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The Third Sunday After Epiphany
Sermons
January 23, 2011

MATTHEW 4:12-25 - "COME, FOLLOW JESUS"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I pray that you have not come to Worship today to be entertained, to see what Pastor Josh may or may not do or say in his sermon. I pray that you have not come to Worship today because you think I am friendly, caring, and energetic person. I pray that you have not come to Worship today because this is where you feel welcomed, where your friends and family are. I pray that you have not come to Worship to give or offer anything to God. My prayer is that you have to Worship this day, because this is where Jesus meets you; where Jesus speaks to you; where Jesus feeds you; where Jesus forgives you; where Jesus calls you to Himself, to belong to Him in newness of life; where Jesus bids you to come and follow Him.

Jesus has come here today to meet you sinners. Jesus has come to convert you from unbelief to faith. Jesus has come here today bringing the reign of heaven; He has come to forgive your sins and to make you whole. Jesus has come to proclaim the Good News of God's reign, that in His person, God is breaking into history to redeem and restore creation. Jesus comes today in the power of His death and resurrection and He bids you, "Come, follow Me!"

Last week in Worship, Jesus was proclaimed as the Light to the nations, the Servant of Yahweh long promised by the prophet Isaiah to God's people in dark times. Matthew's Gospel likewise proclaims Jesus the Light to the nations or Gentiles, by quoting some other passages from Isaiah. Matthew writes: ¹² And after He had heard that John was handed over He withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth He came and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea in the region of Zebulon and Naphtali: ¹⁴ in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled saying, ¹⁵ "Land of Zebulon and Land of Naphtali, way of the sea, beside the Jordan, Galilee of the nations, ¹⁶ the people sitting in darkness have seen a great light, and to those sitting in the land and in the shadow of darkness a light has arisen for them."

Jesus came to bring light to those in darkness; He came to redeem and restore all of God's good created order from the chaos and evil that had invaded it. Yet just like John the Baptist, Jesus' ministry at His first coming was largely confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Jesus even proclaimed the same message as John did. Matthew writes: ¹⁷ From then on Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the reign of heaven is at hand." The content of Jesus' preaching and teaching was the same as John; sinners, the lost of Israel, need to repent, to be converted from unbelief to faith, because God was coming to reign as King, to judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous. The difference between John's preaching and Jesus' preaching was that John proclaimed God's coming in the near future, while Jesus proclaimed God's coming in the present, in His

flesh and blood. John spoke as a servant of God; his authority was limited to what God had given him to do. Jesus spoke as God come in the flesh; His authority unlimited.

Jesus said to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, to sinners throughout His earthly ministry: “Repent, for the reign of heaven is at hand.” Jesus spoke these words to the people in Galilee as He drew near to them in the midst of their daily lives. Matthew 4:18-22 records two specific encounters that Jesus had with sinners from Israel in the midst of their everyday lives. These two encounters focus and highlight the power and authority of Jesus and serve as a paradigm for how sinners are elected to be disciples of Jesus (and how some of these disciples are then elected to serve as His official spokesmen amongst the disciples and in the world). Matthew writes: 18 And while He walked along the sea of Galilee He saw two brothers, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He said to them, “Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” 20 And immediately they left the nets and followed Him. 21 And going on from there He saw another two brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father mending their nets, and He called them. 22 And immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.

Jesus speaks His Word; He calls and in both cases Peter and Andrew, James and John follow Jesus immediately. Jesus’ Word and Call has the power and authority to change people in the midst of their everyday lives. Jesus said, “Come, after Me” and immediately they did. Jesus gave these ordinary sinful men new lives centered in Him, defined by Him, and empowered by Him. Jesus chose and elected these ordinary sinners to be His disciples, to follow after Him. Jesus sought them out; Jesus preached to them; Jesus called them; and according to Jesus’ Word they were forgiven, new, and followed Him.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John had nothing to give or offer Jesus; they were ordinary sinners, just like everyone else. They were not special or extraordinary in anyway. They were people like us, created good by God, but twisted, warped, and ruined by sin. It is true Peter, Andrew, James, and John were Jewish, from the house Israel, but they were from the lost sheep of the house of Israel; they were from those who were spiritually dead and had fallen into darkness just like the Gentiles. The dead cannot raise themselves; those in darkness have no light of their own; sinners cannot remove their own sinful condition. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, and fishermen; in other words, they had the same sort of human relationships that we do and lived as ordinary people do in all times and places.

Why did Jesus call, choose, and elect Peter, Andrew, James, and John? Because they were ordinary sinners like everyone else; because they were dead in sin and could not choose Jesus, because they were bound to their old life of sin, until Jesus’ Word set them free and gave them new life. Jesus called, chose, and elected them as a clear witness to His power and authority to bring light to those in darkness and new life to those who are dead.

Jesus’ preaching was not entertaining; He didn’t put on a show or make a spectacle of Himself just to draw in the masses. The power and authority of Jesus’ words and deeds drew in and attracted people. Matthew 4:23-25 makes this clear: 23

And He began to go about in the whole region of Galilee in order to teach in their synagogues and preach the Gospel of the reign and heal every disease and every sickness in the people. 24 And the word of Him went out into the whole province of Syria; and they brought to Him all those who were sick, who were being tormented with various kinds of diseases and by severe torments and those being demonized and epileptics and paralytics, and He healed them. 25 And many crowds from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and along the Jordan followed Him. **Jesus showed compassion and love for sinners; He preached the Good News to them and He healed them of whatever ailed and oppressed them. Jesus gave the ordinary sinful people what they needed; He gave them Himself!**

I pray you are getting the connection between you and lost sheep of the house of Israel, the connection between you and Peter, Andrew, James, and John. For if you recognize that you are an ordinary sinner like them, then you shall receive Jesus' coming to you today as the Good News intended.

Sickness, various kinds of diseases, severe torments, demon possession, epilepsy, paralysis of various kinds are still common in the world today. The human body continues to break down; from the common cold to various cancers, sicknesses attack our bodies, age us, and in the end bring death. Our need for Jesus has not diminished over time; we still need the healing and saving that He brings.

Thanks be to God we live in a time where medicine has advanced greatly, where physicians offer great care to patients and human life has been extended; this too is God's work in the world through ordinary people to care for our bodily needs! But our advancements in the fields of science and medicine will never replace the need we have for Jesus, the need we have for His Word and presence, the need we have for a new life in the resurrection.

You see, the cause of the sicknesses we suffer today, the cause of the sicknesses and diseases of the people in Galilee, and the cause of death is sin. It is sin that has broken God's good creation; it is sin that breaks down our bodies. The very best physicians and advancements in medicine and technology at their best can prolong life and can ease pain, but they cannot stop death or undo it. God alone has the power and authority over such things!

Jesus has this power and authority; He is Emmanuel, God with us. By the power and authority of His Word, He called ordinary sinners to a new life as His disciples. By the power and authority of His Word, He healed the sick, diseased, and demon possessed; Jesus brought the reign of heaven in His person to save sinners and make them whole. Thus is it good and fitting for us to pray to Jesus for healing and prolonging of life in addition to forgiveness. We can pray for healing through the hands of doctors and medicine and for the miraculous healing of Jesus' Word; Jesus has the power and authority to do both. Jesus hears all your prayers and will act for your good according to His gracious will.

If or when our loved ones or ourselves grow sicker and closer to death rather than being restored to good health, we must remember that the same happened even to the multitudes of people Jesus healed in Galilee. Yes they were healed and restored,

for a time, but in the end they too died. We must remember that Jesus went to the cross and laid down His life as the ransom for many in power and authority; His death on the cross was the only way to deal with sin, the root cause of all sickness, disease, and death. In His resurrection from the dead, Jesus secured resurrection and the new creation for us. In the resurrection, in the restoring of creation in the new creation, sickness, disease, the devil, sin, and death will be no more. In the resurrection we will all be made whole by the power and authority of Jesus' Word and we shall live in peace with God and man.

Until the Day of Resurrection comes, Jesus comes to meet you here in Worship. Jesus comes calling you unto Himself, offering you His forgiveness, and giving you a renewed life as His disciple. Jesus is present giving us what we need, Himself, through Baptism, the Preached Word, and His Body and Blood. Come let us follow after Jesus. Let us meet Him where He has promised to meet us. Let us follow Him even into death, for as He died for us and is risen, then so shall follow in His resurrection, Amen.