grew over the years as he became a camp counselor. Though he became an ordained minister, he found that local church ministry wasn't a good fit. But when he began his work at the camp he (and the camp) flourished. You might say he had found his true calling.

In his tribute to this man, the current executive director wrote to Dean in the camp newsletter, saying, "The...lesson that made a huge impact on me was your ability to see God at work in everyone's life. You used to talk about our call to ministry, the counselors, the maintenance people, the cooks, the office staff, even the children in our midst, everyone had a call...It was very inspiring and very exciting to think that everyone had a call, everyone had a part to play in God's world."

What a legacy to leave—to let everyone know that God calls them to ministry. Everyone has a call. Everyone has a part to play in God's world.

In today's Bible story, Jesus is walking around Solomon's Porch when the Jews asked, "How long are you going to keep us guessing? If you're the Messiah, tell us straight out."

Who knows if they wanted to know the truth or if they wanted to trap him, but the answer he gave points to the importance of listening for your call.

Jesus answered, "I told you, but you don't believe...You don't believe because you're not my sheep. My sheep recognize my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them real and eternal life."

Recognizing Jesus voice is what the sheep do and is the first step in identifying call, discerning what the Holy Spirit is nudging us toward.

We need to notice when God's call comes to us.

One of the joys of being a pastor is that I get to mentor people who are exploring their call to ministry. Sometimes I mentor people at the stage in their life when they have gotten a clear sense of who they are and what ministry God

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is calling them to. But even more fun is when I mentor someone who's still exploring, still seeking what it is God is calling them to do.

One young woman I mentored was working in a church part time, running the adult Christian Education program. She liked the work and so she went to seminary thinking that was her calling. She had many gifts in the area, including running some of the most engaging Bible Study I have ever attended, but for some reason her heart wasn't in it.

When she ran into some obstacles in the ordination process, and was asked to add a class in United Methodist History and Polity that she hadn't had any background in at the non-United Methodist seminary she had attended, her enthusiasm waned. It was a small barrier to her being ordained, but it was enough of a barrier that she simply stopped the process toward ordination. We kept in touch and she kept teaching Bible Study, but a year later she got a job working for a Christian Refugee service and she loved her work. She flourished as she helped place immigrant families with congregations who covenanted to support these families in their first year in the United States. She knew she was making a difference in people's lives—both the lives of the immigrants and the lives of those who hosted them. She loved making that special connection as people were welcomed to their new home and new country.

She had found her calling.

How do we find our calling, our way of being in relationship to Christ and the world? How do we hear God's voice?

I think Jesus is calling our names all the time. I think Jesus longs for us to be silent long enough to allow for space to hear Jesus' call. Life is a process of becoming increasingly able to recognize the voice of Christ and decreasingly less enamored with our own voices.

Every day I need to practice listening by asking myself some basic questions: Where can I go that I am most likely to hear Jesus' call today? How can I quiet my own voice so I can hear and follow Christ's words? Will I know Christ's voice better tonight than I did this morning?

Sometimes, many times, it's just easier, though to listen to what we want to do, sometimes to even interpret our own inclinations for Christ's call in our lives.

You may have heard the story of an exchange between two people at sea. The captain of the ship is on deck when he hears a voice over the radio waves: "Change your course." This captain is indignant that anyone less than a captain would tell him anything about how he is to steer his ship and so his reply back is

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less than tactful. He replied, "No, sir. My course is set. You need to give way and change your course." The navigator has told him that there is no large ship on the radar, that they are the largest ship in those waters.

Again the voice over the radio comes back and says, "Change your course." To which the captain replies, with a slight more edge to his voice. "My course is set. You, sir, need to give way to the larger ship."

A third time the voice says, "I understand you are a large ship, but you still need to change your course."

To which the captain replies, "I, sir, am the captain of a battleship. I will not change my course. Who are you to tell me to change my course!"

The voice says, "I am the lighthouse keeper. You are headed toward danger. It's your call."

If we let our own agenda, our own ego, our own baggage get in the way of hearing Jesus' call, Jesus' claim on our lives, we are headed toward danger. We are headed down the road to death.

In Christ's eyes we are the sheep and he is the shepherd, who loves, protects and guides us to where he wants us to go.

Are we listening to his voice?

In my home in the last several weeks we have been noticing things that we hadn't before. I think my kids are getting these ideas from school and they are bringing them to the family as together we notice what's going on in our lives.

One son is particularly concerned about our energy consumption. He wrote a paper about energy conservation and since then has pointed out things like a lamp that is on that no one is using or that we leave the refrigerator door open longer than we should.

Another son is paying attention to screen time and how there are many better alternatives to watching a screen for hours upon end. He's turning off his electronics and inviting us for a walk or to play outside.

Because of these concerns, I find myself being more attentive to my energy consumption and to my use of the computer and TV. Their comments and concerns have created a culture of awareness in our home.

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We need to cultivate a culture of awareness in our lives—an awareness of the voice of Jesus, the voice of God calling us—calling us to ministry, calling us to relationship, calling us home.

How can we afford not to listen?