

Preached by Dr. Syl Lorenzo Shannon
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, Virginia
August 23, 2009
Celebration of Dr. Rush's 25th Anniversary of Ordination

Isaiah 43:8–13
John 15:1–17

CHRIST'S CALL TO MINISTRY **God Calls — Our Answers**

These texts were used on Sunday, August 19, 1984, at First Presbyterian Church in High Point, North Carolina when our pastor, The Reverend Dr. Carl A. Rush was first called into the ministry. Twenty five years ago these ancient words made sense and they still make sense today.

Don't be afraid for I am with you. I will gather you from east and west, from north and south. I will bring my sons and daughters back to Israel from the farthest corners of the earth. All who claim me as their God will come, for I have made them for my glory; I created them. Bring them back to me— blind as they are and deaf when I call (although they see and hear).

[Isaiah 43: 5-8]

God calls. Carl answers. You and I, we answer too. Let's be honest. Sometimes we see and hear. . .but we do not listen. I mean we do not heed God's word. Of all our physical faculties, we probably cherish the ability to see the most. We would rather lose our hearing, or our ability to speak, or even our arms or legs than to lose our sight. To help us see more we have developed the microscope and the telescope. We have spent millions and millions on motion pictures, and now television is one of the largest industries.

We love to see and hear. Yet, too often---when the opportunity is before us: *we do not listen nor do we see*. Carl comes to us as a witness for God. Christ called him. He calls us. He reminds us each week. Our intentions are noble. You know what I mean. Someone calls us on the phone. We listen for a moment, but the cares and worries that were ours before we picked up the receiver, invade. When we hang up the phone, for the life of ourselves we can not remember what it was our neighbor called about. The concern and passion of our friend eludes us. Not all the time. But much too often. So we hear; but we do not heed. And we do the same thing with God.

Here we are in God's house ... celebrating another Sabbath. Singing all the right tunes and listening to the right words. However, will this experience spill over into our Monday to Saturday living? Jesus says: *"Yes, I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in me and I in him shall produce a large crop of fruit. For apart from me you can't do a thing.* [John 15:5]. When I re-read this again this week, I realized anew that we focus on the wrong ends.

A preacher/pastor/teacher has an awesome responsibility. Thank God! Carl has taken this calling seriously. He even earned a doctorate degree during his first twenty-five

years as Minister of Word and Sacrament. He is the senior servant in our midst. I love thinking about that when I sit down in the pew. He models Christ before us and repeats the ancient words and stories: *If you stay in me and obey my commands, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! My true disciples produce bountiful harvest. This brings great glory to my Father.* [John 15:7, 8]

Christ's words become Carl's words and in turn our words, too. This Holy Book has great and rich meanings. If we all could only learn to take Him at His Word. One Hymn writer said: *Take the name of Jesus with you ... child of sorrow and of woe ... take it then where ever you go. Precious Name ... Oh, How Sweet.* I wish the churches and temples of the world could focus on the Word. Wonderful buildings and exciting programs are necessary; but it is the Word of God that saves men and women and boys and girls.

If you and I would take the selected texts of each Sunday seriously. Focus on them at least two or three times during our week. Our lives would be richer and stronger. We would find rest for our souls.

A great preacher of by-gone years, Doctor Charles L. Allen tells of a man who came to see him. If you could look at the man who came to see him, you would think he never had had a worry in his life. Big, strong, manly, successful in business, he owns a nice home, has a lovely family, and is highly respected by his friends. So Dr. Allen was surprised when the man told him that he was sick. This great Texas pastor suggested that the man see his physician.

But he had already been, and, after a number of tests and examinations, his physician had told him he was in perfect physical health. But the man kept insisting that something was wrong with him. So the physician said that the man should go and see his pastor.

Dr. Allen asked the man about his trouble; it was that he could not sleep at night. He told the pastor that he had not had a full night's sleep in six months. The pastor named some current book on how to sleep (the book was having a good sale). The man had already read the book, and it had not helped. Then the pastor asked about his bad habits—but he seemed to have a lot fewer than the pastor—so he dropped that approach. He asked about his conscience, but was assured that the man had done nothing that was disturbing him.

Pastor Allen told the man he was not alone in his problem. Every night over six and half million Americans took a "sleeping tablet," but the man said he had taken so many that even those did not help him any more. Pastor Allen thought of giving the man one of his sermons to read at night—he noticed a good many people had gone to sleep while he was preaching. The pastor even suggested that he go to church every Sunday night (they were Texas Methodists—we Presbyterians don't believe in night church any more).

Pastor Allen continued to talk with the man. Here is what the man concluded: *"I have everything a man should want in life, but I am just plain scared and I do not know why I am scared."*

Pastor Allen took a sheet of paper and wrote across the top of it these words: **"HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS."** He handed the man the sheet of paper and told him to put it in his pocket and before he went to bed that night to write down under the quotation everything he thought it meant and what ever related thoughts it brought to mind. Then he was to put the paper in his dresser drawer. The following night he was to take out what he had written, read it over, and add whatever additional thoughts had come to him. He was to keep this up for a week and then come back to see the pastor.

Sisters and Brothers, Boys and Girls...Friends: There is no nerve medicine on this earth that can be compared to or with still, cool waters. I wish I could tell you that the man returned to see the pastor in a week ... but the truth is he never returned at all. He may have felt that he was too important for such a simple little exercise. I am a witness, Carl, and I am sure you are, too. God uses the ordinary to accomplish the extra ordinary. Stay connected to the Vine—The True Vine, and keep dispensing the True and Lively Word so that your 50th Ordination Anniversary will be as rich as this 25th Ordination Anniversary. As Longfellow put it, *"Sit in reverie, and watch the changing color of the waves that break upon the idle seashore of the mind."* AMEN.

This sermon was preached on August 23, 2009, to celebrate the 25th Ordination Anniversary of The Rev. Dr. Carl A. Rush, Pastor, Bush Hill Presbyterian Church. The sermon was written and delivered by The Rev. Dr. Syl Lorenzo Shannon, honorably retired Presbyterian Minister of Word and Sacrament, former Pastor, The Pentagon Pulpit and Pastor Emeritus, Siloam Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, New York.