

Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 22, 2017
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 4:12-23 (NIV)

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. 13) Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—14) to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 15) "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—16) the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." 17) **From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."** 18) As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19) **"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."** 20) At once they left their nets and followed him. 21) Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22) and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. 23) **Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.**

Fellow followers of Christ;

There's a game children play called "Marco Polo." Here's how it works. One child closes their eyes or is blindfolded. That boy or girl is "the seeker." The other children walk, or run or swim around calling out, "Marco Polo." The seeker has to try to find and tag the other children by following their voices. In our sermon text Jesus calls out to people who at one time were spiritually blind. Today as we listen to this text

Theme: Jesus Calls Us

1. To Repent
2. To Follow Him
3. To Bless Us

This text took place about a year after Jesus was baptized. At this time, John the Baptist had been put in prison because he called upon the king to repent of his sins of divorce and adultery. (Free speech wasn't one of the rights which John enjoyed!)

This event marked the beginning of Jesus ministry in Galilee. **Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—14) to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 15) "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—16) the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."** Matthew makes a point of showing us that the OT prophet had announced that the promised Savior would bring light to the people of this area. Galilee at the time of Jesus was an area inhabited by people with mixed racial and religious backgrounds. They no longer looked to the Scriptures for enlightenment. Jesus came to call them back to the truth.

Perhaps we might wonder why Matthew makes such a big deal about the fact that Jesus left Nazareth and lived in Capernaum. One of the reasons for this is because the popular belief among the Jews of Jesus day was that the Messiah would carry out his work in Judea in the area of Jerusalem. Many accepted this tradition without searching the Scriptures for themselves. Matthew's emphasis contains a warning for each of us. We dare not be content with blindly following what our parents or what the church teaches – we need to diligently study the Scriptures for ourselves so that we are able to follow Jesus.

Jesus message was similar to the message of John – Matthew tells us in our text that Jesus preached: **Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.** Jesus calls us to repent. By nature, you and I are followers of the Devil. We live a life of sin. Sin affects all that we do. It leads us farther and farther away from God's will for our lives. It separates us from God and cuts us off from our relationship with him.

Jesus calls us to repentance – urging us to turn our lives away from sin and toward righteousness. Such a change begins in the heart, but it doesn't stop there. This change permeates our lives. It's important that we realize that Jesus isn't talking about a one-time event. Repentance is an on-going process -- a continual setting aside of sin and a continual turning toward righteousness.

Such changes are possible only through the working of the Holy Spirit who calls us to faith through the Gospel – the good news that the Kingdom of heaven is near. For years, the Jewish people had been waiting for the promised Savior – for the kingdom of God to arrive. Jesus tells them – there's good news – the kingdom of heaven is near. Stop looking forward to the coming of the Savior. Look at me and see the Savior.

Among those who looked and saw Jesus as Savior were two brothers: Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They lived in Capernaum where Jesus had established his "headquarters." They had previously been John's disciples who followed Jesus and spent time with him after John had identified him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. They had been with Jesus at the Wedding in Cana where he performed his first miracle but now they had returned to their homes and their vocations. Now Matthew tells us that Jesus called them to not only to follow him but to serve him. He had a new life in mind for them. 18) As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19) "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

It was a normal thing for an individual who was a teacher to gather students or disciples to be followers or learners. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew he certainly planned to instruct them as their master teacher. But this call was not just a call to learn. It was also a call to do! They were common everyday laborers and workers but Jesus would equip them to be fishers of men. He would teach them what they needed to know. They would see his miraculous powers. They would behold his empty tomb. The Holy Spirit would provide them with the gifts they would need for the gathering of men into the kingdom of God. Already now they knew Jesus as their Lord and Savior – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Whatever else they lacked would be given them.

We've spend a fair amount of time talking about the calling of Peter and Andrew. The calling of two other brothers James and John is also reported in this text. They too, were fishermen. These four are not the only ones who have been called to follow Jesus. By God's grace, we also have been called through the gospel to be Jesus' followers.

Just as these men did not seek out Jesus so we did not seek out Jesus. Jesus came and found them. You and I didn't go out look for Jesus either. But, he found us. As Luther puts it: "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him ... but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one true faith."

Our sinful nature made it impossible for us to come to Jesus – but through the Gospel our mind was changed about sin. We were lead to repentance and called to follow our Savior. When we talked about the disciples in our text we never once mentioned anything about them that made them special. There wasn't anything about them that made them worthy to be called as Jesus' disciples. They had no special qualities which made them fit to become fishers of men. And when we consider ourselves we realize that we in no way earned or deserved our call to faith. It is only by the grace of God that you and I have become redeemed children of God. Jesus trained and equipped the men he called. He still equips his follows today with his Word.

With that Word and with his Sacrament he strengthens us. He shapes us through trials and adversity and draws us closer to him. Just as the Lord called Peter, Andrew, James and John into full-time and unconditional service so our calling as Christians is similar. There are no part time Christians – Christians are those who those who hold to Jesus teaching and who love each other and who display fruits of faith in their lives.

When Jesus says: Come follow me, we will do what he asks. Notice and learn from the reaction of Peter and Andrew, James and John. At once, Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed when Jesus called. James and John immediately left the boat and their father and followed Jesus. Surely they loved their families but they also loved their Savior. It's important to realize that the Lord hasn't called each of us away from our occupations as he did these four men. But the Lord does call some to be full time workers in his church. It is my joy and my privilege to serve the Lord as I serve as your pastor. The Lord has called me through you to serve him in this way. And the Lord may have in mind for some the young children here to serve him as pastors or Christian teachers – to be fishers of men. I'd like to encourage the parents in this congregation to encourage your children to consider such service. Help them to see your joy in living for the Lord. Help them to appreciate the wonderful blessings the Lord pours out upon others through the full time workers in the church. Let them learn all they can from Jesus and then if the Lord leads them to pursue training for full time ministry – assist them in getting the proper education at schools which can prepare them for this ministry and rejoice with them if the Lord ultimately leads them into full time church work.

Rejoice with them also if it becomes clear that the Lord has other ways for them to serve him. For all of us are the Lord's servants regardless of our occupations and careers.

Every Christian follows Jesus as he lives his life in keeping with Jesus' teachings. We follow Jesus as we apply the law to our lives and use it as a guideline. We follow Jesus as consider what he says about our various positions in life. The Scriptures talk about children and parent relationships, husband and wife relationships, employee and employer relationship. We follow Jesus as we follow what the Scriptures say to us as children or parents or husband or wives.

We follow Jesus as we show our love for his Word and our love for our fellow Christians. That is a part of our lives as Christians. We follow Jesus as we serve in his church gladly and willingly using our talents whatever they may be for the welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We follow Jesus as we go with his word to encourage one another and to lead others to Christ. We do what Jesus asks as a joyous response to the Lord's call: Come follow me.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. As Jesus traveled throughout Galilee calling people to repent and to follow him he was also calling them to be blessed. His blessings were evident in the lives of those who heard his teaching and preaching. His blessings were evident in the lives of those whom he healed and cured from their diseases and sicknesses.

Jesus calls us to bless us. As we listen to his teachings, we are guided in the truth. When Jesus proclaims the good news to us we are assured of the forgiveness of our sins and comforted with the assurance of a place in God's kingdom. We are invited us to call upon God in the day trouble and need with the promise that he will hear and deliver. We can come to him with our sickness and diseases confident that he can provide us with a cure if that is his will for us. He will enable us to cope with the challenges of those illnesses if he determines that this is what is best for us. The promises of his grace will enable us to accept our own weaknesses as we express our appreciation for his many blessings.

Because Jesus calls to us we are no longer living in the dark blindly trying to find our way through this life. By grace, we live a life of repentance as we follow Jesus and enjoy his blessings. Amen.