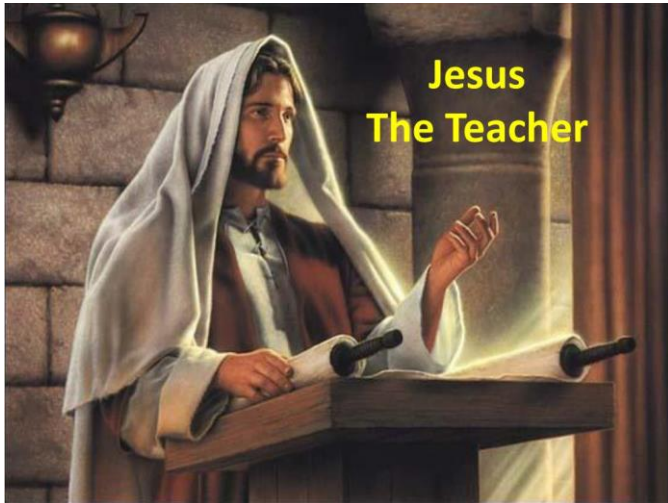


THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JANUARY 22, 2023



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Rev. Rosemary Captain

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Come, all who have known gloom and anguish.

Come, all who have walked amid terrors of the night.

Sometimes we have felt oppressed and forsaken.

Our losses seem greater than we can bear.

God is our light and our salvation.

God is our stronghold; we need not fear.

Enemies lose their power when we look up to God.

We come now, seeking God's face.

Come, behold the beauty of our God.

Come to find shelter in a day of trouble.

We will sing and make melody to God.

We will dare to lift up shouts of joy.

***INVOCATION:**

Shine on us today, gracious God, for we need the light and salvation you offer. Come to each one gathered here, and to all who are part of this community of faith. Come to our city, our nation, our world, to still the quarrels and dissolve the enmity among us. Come with good news of health and wholeness for everyone. Do not cast us off, do not forsake us, O God of our salvation. Amen.

***CALL TO CONFESSION:**

Jesus came to Galilee with the message of John the Baptist; "Repent, for God's realm has come near." His invitation went out to common everyday folks; "Follow me." We, too, are called to repent and to follow.

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

Turn our lives around, God. Help us to identify in ourselves those parts of us that need to change if we are to experience your joy. Too long we have been hiding in the shadows, reluctant to express our faith. Too long we have shunned the light, afraid of what might be exposed. Too long we have avoided people with whom we have a

**quarrel, refusing to build bridges across our differences.
Save us from ourselves that we may enjoy your realm.
Amen.**

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:**

Light has come. Salvation is poured out on those who accept it. God is gracious and reaches out to welcome us. We are free to accept the invitation to follow Jesus. There is good news of forgiveness and healing to be shared. Let's do it.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 4:12-23**

Move to Galilee

¹² Now when Jesus heard that John was arrested, he went to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum, which lies alongside the sea in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ This fulfilled what Isaiah the prophet said: ¹⁵ *Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, alongside the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, ¹⁶the people who lived in the dark have seen a great light, and a light has come upon those who lived in the region and in shadow of death.* Isa 9:1-2

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to announce, "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!"

Calling of the first disciples

¹⁸ As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, because they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," he said, "and I'll show you how to fish for people." ²⁰ Right away, they left their nets

and followed him. ²¹ Continuing on, he saw another set of brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father repairing their nets. Jesus called them and ²² immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Ministry to the crowds

²³ Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues. He announced the good news of the kingdom and healed every disease and sickness among the people.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches:

Thanks be to God, Amen.

MESSAGE: "Jesus Begins His Ministry"

For being only 11 verses, our Gospel lesson for today is jam-packed with activity. So, let's unpack these verses and see what we can learn about Jesus as he begins his ministry. Let's speculate as to why he makes the choices that he does.

Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been arrested. To Jesus this was the sign that it was his turn to continue John's ministry. Sort of like a relay race, the baton is passed from John to Jesus.

The first thing Jesus does is to move away from home in Nazareth. He dared to step out of his comfort zone. I wonder what would have happened, or not happened, if Jesus would have stayed in Nazareth. Maybe the people would have listened to Jesus' message. However, they probably would have gone to Jesus for help with broken furniture instead of broken souls.

Jesus decided to move to the town of Capernaum in the Galilee region. This was not a random decision by Jesus. He knew what he was doing. Galilee was not a large region but small as it was densely populated, mostly because of the fertile soil. It contained 204 villages with a population of fewer than 15,000 people. So, Jesus began his mission in that part of Palestine where there was the most people to hear him. He began his work in an area teeming with people to whom the gospel proclamation might be made.

The people of Galilee were open to new ideas. They were always ready to follow a leader and to begin an insurrection. They were quick in temper and given to quarreling. Yet for all that, they were the most brave and honorable people. These inborn characteristics of the Galileans were such as to make them most fertile ground for a new gospel to be preached to the.

So, Jesus began to preach. The word *preach* has come down in the world to be connected in the minds as many people with boredom, unfortunately. In Greek the word for preach is a word for a herald's proclamation from a king. Think of "Hark the herald angels sing". This Greek word tells us of certain characteristics of the preaching of Jesus. Thinking of the preaching of Jesus, can we recognize these characteristics.

1.) The "herald" had in his voice a note of *certainty*. There was no doubt about his message; he did not come with "perhapses" and maybes and "probablys"; he came with a definite message. Preaching is the proclamation of

certainties, and we cannot make others sure of that about which we ourselves are in doubt.

2.) The "herald" had in his voice the note of *authority*. He was speaking for the king; he was laying down and announcing the king's law, or the king's command. This is also true of a great preacher. He did not just guess; he knew. It is said that preaching is the application of prophetic authority to the present situation.

3.) The herald's message came from a *source beyond himself*; it came from the king. Preaching speaks from a source beyond the preacher. It is not the expression of one individual's personal opinions; it is the voice of God transmitted through that person to the people. It was with the voice of God that Jesus spoke to men and women.

The message of Jesus consisted of a command which was the consequence of a new situation. Repent!" he said. "Turn from your own ways, and turn to God. Reverse your direction and stop walking away from God and begin walking towards God." That command had become urgently necessary because the reign of God was about to begin.

One last decision by Jesus that I wanted to talk about. This involves who he called to go with him in his ministry. He first called on four fishermen. Jesus called on these men to follow him. They were not men of great scholarship, or influence, or wealth, or social background. They were not poor; they were simple, working people with no great background, and certainly, anyone would have said, with no great future. Are you surprised by Jesus' decision?

Why fishermen? It has been pointed out by many scholars that those who are good at fishing must possess these very qualities which will make them equally good at “catching” people.

1. They must have *patience*. They must learn to wait patiently until the fish will take the bait. To become good at bringing people in, they will have need of patience. They must learn to wait.

2. They must have *perseverance*. They must learn never to be discouraged, but always to try again.

3. They must have *courage*. They must be ready to risk and to face the fury of the sea and of the gale. Good preachers and teachers must be well aware that there is always a danger in telling people the truth. Those who tell the truth, more often than not, take their reputation and their lives in their hands.

4. Fishermen must have *an eye for the right moment*. Through experience, they know that there are times when it is hopeless to fish. They know when to cast and when not to cast. Good preachers and teachers chose the right moment. There are times when people will welcome the truth, and times when they will resent the truth. Wise preachers know that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

5. They must *fit the bait to the fish*. One fish will rise to one bait and another to another. The same approach will not win everyone.

6. They must *keep themselves out of sight*. If they make their presence too obvious or even show their own

shadows, the fish will certainly not bite. Wise preachers and teachers will always seek to present men and women not with themselves but with Jesus Christ. Their aim is to fix people’s eyes not on themselves but on that figure beyond.

So, Jesus made some decisions when he started his ministry. Do you think they were wise decisions? Can this example of Jesus help us as preachers, teachers, and Christians as we proclaim the message of Jesus to others? Do we have the courage to start? Do we have patience and perseverance?

There is one more step to help us that I didn’t mention. The first and most important step is to pray to God. Is God calling us to teach and preach and talk to others? If so, pray for guidance, strength, patience, perseverance, and courage to continue the ministry of Jesus. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

Light too dazzling for human eyes, Light in focus in human form, Light dispersed in human beings, you have increased our joy and given us great gladness. You have gathered children of the light wherever the good news is preached, and sent them out as lightbearers to those living still in the land of death’s dark shadow. We rejoice with all who have seen the light and known your healing and love.

Hear our prayers for your church and those who worship at your feet. Add to the faith of your people, knowledge and zeal and overflowing love for your Holy Spirit, that the

name of Jesus may not be scandalized by rivalries nor marred by gross errors of doctrine or practice. Heavenly Father, you created all of us by your love. You created us to love one and another. When we chose to separate ourselves via race, rich or poverty, or beliefs, or status, God is crying from grief. Holy Spirit, help us as mortal sinfull and broken people change that. Help us turn our lives around to serve God by serving others.

Into your care we commit all who are dear to us. Sustain us in our relationships of interdependence, carrying our own burden but also sharing the burden of others when it is more than they can carry. Hear our prayers for the sick, the aged, the frail, that they may know your healing strength and give thanks to you.

May we be like those who are wise, who shine like the brightness of the sky, and like those who have led many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. So may we bring glory to you, Fatherly, Brotherly, Motherly God. May we pray together the prayer your Son taught us, . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

***RESPONSIVE COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

People of light, turn to face a new week.

People of joy, enter your daily routines empowered.

God is our light and our salvation.

We will not be afraid to live our joy.

People of unity, seek to overcome divisions.

People of commitment, dare to follow Jesus.

Christ is our example and our leader.

We will care enough to fish for people.

God is gracious to us and blesses us.

We are being saved from the consequences of our sins by the power of God.

God offers us life in the heavenly realm.

We can begin to experience it here and ow.

Amen. Amen.