

Ashley St. Pierre
God's Calling

(First shared during a Fall 2021 Chapel service)

Five years ago, if you had asked me where I might be in the future, I would not have said seminary. For the majority of my adult life, I have been working as a jazz singer and an artist, and teaching music on the side. But unexpectedly, God has called me here to MDC and into something new, something I can only catch a hazy glimpse of right now, but that wonderful foggy glimpse is enough, because of who it is that has called me into it.

Four years ago, in the midst of praying and fasting for Lent, I heard my name called out loud in the early morning and went downstairs to see who it was that was calling me. No one in the house had called my name. I told my husband about this, who was out of the house that morning, and knowing that God had been speaking to me in vivid ways that season already, he directed me to 1 Samuel 3 and suggested that if I heard my name called again, to respond. Five days later, I heard my name called again in the early morning and so this time I responded, fumbling terribly with a Samuel like response, not knowing what to say except "I am here, Lord. I am your servant, and I am listening." And I heard a voice back, audible and clear, soft yet trumpetlike, coming from behind me on my righthand side, "Speak!". God continued to make His presence known in various ways throughout that entire season of Lent, ending on Easter morning at 3am, but His command to speak left me wondering what exactly He wanted me to do in response.

Now 'speak' can mean many things and I am still praying for clarity and direction, but as I struggled through the years with what all of this might mean – as I doubted, and questioned, and gave all the excuses, and eventually bowed in submission, still unsure but trusting, it became clear that I needed to take some action even in my waiting. The need to respond pressed and weighed upon my heart so much that I couldn't bare it any longer. So, I began to reach out to a few Christian friends and pastors to tell them about what had happened and ask for their advice. Through them, a call was confirmed, and a way forward was suggested: study and prepare and trust that God will work it out along the way.

So, earlier this year, after a lot of prayer, I applied for the Master of Divinity program here at MDC. One friend had even suggested that I reach out to a particular professor there. Upon receiving my acceptance letter, I learned that that very professor was selected to be my program mentor. Before I could even reach out to her, God orchestrated it for me.

The night before I applied, I prayed, asking for guidance. Before I could even finish my sentence, God responded as gently as ever with "I AM", and I crumbled into tears. "I AM. I am guiding you. I am the Good Shepherd. I am the bread of life. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I AM WHO I AM." All of this came flooding through these two words in an instant and I was grateful beyond words to be in the presence of the great I AM, who is also our loving, nourishing, intimate, Shepherd and Father. The next morning, I prayed again and the image of Jesus calling

Peter to step out onto the water came to my mind, and I prayed, “Don’t let me fall!” And He responded, “Keep your eyes on me.” I laughed and cried and submitted my application.

Boy did I need that image and that conversation. As I started my first week of school, I found myself drowning, overwhelmed by the amount of time needed for a masters – time I did not have as I cared for a toddler during a pandemic. And overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy. On my second day, I cried the whole drive home. And yet, I was grateful, because this left me in a state where I *had* to rely on God. By the end of the week, I also knew that I needed to make some adjustments. So, I prayerfully dropped one of my courses and sought out some further childcare options to give myself an extra sliver of time through the week that I could devote to studying.

Since then, things have not gone completely smoothly, but I am not drowning. I am beginning to find my footing on the water and whenever those feelings of inadequacy appear, I remember that God has called me here – the only thing that qualifies me – and that God uses inadequate people. So, no matter what circumstances or pressures or disappointments I might face, I am confident that He will lead me where He wants me. All I need to do is obey, trust, press on, and engage in watchful waiting. Some days, going to class feels like walking into a refining fire. This means it is a struggle because the fire is uncomfortable. But every time I find myself walking back with joy after class.

When Jesus calls us to step out on the water with Him, He often doesn’t tell us where we’re going, except that it is *towards Him*. And so, I’m keeping my eyes on Jesus, taking one step at a time, letting Him lead and light my feet. I don’t know where these studies are going, but I have a loving powerful guide who knows me by name, and calls each of us to Himself.