

Sunday, January 22, 2023 – Third Sunday after Epiphany

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Introduction

Jesus begins his public ministry by calling fishers to leave their nets and follow him. In Jesus the kingdom of God has come near. We who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. We see this light most profoundly in the cross—as God suffers with us and all who are oppressed by sickness, sin, or evil. Light dawns for us as we gather around the word, the font, and the holy table. We are then sent to share the good news that others may be “caught” in the net of God’s grace and mercy.

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, your lovingkindness always goes before us and follows after us. Summon us into your light, and direct our steps in the ways of goodness that come through the cross of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-4

The northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali experienced the gloom of defeat by Assyrian military forces, but they are assured that their condition will be reversed when God makes a light-filled appearance. The joy they will experience will resemble celebrations of great harvests, because God will deliver them from everything that diminishes or oppresses them.

¹There will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time [the LORD] brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Psalm 27:1, 4-9

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom then | shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I | be afraid?

⁴**One thing I ask of the LORD; one | thing I seek;
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life; to gaze upon the
beauty of the LORD and to seek God | in the temple.**

⁵For in the day of trouble God will | give me shelter,
hide me in the hidden places of the sanctuary, and raise me high up- | on a rock.

⁶**Even now my head is lifted up above my enemies | who surround me.
Therefore I will offer sacrifice in the sanctuary, sacrifices of rejoicing; I will sing
and make music | to the LORD.**

⁷Hear my voice, O LORD, | when I call;
have mercy on me and | answer me.

⁸**My heart speaks your message— | “Seek my face.”
Your face, O LORD, | I will seek.**

⁹Hide not your face from me, turn not away from your ser- | vant in anger.
Cast me not away—you have been my helper; forsake me not, O God of | my salvation.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Paul calls on the Corinthians to end their dissensions and share the unified outlook of the gospel. Discord arises when we forget that we belong not to human leaders or institutions but to Christ. Indeed, the unifying word of the cross of Christ is the center of the gospel and the power of God's salvation.

¹⁰Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹²What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-23

Jesus begins his public ministry shortly after John the Baptist is imprisoned by Herod. He proclaims the nearness of God's reign and calls four fishermen to be his first disciples.

¹²Now 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.

Prayers of Intercession

Called together to follow Jesus, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need, saying “Merciful God,” and responding, “receive our prayer.”

A brief silence.

Make your church one in purpose, proclaiming the message of the cross. Help us to work together across differences. Energize ecumenical partnerships, including the World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation (*other ecumenical ministries in which the congregation takes part may be named*). Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We rejoice at the bounty of your creation. Fill the land and sea with your abundance. Bless harvests in the southern hemisphere and fallow fields in the northern hemisphere. Equip farmers to till and keep the earth sustainably. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

In Christ your reign comes near and calls all to repentance. Break the rod of the oppressor in every nation. Dispel the shadow of death in places of war and persecution. Grant us leaders who lift the yokes that burden those in need. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Be a stronghold for those in trouble and a rock for all who are afraid. Rouse communities to care for neighbors who need shelter, are facing maltreatment, or are isolated and lonely. (*Especially we pray for . . .*) Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Sustain the ministries of this congregation and all churches in this community (*neighboring congregations may be named*). Nurture each congregation’s unique witness to your presence; foster mutual respect; inspire our cooperation in loving our neighbors. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We praise you for the faithful who have gone ahead of us, both famous and unknown. Help us to leave our nets and follow, and bring us with them to the fullness of your promise of eternal life. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We bring to you our needs and hopes, O God, trusting your wisdom and power revealed in Christ crucified.

Amen.

A reflection for this Third Sunday after Epiphany...

A New Way to Follow

Nations wage war, gangs battle each other, families quarrel, communities of faith divide. We hear others say and even hear ourselves saying, "There is no other way."

In Jesus, the light of God's kingdom draws near and a new way shines for us to follow.

In today's gospel, Jesus first withdraws (Matt. 4:12). The word *anachoreo* (to withdraw) is used ten times in Matthew's gospel—each time as Jesus' response to violence or conflict. John the Baptist has been arrested, and tension is beginning to build. The way of God and the way of the world's rulers are beginning to collide.

In Jesus, a new kingdom has drawn near, a kingdom of nonviolence and non-retaliation. Jesus' withdrawal is not simply passivity but points to a vision of an alternate way of reigning as king. Jesus rules not with violence, abusive power, or through division but through voluntarily emptying himself of power, identifying with the oppressed and burdened, and healing that which is broken. Into this new reign, Jesus calls the disciples to follow him, a way that appears foolish and weak to those who cannot discern it. To those God calls, it is the wisdom and strength, the light and power of God.

To follow in the way of Jesus places one's life at risk, for it eventually leads to the cross. To follow, though, implies someone is leading. The way God calls us to follow has already been filled with the loving kindness and mercy of Jesus who has gone before us and who leads us to the foot of the cross. There, in the shadow of the cross, God makes a way for unity in the midst of division, for healing in the midst of brokenness, for peace in the midst of violence, for forgiveness in the midst of betrayal. Around the table, the kingdom of God draws near; Jesus' broken body announces forgiveness, healing, peace, and unity. Many bodies are nourished and formed into the one body of Christ, called and sent to follow in the way of Jesus, to be broken and shed for the sake of the world.

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