

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Third Sunday after Epiphany - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm 27:1, 4-9

I Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

01/26/2020

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

<sup>12</sup>Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. <sup>13</sup>He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

<sup>15</sup>“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,

on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

<sup>16</sup>the 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.”

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

<sup>18</sup>As 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.

The Gospel of our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Fishing**

Good morning! Throughout my time as a preacher I’ve shared a lot of embarrassing stories about myself, but today I get to share an embarrassing story about my father! My dad, like any other normal American boy in the 60’s grew up fishing with his dad and grandfather. My great grandfather was supposedly one of the better fishermen around. The family enjoyed camping and fishing so much that every couple years they would take a trip up to Canada to Esnagi lake. You could only get there by seaplane which would fly you in at the beginning of the week and come back at the end. You can still go there if you’re interested.<sup>1</sup> Well, when my dad was a young boy, the family went up for one of the regular trips. This included my great grandfather and great grandmother, my own grandparents, and my dad. As the family went off to go fishing

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.marmaclodge.com/fishing/>

one day, my dad swung back, cast out, and felt a sharp stab in the back of his head. That's right... my father had basically caught himself. Now I can't verify 100% the following details because my dad doesn't know that I'm telling this story, so I could only dig for so much, but I seem to remember that he got caught on one of those old red devil fishing lures. Do you remember the ones? About yay long, big old hook on the end. Well, the Crummitts are known for their ability for going whole heartedly into strange injuries, so I'm told the hook was IN! Now, they've been flown into the lake, you can't just shoot on over to the hospital to have them get the hook out. So, my great grandfather held my dad's head still, my pap held my dad's body, and my great grandmother did the minor surgery of cutting the hook out of his skull. There are photos of him from the rest of the week with this big bandage on the back of his head.

Strangely, Dad still enjoyed fishing. If Jesus had come along and asked my great grandfather, my pap, or probably even my dad, if they wanted to follow him, they probably would have said no. I, on the other hand, despise fishing. I tried fishing, but because I was an undiagnosed ADHD young boy, I somehow lost my patience. So, I have never caught a fish. If Jesus had asked me to come follow him, I would have been walking on water to get out of there so fast.

And it's at this point that I'm going to go on a mini-rant. Because like many of us in this room, we probably all remember when this text came up in Sunday school and the teacher hit us with the guilt question: "Would you have been so quick to follow Jesus? To drop everything you had to follow him?" I grew up feeling guilty for my unknown but probably lackluster response to this hypothetical question. So you can

imagine my surprise when in college I found out that most everyone would have followed Jesus.

Becoming a Rabbi was one of the most prestigious things that could happen to a Jewish man in the first century. A good Rabbi was equal parts story teller, poet, teacher, priest, and healer. From a young age boys were trained to memorize the Torah, by a determined age they would be tested and the best would go on to further training. They would eventually be apprenticed out to a Rabbi and would literally follow them around, learning and listening to the teacher. The boys that failed would go on to do the family business. So when Andrew, Peter, James and John are asked to follow Jesus, it's like a second chance! SO! If your Sunday school teacher gave you the guilt trip, feel free to ignore it! There, my rant is over!

Rant aside, it's an important point! What Jesus is offering isn't a hard choice! It's the very best decision any of us could make! It's why St. Paul argues in Philippians that he regards all the good he had before Jesus as crap in comparison! Take a listen: *"If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based*

*on faith.*"<sup>2</sup> It's a smart argument that I can't take credit for catching. Dr. Peterson, the same professor who refused to give up on my learning Greek, pointed it out to me.

It's a completely different type of testimony than what we are used too. Now, some of you may have gone into a panic when you heard the word testimony, but don't worry, it's ok, I'm not calling anyone up to share. A testimony is the type of thing that sends fear racing through the body of most mainline Protestant denominations. What usually happens is that someone stands up and shares about how they "came to accept Jesus Christ as their own personal Lord and Savior." A lot of times it includes some story about how the convert was living a horrible life, about how they were stuck on drugs or some other substance and how they had hit rock bottom. BUT! Someone usually finds them and leads them to a faith community where they turn things around. They're incredibly powerful stories, but as Dr. Peterson pointed out, if you've been eating dog food your whole life, no wonder your life changes when you're offered a steak! His point isn't to discredit the hard life and powerful stories of normal testimonies, but to point out that an even more powerful story is for those who truly do think they have it all, like St. Paul. He had it perfect, he argued in the section from Philippians. He was circumcised on the right day, he was a Jew and descendant of an important tribe, he had followed all the rules, no-one had faith and zeal like he did... and yet he gave it all up, in fact he compares it to rubbish, which is the polite translation for the actual Greek word that means feces.

It's a powerful witness, and it helps remind me that all those Sunday school teachers had it so wrong! We shouldn't feel guilt about our ability to hypothetically

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<sup>2</sup> Philippians 3:4b-9 NRSV

answer Jesus' call, because we can celebrate that we have already answered his voice! In Baptism our reply was sealed, just as our salvation was secured. Following Jesus isn't always easy, but the choice itself is one made with excitement and joy! So stop feeling bad about the hypothetical, and start rejoicing in the goodness of following Jesus Christ. Amen.