

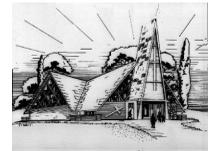


Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon for Third Sunday after Epiphany

*The Lord manifests His Glory through His
Office of the Holy Ministry!*

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach



The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 4, 12-25:

• ¹² **ESV** Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

• ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,

• ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

• ¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-

• ¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."

• ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

• ¹⁸ While walking 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.

• ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

• ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

• ²¹ And going on from there he saw two other 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 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

• ²³ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

• ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.

• ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

• **Let us pray:** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that the Light of Jesus may enlighten us to see the Glory of Jesus' office! Amen.*

• **Dear Israel of God!**

• Jesus was born in Bethlehem. His Name was given by God to be Jesus, which means 'He will save His people from their sins'. Jesus is Immanuel, 'God with us'. The Jewish shepherds got the message first, through the angels, then through the star and the Scriptures the Magi from the east, who were Gentiles, surprisingly came to worship Jesus. Then we hear that Jesus, Joseph and Mary, had to flee into Egypt because king Herod wanted to find and

kill this little baby Jesus.

- This fulfilled Hosea 11,1 and we learnt from the Scriptures that the first-born of God in the OT, namely Israel, finds its fulfilment in Jesus. He is God's only begotten Son who is at the same time God's first-born son of the New Testament. In the Baptism of Jesus this becomes clear as Jesus is baptised next to Israel and at the same time standing in the place of Israel, to fulfil all righteousness. Jesus begins His ministry as first-born of the everlasting Israel.

- The first thing that happened to Him after His Baptism, was that He was led into the wilderness to be tempted by satan, just like Israel was led into the dessert after going through the Red Sea. Yet, unlike Israel of old, He did not fall into the temptations inflicted on Him by satan. The devil left Him and angels came and ministered to Him.

- This takes us to the passage of today. John was arrested and Jesus had to withdraw. Do you see, although Jesus emerged from the wilderness victoriously He does not take a stand against Herod. He takes the unexpected route. He withdraws and John is left in the hands of the sinners. Jesus is victorious, but He goes the route of perfect obedience rather than taking the route of triumph in a human sense. That is when He went to Galilee and lived in Capernaum by the sea in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.

- This fulfils the promise of the prophet Isaiah, recorded in chapter 9. These regions were ravaged by the Assyrian invaders in the eight century BC because they made ungodly covenants with the pagan nations. But now the deliverance promised became true as Jesus went there. These were parts of the Northern regions of Israel. This was not Judea. These Israelites had mingled heavily with other nations. That is where the Samaritans came from. They were not pure Jews which was against the explicit law of God.

- So, there, in the region where the biggest culprits of Israel's history found themselves, Jesus went and started to proclaim the Gospel, Galilee! Once again we learn, God keeps His promises although it may take hundreds of years.

- There Jesus began to preach, saying, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* It is true: [16] *“The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”*

- *“Repent”*, that is *“be converted from unbelief to faith,”* for the reign of God is at hand! The kingdom of God has come. It has come to earth in the person of Christ Jesus. Eternal Life was walking around on earth. The Light of Heaven, the Life of Heaven, pure Life was present, without the faintest tint of sin or deceit! He is still present with us here on earth-Immanuel. And what's more, He is present with His mercy, forgiveness of sins. He came to baptise with the Holy Spirit, to hand Him out to sinners sitting in darkness! The new temple of God was Jesus Himself.

- And then, well a temple needs people to worship God. And so, Jesus started to call men for His discipleship. He called fishermen. He called them to follow Him, and He would make fishers of men out of them. He did it. Nobody follows Jesus or becomes a disciple of Jesus

through his own initiative. Someone once said, “when Jesus said, ‘Follow Me, ‘ He was confiscating man for Himself.”

- The disciples would much later cast the net of the Gospel out onto the sea of the nations and would gather people for Jesus’ reign. You see, this is important, they fished with a net, they were doing the same Jesus did, they were throwing out the net of the Word of God onto the people. By proclaiming the Gospel people hear the message- the initiative comes from Christ using His disciples. That is why mission work is important. The disciples go out into the world and throw out the net of the Gospel so that by God’s initiative people may receive the light and life of Heaven.
- That means, whenever you share the Gospel of Christ with someone, it is God’s initiative working through you! The best way is still from person to person. Social media can also be used to get the message out. By all means! It can work as a way of communicating with real people.
- It is comforting to know, this is God’s initiative using you, because if the truth is shared with another person and that person rejects it, it is not a rejection against you, that person rejects Christ. Rejections should not demotivate us. The seed is planted. Who knows, when it may suddenly sprout. It may be rejected for now, but God can change the circumstances so that all of a sudden what has been heard rings true.
- Remember the most important thing, if the real Word of Christ goes out it is always accompanied by the Holy Spirit! We can trust it. It will do its work. It is never ineffective. If it is kept the Holy Spirit will renew that heart. If it is rejected that person stands condemned before God. Us humans are only the instruments. God borrows our bodies to get His message out in the world.
- This is confirmed throughout the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew by God doing things differently than expected. It’s not going according to political correctness, so to speak. For instance, here in this passage, why is Jesus calling the going- to- be Apostles, the foundation phase, from the lost tribes of Israel, rather than from the Judeans in Jerusalem? Not that Judah is not represented. Jesus is the first citizen and cornerstone of the new reign. He is a Judean.
- This maybe the reason that the pastors, called by God, are not always those people with personalities the world or psychology would pick for handing out God’s truth and comforting people! They can be strange characters- lets face it. We must not get too occupied with the instrument of God, how he is or what he does and does not do properly. The only requirement is for them to be found faithful towards handing out the mysteries of God.
- And the reason being, the mysteries of God have the power to either convert people or to condemn them. So, if someone claims to speak the Word of God, we may check against the Scriptures if this is indeed the case. The congregation has to test the spirits. And this is where the Holy Scriptures come in.

- It is thus important to focus on what does that person say. If it is the Word of God he speaks, it is God speaking. If he makes it up or takes it from other sources which contradict the clear Word of God, then that person needs to be rebuked, even if he is the smoothest and slickest looking guy in the community, even if he is your best friend. The most important thing is what does the servant of God's Word say? If he speaks the Word of God he extends the Life of God to you. God can also give His Word of Truth and Life through jerks, which is the same as saying God proclaims His Gospel through sinners!
- You see, God does things differently to Hollywood or the standards of social media.
- This takes us straight to a very insightful Epistle reading of today where Paul addresses the unnecessary division in the church because of personality clashes! 1 Cor 1,10-13: *"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloë's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"*
- The point here is: Paul, Apollos and Cephas are all standing on the same foundation, namely Christ. But the people were fighting because of personal issues with the people. The one said, I follow Paul. Others said, no I follow Apollos, but they were all preaching the same Word! And it is very insightful that even saying "I follow Christ" that is, not Paul, not Apollos or not Cephas but only Christ, is also problematic! How can this be? If Paul proclaims Christ, how can you separate Paul from Christ. If Apollos baptises with Christ's Baptism, how can you say, no I don't want Apollos, I only want Christ.
- In other words, no one is allowed to drive a wedge between Christ and His Apostles whom He has called to be stewards of the mysteries of God. All those who stand on the same confession of faith are God's instruments.
- That is, the only reason why one should ever leave a certain confession is because of doctrine, the content of God's Word. If one realises that a certain confession is teaching and confessing something against the clear Word of God that is when one should consider to go to a confession that teaches according to the Word of God.
- One should never leave or divide the confession on the grounds of personalities. If divisions happen because of personality issues it reveals that the people are too occupied with the person in the office instead of with the Word of God being proclaimed through that fallible person. That is why Paul then goes and proclaims that the Word of the Cross is the power that saves.
- "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus is at hand with His Spirit and Body together with His Word. We are assembled around Jesus in His Body. Immanuel, God with us is a reality for all of us, because He says so, through His servant. **Amen.**
- *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.** [Phil 4,7].*

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