

January 22, 2023

Matthew 4:12-25

“Let’s Go Fishing!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today happens to be the Third Sunday after the Epiphany. What does the word “epiphany” mean? It means manifestation. Suddenly, something becomes perceivable and meaningful. Our Old Testament lesson strikes the keynote. Here we are brought to the “the fundamental or central fact, idea, or mood of what is considered.” The prophet Isaiah writes: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone (Is. 9:2).”

In our Old Testament lesson, darkness emerges as the problem and light as the solution. But what kind of darkness and light are we talking about? Of Jesus it is said, “... the light shines in the darkness ...” The danger for all of us is that the light comes into the world and we love our evil works and so remain in the darkness of rebellion and death. As Jesus says: “For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” Epiphany takes us to the works of God which are light in the Lord Jesus Christ. For all of us who believe, we come into the light that we may see what God has done for us in the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth. And for those who do not believe we pray that it is a time of great discovery.

For everyone it means repentance. It means to die and rise with Jesus who is the light of life. It means to see how sin is utterly sinful, and how impossible it is for us to save ourselves. It means that Jesus reveals himself to us in his person and work, so that we may be delivered from the horrible darkness that is everywhere around us and even found within. Let’s face it. Times are dark. And whether you are a believer or not, our thoughts betray us in the light of God’s Word. Our thought world reveals the same darkness in us that we so readily condemn in others.

It is to those who look around at society and see how bad things are becoming that Jesus speaks a word of hope. Jesus speaks a comforting word to those who look deep down inside of themselves and are hit by their guilt and are afraid of facing death and everlasting punishment. To the spiritually sick, there is the promise of becoming healthy both spiritually and physically - spiritually today and physically in the resurrection of the body. The more Jesus preaches and serves his creation, the brighter the light shines.

As the light of Jesus Christ increases, the true source of darkness is exposed. We go to the cross and see the true source of darkness when we come to realize that it is for the sins of the world that he is there. We should be there. That’s our punishment that he is baptized with, and the cup in which he drinks is the very blood of our death and hell. Still we see that the light of Jesus increases at the cross when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we come to the realization that what is upon him is for our peace. The spilling of his blood is to atone for our death and hell that we might have life and heaven.

And so we have been called to be disciples. Baptized by the cross and empty tomb, and living in that baptism every day of our lives, is the ongoing washing away of the filth of our sins. In that cleansing we have the promise of a kingdom that will last forever. We are washed into a new creation - a new start - a new life - that brings us to joy. As disciples we also drink a cup. Because Jesus drank the cup of our

death, we drink in the Sacrament of the Altar the cup of immortality. We eat a food and drink a drink that overturns the rebellious eating of the garden. Jesus and the cross is a tree of life prepared for sinners who need the forgiveness of sins. And though we are not apostles, as Jesus chose the twelve, we are disciples who like the apostles of old are invited to follow Jesus. We are invited to abide in his word and live in the glorious freedom of forgiveness and the anticipation that one day we will be completely delivered from all evil - both the evil without and the evil within!

A woman was anxious and afraid as she lay in the hospital bed and talked about her illness with her pastor. And yet it wasn't her illness that bothered her the most. It was the feeling of guilt that haunted her as she remember her past. "Does God love and forgive me, pastor, in spite of what I've done?" she asked. To this the pastor quietly responded, "Now you are beginning to understand what the gospel is truly all about. Neither you nor I deserve it, but God still loves, forgives, heals, and gives life."

This is the call that the Lord Jesus extends to each and everyone of us. As it says in our gospel lesson: Jesus "went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." By the wounds of Jesus we are healed. First, our dead relationship with him is healed. Secondly, he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows so that all consequences of sin, including physical ailments, will be removed from us in death and resurrection. Does God love you and has he forgiven you for what you have done? Yes! You and I don't deserve anything from God, but in his one and only Son he has forgiven us for all of our sins and has healed us in every way, even giving us forever life!

This is what has been manifested to us in the gospel and sacraments. Jesus has made himself known to you and me by the power of his Holy Spirit. This has come to us by his loving Father in heaven. How will it be that what has been so graciously manifested to us will be manifested to others? In our gospel lesson we are told that when Jesus called his first apostles they were fishermen and he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." And then it says: "immediately they left their nets and followed him."

A fancy theological term that some pastors use for mission work is "halieutics." I'm only using the term to hopefully get your attention, if I don't have it already. I don't expect anyone to ever remember it. The word simply means "fishing." It is true to say that our mission is the task of fishing in the sea of people who do not know or believe in the good news of Jesus Christ - those living in darkness. The sea is full of them. The hope of any fisherman is to get the fish into the boat. The boat can be understood as the Christian church where the Word of God is preached in its truth and purity and the sacraments are instituted according to Christ's command and promise.

The time of Epiphany is a time of manifestation. Thus, we emphasize that Jesus is not only the light of the world, but that we have been sent into the world to make him manifest to others using the means of grace. Jesus is the only light of the world, but because we have been illuminated by him through his good Spirit and means of grace, he says this to each and everyone of us: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it

gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).”

Now please don't misunderstand. The challenge that Jesus gives to us is to fish. The catching is left up to him. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can create and preserve faith. But you and I have been chosen as instruments of Jesus to proclaim his law and gospel to others. How can people know if no one tells them? Pastors preach publicly. You proclaim in your everyday vocations. You speak to and invite others in everyday life. You and I have been chosen to speak of what we ourselves have believed in the commandments and creed, so that light may overcome the darkness in the hearts of others. That means that God has made us miracle workers. By the words we speak and the lives we live and the invitations we make by mouth or by letter we are about the business of raising the spiritually dead unto newness of life.

Many years ago a minister shared a tongue in cheek story. He was asked how many active members there were in his 1,000 member congregation. Without hesitating he replied, “I have 1,000 active members. About 200 are active for the Lord, and the other 800 are active for Satan.” May this remind us here at Pilgrim of the serious nature of our calling - to receive the gospel and sacraments and use them for others. We have more than just a job to do - we have a great honor and privilege that God has made us fishers of people. But if we are not casting out the net and throwing in the line, then what exactly is the reason as to why we are still here in this unbelieving world? Again, the words of Jesus, “Let your light shine before others!” For those of us who are being saved, the word of the cross is a beautiful light. It is the power of God. **Let's Go Fishing!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott