

Rachel Halterman: Waiting For God's Call

A sermon for Seekers Church by Rachel Halterman
January 7, 2001

Waiting For God's Call

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine". (Isaiah 43:1)

This sermon is dedicated to all of us at Seekers Church who do not now have a call, have never had a call and/or may never have one.

The quotation from Isaiah, part of our reflection piece this season, epitomizes my frustration in this community. I have been a part of Seekers Church for about ten years now, and in all that time I have been waiting for God to call me. And waiting. And waiting.

I have listened attentively as one after another of you have walked up to this pulpit and described your visions of God's call. I have watched with envy and a profound sense of incompleteness as many of you live out those calls to something outside yourselves. I have for years felt, as Brenda has verbalized, "call-less in a community where call is everything." Moreover, I have, for those same years, wondered why it is I feel this is my home when I lack what appears to be the primary pre-qualification of belonging here.

For some months this fall, I was in what I can best describe as a spiritual malaise. I had allowed my disciplines to lapse to the point where I announced to the stewards that I had reservations about recommitment. I knew I wanted to recommit; I knew that Seekers is where I want to be. Nevertheless, I

felt dishonest in staking my claim to stewardship when I was not even sure of myself or sure of my place in this church. I felt distant and removed from the activities and commitments of community life.

There is no one cause I can cite for my feelings of estrangement, although Sonya and Manning's departure was certainly a major factor. Along with that painful loss, I have been grieving Diane's absence from Seekers even though I understand that she is not nourished here as I am.

Nevertheless, something even more deep-seated was behind my withdrawal, an old demon revisited – my sense of inadequacy that I lack the gifts to contribute appropriately to Seekers.

My lack of self-confidence, this acute sense of unworthiness, has always been my core struggle. I have shared these feelings with you before, but it has not seemed to rid me of them. While I have found meaningful ways to participate in this community, I have never felt fulfilled in terms of being called.

I was enticed out of my recent malaise in response to two irresistible invitations, which turned out to be very renewing experiences.

The first invitation was an opportunity to take a course in the School of Christian Living on [Faith and the Historical Jesus](#) taught by Jeanne Marcus. This is the first SCL class I have taken probably since I was a member of that mission group some years ago. Jeanne began the class by asking us to talk about who Jesus is for us and what we feel Christians ought to believe about Jesus.

The candid, free-flowing and thoughtful discussions that took place in this class were models of what attracted me to Seekers in the first place – the intellectual and spiritual freedom to hold my own image of God. I sat mesmerized throughout the class as individuals offered their views of

Jesus, the Resurrection, God and Christianity. It was tremendously energizing and affirming.

As for the second invitation, I have Trish Nemore to thank for encouraging me to join her and Sherri Alms on a retreat to Rolling Ridge with the youth group. For obvious reasons I spend a lot of time with the younger children in Seekers, but I had never spent much time with this older group, consisting on this trip of Jennifer, Samantha, April, Shoshanna, Margaret, Christo, Marian, Lauren and Christopher. Regrettably, Tobin was unable to join us. I loved the opportunity to work and play with them, but most of all I was struck by how much they enjoy each others' company; how comfortable they are just being together.

Since that trip, we have all learned that April and Samantha will be attending the same college, thus deepening their Seekers bond. And I recently learned that a Seekers youth group alumni composed of Meredith, Erica, Sarah, Jonathan, Susanna and Solomon spent part of the holidays at Wellspring for a reunion and silent retreat. No matter where they eventually choose to worship, their experience of community in Seekers will be with them always. That is good news for them and good news too for the next generation of Seekers children to witness and to emulate.

Yes, there is a lot of richness for me here. I know this is where I belong. Yet, there is still that "C" word. Who am I here without call? What am I supposed to be doing?

Recently I experienced a revelation about call during a discussion in Celebration Circle about the Epiphany liturgy. After we had decided on the reflection piece and theme, we began to ask ourselves what is meant when we say we are called by name. What is it to be called by God? For some this is a very specific call, whether it is social work, teaching, art or whatever. But for others, as Deborah observed, it is a clear and compelling call simply to be a part of the Body of

Christ – a call of *being* rather than *doing*.

I understood then that this is my home because I am *called* to be here! This seemingly small distinction of calls can make a huge difference in my perception of myself and in my perception of what I bring to this community.

As I think about it, I realize that I know very well to what I am called.

I am called to belong to a Christian church that wrestles with its theology and celebrates the importance of the creative tension caused by differences. I am called to belong to a church that attracts people who openly and candidly share their inner journeys as well as their outer ones. I am called to belong to a church that strives intentionally to be inclusive of all who wish to be a part of it.

I *am called* to Seekers. We are all called here.

There are many individuals here who represent what draws me to Seekers, but I want to talk briefly about two people in particular whose stories stand out as embodiments of what calls me here.

First, I want to hold up Brenda Seat as one example of what the work of being a Christian can entail. Brenda has been engaged for some time in the process of personal transformation. This has been a very painful, public process wherein she has taken responsibility for actions she regrets and has put in motion new hopes, new visions and, yes, call. Brenda's struggle mirrors our own as we all strive to gain the promise of rebirth that is implicit in the resurrection. Her story can serve as a reminder of the soul-work involved in being a part of the Body of Christ.

Second, I want to raise up Pat Conover. For those of you who may have missed her announcement several weeks ago, Pat has decided to no longer appear before us in her feminine

presentation. The reasons for this decision are complex and best discerned by speaking with Pat.

We can be proud that Pat has felt safe enough in our midst to reveal her feminine persona, and she has been able to do so because of our intentional commitment to inclusiveness. On the other hand, Pat's trust was not without risk. I cannot overstate the depth of the courage it took for her to stand before us week after week, naked in her vulnerability, looking for tolerance and affirmation. I believe Seekers did offer tolerance, but am sad that this tolerance did not move forward to widespread acceptance.

I think Seekers has a lot more spirit work to do around the issue of inclusiveness. There are other areas where people are made to feel unwelcome or excluded: insensitive comments that marginalize political philosophies, for instance, or subtle implications that those engaged in commerce cannot be about God's work. Our collective call is to be church and all that encompasses in terms of accepting and respecting each other for who we are and how we are called to serve.

I believe Pat's story is just the beginning of our deeper understanding of what it means to be inclusive in the radical sense that Jesus modeled. Pat has opened a dialogue that can have profound implications for our spiritual development.

I celebrate a church community that is willing to hold itself accountable for its limitations and shortcomings. I celebrate a church community that intentionally strives to transform its ways of being church together and to welcome the priesthood of *all* believers.

Yes, I am called to Seekers, and the pull of this call is so strong it cannot be other than from God.

Marjory Bankson [suggested recently](#) that the Holy Spirit calls each of us to a new and larger Self. Writer and poet Kathleen Norris stated it another way when she observed that we all are

expected to use our lives to reveal the grace of the Holy Spirit working through us. Ms. Norris describes this as "a tall order, to literally be a sacrament."

"You did not choose me; I chose you" Jesus reminded the disciples. God chooses us – all of us – and calls us by name. That is why we are here.

Amen.