

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 4:12–25

Sermon: Follow the Light

Twenty days into the Epiphany season, we have seen Jesus baptized and John point to him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. There is some overlap from last Sunday's Gospel, where Andrew found his brother and brought him to Jesus, who renamed him Cephas. This Sunday, Andrew and Peter, along with James and John, are directly called by Jesus to follow him.

The Old Testament Reading is Isaiah's prophecy to be fulfilled in the Gospel: "*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*" (Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4:16). There is an ongoing need for the enlightening Lord to shine among his own people. Helpful, then, that this Epiphany expression of the light shining into a darkened world is found also in our Psalm: "*The Lord is my light and my salvation*" (27:1).

Did you ever wonder what Peter, Andrew, James and John's mothers thought when they heard that their sons had left behind the family business, leaving behind their nets, their boats, and, for two of them, their father, I wonder, "What did their mothers think?" Did one mom ask, "How can you be so irresponsible?" Did Salome say to James and John, "Are you really going to leave your dad to take care of the whole business?" Did Peter's mother-in-law cry out, "Why did my daughter have to marry such a hothead?" Matthew does not tell us any of this. We only hear that they left and followed. So that must be all that matters. But it's crazy! It looks like these disciples are making an impulsive and hasty move.

Peter and Andrew, James and John had built a solid business, a settled life, homes and families, responsibilities and rewards. Why would they so quickly leave them all behind to follow Jesus? Why would they ever leave the known to follow toward such an unknown? We each have our ways of seeing the world, our comfort zone, our own settled life.

Whenever Jesus calls us, in his Word, he calls us to change, to repent, to be not what we were before. Why would we ever leave behind what we know in order to be changed by him?

Jesus left his hometown of Nazareth to begin his ministry out of Capernaum. He would not return there except to visit, and that didn't go well. Much more than that, Jesus left his incredibly comfortable, eternally divine home, where he had the perfect fellowship of his Father and the Spirit, when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary's womb.

So, what were these four fishermen really leaving behind? Isaiah called their land, their Galilee, "*the people dwelling in darkness*"; *they were among "those dwelling in the region and shadow of death."* Perhaps everything was not really as comfortable as it seemed. The people around the disciples were not all doing well. The crowds suffered from a whole list of woes (v 24). Who would not want to leave these behind?

What kind of darkness are we in? What kinds of sicknesses prevail among us? No matter how settled or comfortable our lives may appear, we are living in the region of sin. We chase after other gods and cause a lot of harm to us and to one another. Money, pleasure, power, all types of things we pursue, our own little gods. Because of our sin, we also live daily in the shadow of death. Illnesses like cancer, dementia, things that rob us of the life God intended. Sin has corrupted everything and everyone. Who would not want to leave this behind?

So for the four to leave everything behind isn't crazy that they left to follow Jesus (v 20). These four fishermen will see it all. They will have a front row seat for Jesus' miracles and healings. Their ears will be the first to hear the gracious words of life that will come from Jesus' lips. But they have not seen it all, or heard it all, yet. At the start, they don't know where the finish will be. They don't know where Jesus is taking them, and many times they'll think he's going the wrong way.

They won't know the true joy of following until the resurrection of our Lord.

We see and hear so much from Jesus. We have the whole story, given by the evangelists, of Jesus' life and healing and teaching. We have the cross before our eyes each week, each day. We have forgiveness, starting already in our Baptism and continuing each day as we remember our Baptism. We have the Word of mercy to call us anew every morning. We have the Lord's Supper given to assure us that we are his forgiven ones. We have not seen the end; we walk by faith, not by sight. Yet, It isn't crazy to follow Jesus, because already as we begin to follow him we see the light at the end.

As we follow Jesus, we are following the light of the world! Jesus, the Rabbi calling fishermen to leave their nets behind and follow him, is the light of the world. His blessed light is already shining as he heals many kinds of sicknesses. These sicknesses he will carry to the darkness of the cross. All that is darkness will be taken by him to the cross.

And the light of the world shines the brightest in the darkness of Good Friday. His compassion is for the whole world. No one who is sinful or sick is left out of his embrace at the cross. No one is left out of his declaration, *“It is finished!”*

Because Jesus, the light of the world, is God of God and Light of Light, he did not stay dead after he died. Jesus rose from the dead in order that the light of his grace may shine through the whole world. The fishermen turned fishers-of-men were each witnesses of the resurrection light. This is the end to which Jesus called them to follow. They proclaim to the world that Jesus is the light of the world. We live by their witness. We have the light of Christ through their word to us, the word we hear today. We follow him immediately today, laying down the sins we confess and being healed in his absolution. We follow Jesus immediately today, acting on his invitation to be fed and nourished at his Table. We follow Jesus immediately tomorrow, when we rise in his name to be his people in this world.

And following has to begin somewhere. Galilee was as good a starting point as any. It was a place of sin and sorrow and sickness of daily life. Yet it's the place Jesus comes, with his call to leave the old and enter into newness of life in him. He already has changed these fishermen by his Word. Their lives will never be the same. They are already in the Kingdom, the reign of the King. The beginning is now shaped by the end. Jesus knows how he will love these disciples and his whole world with his holy life and innocent death and victorious resurrection. He has called them to follow him there.

Where you are now is the place to begin. No matter where you are, Jesus is here in his Word to call you to follow him, to be forgiven by him, to live in his grace that makes you his. Jesus died for the sins of the world. No matter how you feel, Jesus is here in his Word to tell you how he feels about you. He wants you to come with him, to see what he has done for you, and to see what he will do for you.

No matter how sick or healthy you may be, Jesus is here in his Word to heal you in heart and spirit, by his mercy, and as a sign of the healing that is to come in him forever.

It is not crazy to follow Jesus. It is our life to be with him, to hear him, to be loved by him, and at last to see him as our risen light forever.

Amen