

From January 21st, 2023 – Epiphany 3

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

*15“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
16the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned.”*

17From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

18As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 19And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

23Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the LORD Jesus Christ.

Here we are on the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany, moving up to Ash Wednesday (Wednesday, Feb. 22nd) and Lent. Wow! Didn't we just finish unwrapping our Christmas presents?! In this week's gospel, Jesus is beginning his ministry. And yet, it's revealing, if you read the text carefully, where he *doesn't* go. He *doesn't* stay at home in Nazareth. Wouldn't you think if he were starting a new ministry, he would maybe find some people in his hometown? People he knew? People he trusted? People, and a place he was familiar with?

And he *doesn't* go to Jerusalem, the religious and probably spiritual center of the Jewish world at the time. Wouldn't it make sense for him to travel the short distance to Jerusalem to find disciples and begin his ministry there? Surely there would be any number of people there who would join him in his ministry. People who were learned in the Scriptures. People who were sympathetic to something new.

But Matthew's gospel tells us Jesus goes to Capernaum. Capernaum, some 40 miles or thereabouts, from Nazareth. By foot, a good 4 day journey through hilly and scenic terrain. And when there, he selects people who he probably doesn't even know - regular people probably. People (men) who made their living on the water. And while we can't be sure, you can only imagine that some of these guys had a past. Working on the water is a hard job - a rough and tumble job. A hardscrabble job. A job where you can imagine profanity is common among the "guys".

But this is the life and ministry of Jesus. Going where we least expect him to go. Picking people for ministry who seem the most unlikely to do that kind of work. He doesn't, choose rabbis, or teachers of the

faith, or Jewish scholars. Instead, he chooses people in the "blue collar" jobs, if you will, to carry on his ministry. He chooses to dwell among the profane in our world, rather than in the pious and sacred.

Jesus begins his ministry in places unfamiliar to him, selecting people who are unfamiliar to him. Sound familiar? That Jesus doesn't go to the cultural, the religious, the elitist centers of his world to begin his ministry is good news for us. Because this is where most of us normal folks live - in the perimeters, on the outskirts, in the shadows, if you will, of life. It is in these places, and among these people (like the disciples) that Jesus chooses to begin his ministry. People, and places that *we're* familiar with - us regular folks.

This is his ministry - the outsiders, the outside places of our world. The down and outers, that Jesus comes to touch, heal, and restore to wholeness. And that includes you and me. Thanks be to God that Jesus finds his ministry not on the inside, but on the outside of life. Symbolically, I believe that Matthew is trying to say that Jesus chooses the hard way; the difficult way; the "not so easy" way in his ministry throughout his brief ministry. He chooses to go to places you wouldn't expect him to go, to see and engage with people you wouldn't expect the son of God to go.

I suppose the ultimate symbol of this journey of Jesus to "outside" places, is hell itself, where he goes and dwells for three days (think of your Creeds), in order to route out the devil and recover lost souls. Now that's some serious going outside the expected boundaries. And he does it all for our sake. For us. Jesus goes to places that no one else wants to go to, touching and healing people no one else wants to touch or heal. And we are the beneficiaries of this beginning journey of Jesus today.

Thanks be to God. Amen.