

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

Today we hear that Jesus leaves Nazareth and settles in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. These are fishing villages that were recognized as Assyrian provinces or Gentile territories before they would become Christian territories.<sup>1</sup> These outlying territories were devastated by war at the hands of the Assyrians and they are lands that are metaphorically in darkness. And it is in these lands that Jesus begins to call people to discipleship.

Now it is believed that the first called disciples of Jesus were in their late teens and early twenties...this is certainly nothing that I can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt but I mention this in order to consider Peter, Andrew, James, and John beyond some words on a page and into a perception or a context that we can place ourselves into. In other words, how do you suppose this would play out today for them and even for us when we were that age? How do you suppose this plays out for young adults today being called out of the blue to put down their phones or put aside the video games and their agendas and do something that goes against the culture they live in, by someone they have never seen nor heard of, called to drop everything and follow. What would we do, right now, in this situation? Thinking back as we were young and establishing ourselves and our careers, would we have dropped everything to follow this person called Jesus? We can all claim that we have answered the call to follow because we go to church or that we say that we are Christians, but do we follow Jesus on *our* terms or do we follow the examples that we have before us today in this Gospel lesson? Do we follow our call to discipleship until it gets in the way of our agenda or our desires? Do we follow our call to discipleship until it calls us to change our perspectives, our minds, and most of all our hearts? For Peter, Andrew, James, and John the call changes everything.

The conversion in Peter, Andrew, James, and John is obvious...but how obvious has it been in each of us? When reflecting on how our call to discipleship, or even our Baptism has converted us or changed us, do we follow the call on our terms or do we *FOLLOW the call*. There is a line that may articulate this better than I am doing found in a Bob Dylan song from his *Slow Train Coming* album...and yes, I show my age by saying an album. But when this was first released in 1979, it was an album of nine songs that Dylan wrote about his call or his conversion to Christianity. The line I am referring to is from a song is entitled, "Gonna Change My Way of Thinking." Dylan says this:

"You remember only about the brass ring –  
you forget about the Golden Rule."

In other words, discipleship, like the Golden Rule is fine, until it gets in the way of what we are reaching for in our lives, or the brass ring of what "I" want. We talk a good game but do we only follow our desires rather than what our faith really calls us to follow? Discipleship lead by our own desires and without Jesus is merely choosing our own path.<sup>2</sup> Do we even consider the Golden Rule anymore?

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<sup>1</sup> Van Harn, Roger E.. *The Lectionary Commentary Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts, The Third Readings: Gospels*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001. The commentary based on the appointed Gospel reading for the Third Sunday After the Epiphany, Year A, Matthew 4:12-23, page 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4, Discipleship*. Translated from the German Edition, Edited by Martin Kuske† and Ilse Tödt. Minneapolis: Fortress Press paperback edition: 2003. Not a direct quote but Bonhoeffer's words are very obvious here in this line. Page 59, par48.

<sup>12</sup> ‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (Matt 7:12)

We probably know Luke’s more succinct version better:

<sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:31)

Do we see this prophetic law, this Golden Rule as a way of life, or do we see it as a “nice” phrase we use as an artistic plaque we hang on our wall and simply look at as we attempt to grasp the brass ring of the goals and desires of our life?

Today, we celebrate the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, the third Sunday where we hear once again of the revelation of God, or the revealing of God. And today, Matthew’s Christology, rather Matthew’s principle understanding that theologically affirms and defines the humanity and the deity of Jesus, is fully at work in this Gospel lesson today. Matthew’s Christological thinking is that, God is NOT only revealed in the miracles of Jesus, but that God is also revealed in obedience...and we see both the miracles and the obedience today in this Gospel lesson. We see the miracle of the power within these words, “follow me” and we see the obedience in Peter, Andrew, James, and John who follow these words. However, before the miracle and the obedience is revealed in this passage, we hear Jesus proclaim this:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matt 4:17b)

These are the very first words Jesus says publicly in this Gospel and they are the same words spoken by John the Baptist earlier. However, the Greek term for “repent” is mis-translated, by so many, myself included, by understanding that the term means to literally to turn around. But this Greek term for “repent” is translated from the Hebrew word that means to “turn around.” But here, the Greek term for repent never translates to turn around, rather there is much more to it. It means to change one’s mind, one’s heart, or one’s ways...to take on a whole new perspective, to be transformed and that transformation begins with seeing things in a new way.<sup>3</sup> Repentance in this passage is seen in the new perspective of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Their call along with their obedience became their “brass ring” and not just a nice saying.

But this proclamation, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," from Jesus, and from John the Baptist as well, sounds threatening. Coming from John, we might expect this proclamation to take on a threatening tone. We do not have the luxury of hearing John or Jesus proclaim it. However, from Jesus it too sounds a bit threatening..."Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." It sounds like...beware, we’re watching you! A better way to look at this proclamation is to understand what it really means, and we literally see what it means in the actions of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

The Kingdom of God that has come near, is derived from a Hebrew phrase meaning the “rule of God.” The Kingdom of God is NOT a static condition or a temporal place, the Kingdom of God is the active rule of God, it means to live a life ruled by God. The kingdom is the interaction of our faith or putting our faith into action. And in doing so, we see Matthew’s Christology, or we see the revelation of God in the obedience of Peter, Andrew, James, and John...and we see the

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<sup>3</sup> Rolf Jacobson, Karoline Lewis, and Matthew Skinner, podcast entitled, *Sermon Brainwave*, #1065 – Third Sunday after the Epiphany. [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org) Taken from the discussion on the meaning of repentance.

revelation of God in the interaction of our faith, as well as, our obedience to God in our actions toward other as we put our faith into action.

Today we see Jesus, approach Peter, Andrew, James, and John...in other words, he chooses them, they do not choose him...Jesus sees them, they do not see him. Jesus speaks to them, they do not speak to him and Jesus simply says, “follow me” and they follow...without hesitation. We see a miracle of sorts in that the words are spoken and they follow, we see the power of the word again just as we saw in the beginning when God said, let there be light...and there was light. Today we hear, “follow me” and they follow.

Our faith is our call to discipleship, our call to discipleship is our obedience to our faith, and in this, God is revealed in the grace we share through this faith. If we contain it by keeping God’s grace to ourselves and restricting it to others, we keep God’s grace for ourselves it no longer becomes grace, because it is not extended to others. Grace is only grace when it is shared or extended to others. St Paul reminded the Church in Corinth just as he reminds us all in his second letter to them:

<sup>13</sup> But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—‘I believed, and so I spoke’—we also believe, and so we speak, <sup>14</sup> because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. <sup>15</sup> Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:13-15)

The grace that has been given us through our faith and in our Baptism, is God in Jesus Christ coming to us, calling us to follow...follow by extending the grace we have been freely given so that it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

Today, the revealed Lord comes to Peter, Andrew, James, and John as they go about their everyday routine...Jesus breaks into their lives, breaks their routines and we see their obedience to follow. Once again Peter, Andrew, James, and John are not righteous men, according to Matthew they knew nothing of Jesus, they have not seen the miracles, nor have they heard his teaching...they merely heard his words, “follow me.” They didn’t think about it, immediately their routine changed, immediately they followed. Likewise, God breaks our routines...our ways when the grace received through faith is shared...and in this sharing...God is revealed not our glory.

Whenever I hear the word “discipleship” I immediately think of Detrick Bonhoeffer and I think of his important book *The Cost of Discipleship*. In looking at this work of Bonhoeffer and his views on discipleship, he reminds the reader that Peter Andrew, James, or John cannot convert themselves, but they can leave their nets. Bonhoeffer goes on to say:

As long as Levi sits in the tax collector’s booth and Peter at his nets, they would do their work honestly and loyally, they would have old or new knowledge about God. But if they want to learn to believe in God, they have to follow the Son of God incarnate and walk with him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4, *Discipleship*. Translated from the German Edition, Edited by Martin Kuske† and Ilse Tödt. Minneapolis: Fortress Press paperback edition: 2003. Page 62, par 51.

We too, leave our ordinary ways by revealing God in the grace we extend to more and more people, when we love as God has loved us! God is revealed when we walk with Christ, when we are obedient...this obedience is walking with Christ in faith and in love, sharing that grace and love as freely as it has been given...not just in words, but in deeds and in truth. Jesus doesn't call us to follow just to criticize and judge others, and point out what they do or don't do, he says follow me, that's all...follow me, walk with me...walk this way...walk as I walk. And we walk as forgiven sinners who have the promise of salvation in the one who walks with us.

Today a bright light has broken the darkness of our ordinary routines and we are blessed with the forgiveness of our sin and the call to follow in faith. Christ Himself comes to us, breaks into our everyday routines for no other reason than to forgive us through the means of the proclaimed Word and through the means of this Holy Meal, and through the means of his very presence...we no longer SIT in darkness, we have MOVED into the light of Word and Sacrament...let that light of grace that shines in our faith be the light...others see so they too may also glorify our Father in heaven.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*