How would you know God's voice if you heard it?

How would you describe that voice to your friends?

Would it be so clear that you'd respond with joy, knowing you were part of God's saving work in the world?

Would it be like an alarm clock waking you up to the life God wants for you? A direct conversation with the Almighty that gives you clarity and confidence, even if that clarity makes no sense to anyone else?

And how would you explain that to your family?

Or is God's voice quieter than that? A whisper. A tug in your gut. A sense that God wants to be part of your life, quietly at work as you move through your days, trusting your instincts, fumbling in the dark for a flashlight?

Or maybe God's voice comes through scripture, and that's enough. No explanations required.

For most of us, this isn't an easy question. Stories about hearing God's call are often met with skepticism, raised eyebrows, or laughter. It takes courage to speak about hearing the divine. Not everyone will believe you. Some may even discourage you. It can get you into trouble.

I know this from experience.

When I first sensed a call to pastoral ministry, I was in my third year of my music degree. I didn't hear a voice. The heavens didn't open. No dove descended. There was no divine announcement about my future in ministry.

I was planning to be an orchestra conductor. That was the dream. The call I experienced away from that path wasn't dramatic, but it was real. It was a strong sense that my life was about to change in ways I hadn't planned. And I needed to pay attention.

What surprised me was how little affirmation I received when I told people that perhaps God was calling me to be a pastor as my life's calling. Friends, teachers, and colleagues didn't encourage me. Some actively discouraged me.

My conducting professor, who had been mentoring me toward a career in music, reacted strongly. When I told her I was considering seminary, she stood up, pointed her finger at me, and said, "I forbid it!"

After that, our relationship changed. Opportunities disappeared. It felt as though I had wasted her time.

The campus pastor's response wasn't much warmer. When I told him I thought God was calling me to ministry, he said, "Well, I suppose there's no harm in that."

At the time, I was Anglican, so I met with my bishop to ask about the path to ordination. I was told there were too many clergy. I'd need to wait ten years after seminary before receiving a parish. Other bishops told me the same thing.

Door after door closed.

I began to wonder if everyone else was right. Was this really God's call, or was I just talking to myself? If God was calling me, why was it so hard? Why was there so much resistance?

Graduation was four months away. I had to decide.

Eventually, I met with Eastern Synod staff in the ELCIC. There was no fanfare. But there was something better: openness. I was encouraged to keep discerning. I was given room to listen.

And so I entered seminary in the fall of 1995 and trusted God with the rest.

What happened next surprised me. Up until seminary, I supported myself through music. Then, suddenly, the work stopped. The phone stopped ringing. When my final composition commissions were finished, there was silence.

It felt like a quiet announcement: one life had ended, and another had begun. I felt severed from who I had been. It was lonely. But it was also a strange kind of confirmation.

I imagine that's something like what the first disciples experienced.

James and John left their father Zebedee and the family business with just two words from Jesus: "Follow me." We often romanticize that moment, but it had consequences. Zebedee lost his sons. The business suffered. Their decision likely looked reckless.

Following Jesus always has repercussions.

But Jesus saw something in them: a hunger for a new world, compassion for the hurting, a softness of heart. And so he called them.

What about you?

If you're here, it's because God has already placed a claim on your life. In baptism, Jesus said to you, "Follow me," and you did.

But how do you hear that call now? Through scripture? Through the Spirit's quiet nudging? Through the wisdom of community? Or are you still waiting, unsure what to listen for?

God's call can be unsettling. And it doesn't end. I don't know what God will ask of me tomorrow, let alone years from now. But I do know this: I have been drawn into God's work of healing and hope. Wherever God leads, I go as a beloved child of God, bearing light into a world that can be painfully dark.

And the same is true for you.

You have been caught in God's net. God has a call on your life. Through your gifts, your compassion, your presence, God is already bringing healing into the world. That is your ministry. That is the work of God's beloved community.

God has hold of your life and will not let go. A hand reaching from eternity has found you and drawn you into the life God desires for you, so that God may be glorified through who you are and what you do.

Following Jesus is a life of service and transformation. It is good news embodied. It is a new way of seeing the world, others, and yourself.

Jesus saw something in you worth sharing. A hunger for justice that refuses to accept the world as it is. A tenderness toward suffering that notices what others overlook. A compassion that does not turn away when things get uncomfortable or complicated.

Jesus did not call you because you were perfect or certain or fully formed. He called you because you have what the world needs.

And so Jesus said to you, “Follow me.” Not as a demand, but as an invitation into a deeper life. A life shaped by mercy more than fear, by courage more than certainty, by love more than self-protection.

Following Jesus does not mean having all the answers. It means trusting that the One who calls you knows your name, knows your gifts, and knows the particular way the world will be healed through your presence. And step by step, often without clarity, you followed.

Because of Jesus, God’s light shines through you. Not because you are flawless or fearless, but because Christ has drawn near and refuses to let darkness have the final word.

In Jesus, God has stepped into human life, into ordinary bodies and fragile stories, and declared that love is stronger than sin, mercy stronger than fear, and life stronger than death.

The light that shines through you is not self-generated; it is the risen life of Christ moving through broken people who have been claimed by grace.

The Kingdom of Heaven has come near. Not as an abstract idea or a distant promise, but as a living reality breaking into the world wherever Jesus is followed.

It comes near when forgiveness interrupts resentment, when justice disrupts cruelty, when compassion refuses to look away.

It comes near in kitchens and hospital rooms, in board meetings and classrooms, in quiet acts of courage no one else sees. Wherever Christ is trusted and love is chosen, the reign of God is already at work.

Among us, God's light has shone. In this community, in these lives, in this shared story, God is doing something real and redemptive.

We are not waiting for God to arrive; God is already here. Christ is alive among us, calling, healing, sending. And because of Jesus, the world is being remade, one faithful step at a time. Thanks be to God.

May it continue to be so. Amen.