I call you by name

Beloved, daughter, my child

by Tonya Holland

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**Greeting + Thank You**

* Good morning, my name is Tonya Holland for those I have not had the pleasure of meeting. I have been a member of Christ Lutheran Church since 2004---many moons ago.
* I want to thank Pastor Renata and Pastor Lee for offering the pulpit and allowing me an opportunity “to share the good news with those who may not know they are Beloved.”
* This morning we’ll touch Mark’s 1st chapter verses 9-20. It’s lengthy, but we’ll summarize, and together we’ll relive my odyssey of how Mark 1: 9-20 has changed me.

**Introduction**

* I’ve entitled this sermon, **“I Call You by Name—Beloved, Daughter, My Child.”**
* So, what does it mean in the spiritual sense?
* Has God called you by name, or have any of you ever heard God’s calling?
* In Mark 1:9-20, the text explores three elements:
  + the baptism of Jesus,
  + the temptation of Jesus—driving him out into the wilderness, and
  + Jesus calling his first disciples.
* To respect our time this morning, I am going to discuss Jesus ***calling the first disciples*** and how that applies to me and, hopefully, you.
* I am going to give you a snapshot of how God used me through:
  + helping me understand my privilege;
  + enlisting me to participate in our Mosaix Group,
  + recruiting me to co-teach a multi-ethnic conversations group focusing on race and ethnicity, and
  + placing me on the most controversial murder trial in Washington DC that I believe will nationally change case law for transgender women who defend themselves—***even if it results in the death of a partner through self-defense***—from domestic violence.
* All of this in five months. Wow! God works fast. Where do I begin?
* Let’s start. ***I never understood what it meant to be “called by God—much less called His Disciple.”*** Yes, I’ve heard the stories in the bible of these callings, and I’ve participated in listening to testimonies of God’s calling, BUT I had to ask myself, “Has God called me? Did I hear Him correctly? Did He call me daughter--even more, Beloved? Let’s hold that thought, and we’ll return to that a little later.
* Next, ***I have called God—numerous times. “Hello, God, this Tonya again.”*** Yes, I am very familiar with CALLING GOD.
* So how are my listening skills? Well, sometimes, I hear from him and other times NOT. I often wondered was I not “still and quiet” enough to hear God among *all the noise of the world*. Perhaps, God called me, and there was a busy signal, OR maybe God called me, and I forgot, and I placed him on hold to complete my Amazon order! 😊
* I mentioned earlier that I had been a member of Christ Lutheran Church since 2004—16 years. Am I even that old? As I have seasoned in my journey, I understand NOW how he calls me.
* ***To explain this clearly, however, I need to take you on a journey. My journey begins with God sending me a personal memorandum. He used a benign and straightforward “ask” with his memo.***

**MY FIRST CALLING TO BE A DISCIPLE**: “I CALL YOU BY NAME—BELOVED, DAUGHTER, MY CHILD”

* God has a great sense of humor; funny enough, he used Pastor Lee with her bright and cheery demeanor to throw me off course. I am usually a lot quicker, but my senses are not as sharp these days.
* Lee asked me to participate in a group called Moisax. Then (if that was not enough), she asked me to co-lead a group discussion over three months dealing with multi-ethnic conversations. What was I thinking to say, “Yes?”
* As busy as I am, the answer to both questions should have been “a polite No,” but God and Holy Spirit had another plan.
* I realized this “spiritual walk” we are all on is where we connect with Mark 1:9-20 and it begins with Jesus calling us to be disciples. ***I accepted my first calling by becoming a member of Moisax.***
* What is Mosaix? Mosaix is described as a larger group that would confront issues of race/ethnicity/privilege within the context of the “Church.” By confronting these issues, the “Church” could heal, procure a more diverse membership and even SURVIVE and avoid becoming a “dying church”--a church that loses so much membership that it ceases to exist.”
* ***This assignment is a critical direction from God in an age of divisiveness, and within a western country that still propagates “separate and unequal.”***
* Under this giant umbrella, Christ Lutheran Church would confront issues of race/ethnicity and economics within our walls and inside our city. It sounds simple enough! Sign me up. This assignment is more stringent than I envisioned. I struggled.
* My inner conflict tore at my soul because achieving this assignment, means I would have to show deep pain and unjust treatment—whether overtly or covertly. I would have to go deep, digging out all my “masks,” and laying them out for display! These are the same masks that protected me from insensitive comments about my educational background, my age, my weight, can I afford a gym, do I really live NW, my hairstyles or clothes…the list goes on.
* My battle is that I did not want to discuss race, ethnicity, economics, and my thoughts about being an African American woman in a sea of White privilege. I THOUGHT IT TOO PERSONAL. “Why should my pain be your entertainment.”
* I also do not want to reveal my economic and political privileges growing up in Michigan as a Black person. It was the “Alice and Wonderland” moment for me, falling down the rabbit hole—where I had to educate Whites that Black Republicans were part of the Lincoln Republican party. My grandparents were not offered a selective membership among the Dixiecrats!
* Questions and more explanations are what I feared.
* So, what next, Christ Lutheran was asking me to represent *their diversity, volunteer, and mobilize for impact and change in the name of racial and economic inclusion! As Martin Luther King is famously quoted, “We shall overcome,” but this time during the twenty-first century!*
* Except, where are dogs and hoses of the 1950s and 1960s? You mean all I had to do is stand up and be a crusader for racial, ethnic, and economic inclusion, all in the name of creating a cross-cultural Kingdom. Is this what God was calling me to do? Hey, God, it’s Tonya again. Did you call me?
* So, I accepted the calling. I decided to join Mosaix and dive deep into the racial/multi-ethnic issues involving the “Church.”
* What I’ve learned in sharing issues of race relations inside a country that has not learned from its *first waves of pain*—through slavery, war, and now isolation blanketed in a Let’s Make America Great Again” cocoon--is that allocating my authentic stories, heightens the sensitivity and brings people together.
* These stories shape who I am as an African American woman, and I’ve learned to accept that years of collective racial pain does not have an antidote. There will always be a “dull soreness” underneath the surface of those whose ancestors suffered under the cruelty of racism and economic exclusion.
* The pain can only be relieved (never really cured) by God’s people—creating a *change/action* that breaks down ***the fear of difference and economic stratification dividers***that keep us apart.
* How serendipitous it is that I am sharing these thoughts a week before the nation celebrates Martin Lutheran King's birthday. King was an eloquent speaker but he was really about action.
* Our Mosaix group is about action. I learned through the Mosaix group was that CLC wants to survive the next decade, even thrive in the next century. I believe CLC intends to be the ACTION/CHANGE. I would not be here for 16 years if I thought differently.
* So, my overall thoughts, our church is taking steps to reach outside our walls and includes other types of worship—through music or parishioner sermons (like this one), or genuinely accepting different members at diverse economic levels. These ideals are what MOSAIX REPRESENTS. We continue our work and invite any of you to add to ideas of diversifying the services through your thoughts and ideas.

**MY SECOND CALLING TO BE A DISCIPLE****:** “I CALL YOU BY NAME—BELOVED, DAUGHTER, MY CHILD”

* My second calling after Mosaix was from the Washington DC Superior Court to serve on jury duty one rainy, cold November day in 2019. Easy enough. One day or one petit trial. So, they say.
* My thoughts were, out of nearly 100 people, I was selected to serve jury duty today only, I will be dismissed, and not recall the inconvenience until the NEXT two years and four months. I would have fulfilled my duty in upholding our democratic values in the court system.
* This is not what happened. Again, God had another plan. I knew something was wrong when in the middle of day one, the judge described the case being a trial, where the Government charged a transgender woman named KeKe Baker or Sean Baker with murder.
* The courtroom murmured, and the electricity of excitement was in the air about the 2016 murder.
* The blood drained from my face and I looked ashen and not prepared to judge the fate of another person for this indictment. Sure, I’ve been selected once to be part of a jury. However, it was a slip and fall case—NOT MURDER.
* Yes, I’ve read Agatha Christie books and enjoyed Miss Marple detective episodes on PBS—BUT THIS WAS A REAL MURDER.
* Once jury duty ran into day two and the judge and lawyers were haggling over potential jurors, I decide to run to the ladies' room, locking myself in a stall. I earnestly prayed to Jesus—letting him know I wasn’t sure if I (your servant) had the aptitude for this type of case. I bargained with God and suggested a couple of extra Altar Care duties and a few more coffee hour assignments. God was silent—so I thought.
* I returned to the courtroom. All I could hear as I sat still and quiet--after being called to one of the seats in the jury box—was I CALL YOU BY NAME, BELOVED, DAUGHTER, MY CHILD. I was selected the second to the last juror.
* The case involved a series of brutal beatings over a year and domestic violence claims wrapped in poverty, denial, lies, jealousy, and shame. These sad indictments led to the stabbing death of Robert (Rob) Wiggins.
* These horrific events occurred on 300 37th Street, SE in Washington DC—40 minutes away, and about 8.6 miles from Christ Lutheran Church.
* These details are hard to believe as we sit here in our lives of White or black privilege that a woman who chooses to transition is fighting for her life again. She is not only surviving the violence using basic survival tactics to make it in DC—like paying the rent with food stamps or working as an escort to keep Rob (her husband) content with drugs and alcohol.
* Whether you believe this type of lifestyle happens less than 10 miles from our church during our scrumptious coffee hours, or overabundant yard sale goods—it is happening—just on the OTHER SIDE OF DC.
* The trial was lengthy and tedious—showing us every personal, embarrassing detail of poverty and domestic violence, LBGTQ self-hatred--from Rob, the MPD, and Keke, herself.
* So, as God’s disciple, what does this mean, my daughter, my beloved, my child? Does God only serve love, honor, wealth to his “called” sons, daughters, or children of privilege?
* The answer during my journey, as I was helping to lead the jury, is that God supplies his love to us ALL. He asked me to differentiate and help others understand that it is not our job (as jurors) to pass a verdict on spiritual law. We only had to look at case law and apply the court’s rules during deliberation. ***God would handle spiritual law, accountability, and the actual truth that occurred on 300 37th Street, SE.***
* Also, God asked me to set aside my biases and privilege---no, give away some my privilege. I believe God asked me (and others) to derail the “train of pain”—for both Miss Keke and Rob (even though Rob was deceased).
* Keke’s pain became derailed when twelve (12) jurors found her NOT GUILTY. The Government simply could not prove the case—whether it was domestic violence or murder.
* Rob’s pain ceased when twelve (12) jurors took him off trial even after death. May he rest in peace. As awful the acts Rob used with his arsenal of beatings and terrifying violence, I believe God would call him son, beloved, and child of God. Rob deserves peace after death.

In closing, the lesson in Mark 1: 9-20, means God is calling us beloved—son or daughter through ***baptism. We wash away sin and wear a “newness.”***  In Galatians 3:24— “all those who are baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ…” Sometimes during our walk, the Spirit drives us OUT into the wilderness. In my journey, the Spirit drove me out of my privilege and into a world very different from one in Michigan and from the one I enjoy in Washington, DC—gentrifying and selective. The ***wilderness—where I was for forty days—tempted by Satan*** was only 8.6 miles away. God used a specific life experience to call me into His ***divine discipleship***, a journey I am still walking.

Some might debate that my “wilderness” was always at 5101 16th Street, NW--within the walls of Christ Lutheran Chruch as I wrestled (with all of you) on difficult social issues of race, ethnicity, identity, and gender—but ***Always fighting with Love***.

I CALL YOU BY NAME, BELOVED, DAUGHTER, MY CHILD. Thanks be to God.