

Epiphany 3
St. Matthew 4:12-23
January 22th, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Love and Change

“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—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.”

Good news for the poor, the forgotten, the down trodden, those who were left out. God has come near to them and shown God's favor upon them. The people are healed of many diseases and infirmities. Those who lack common comforts, find comfort in God who cares for them. These are they whom God has made special.

God cares for all of us. God also worries about the effects of human behavior which takes advantage of our fellow citizens of this planet earth. God sees the widows, the orphans, the refugees, the homeless and the poor, the sick and disabled, those imprisoned, and God cares about them and for them. God moves us to be his living army to carry out this care in our generation. We are moved to act when we see their plight. We are moved to act as God has acted upon us.

We share the blessings with which God has blessed us.

Make no mistake: God loves every one of us.

Therefore, we are all special to God, and God searches for the lost lambs to restore them to God's flock. That we are special, each of us individually matter to God, counted as belonging to God's flock, that is incredibly good news. That God loves me, even when no one else does, even when I find it hard to muster any affection for myself, and *that is great news!* I am special because God loves me, and God loves you also. When we go missing, God searches for us!

The message of Jesus? *"Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near you!"* What does it mean to repent?

Repent has the connotation of feeling bad about things you have done wrong and are ashamed of. It is about feeling contrite for your sins. It is also about changing your ways and sinning no more.

God did not come to make us feel bad about ourselves, but rather, to start feeling good. God did not come to shame us, but to lift us up from the darkness. He preached in the land of darkness as the Gospel describes it. He carried with him the light of God, the light of His Gospel. The words of Jesus were meant to open our eyes and to see this light. And once you see it, it changes you.

God would want us to change our ways, wouldn't he? God would want us to live in harmony with the ways God created for us. The message of Jesus to us is *to change*.

Change is an exciting and hopeful word. It implies that if we change, things will be better for us, smoother, free of constraints, sort of at *liberty* to be who we were created to be. We often seek change every four years politically in our country. This is a season of change.

But Jesus is talking about more than changing temporal rulers, isn't he? If God wanted that, Jesus could have sought to be installed as a king or governor of his people. That is not what he did. And honestly, that would not have changed much for very long. Rulers and leaders come and go, but the message of God has endured to our time.

Jesus changed our whole idea about God, and about how God lives and walks among us, caring for all of us, including the least of those our brothers and sisters in need.

The change, which God seeks in us, is transformative and all-encompassing. We are to change from being people of fears and anxiety to people of faith and

inner calm. We are to change from being people of desire and wants to people who are completely satisfied. We are to be lifted from hopelessness into the full on experience of true, solid, unshakeable hope. Our hearts change from being focused upon ourselves to being focused upon others, being filled and satisfied with the love of God. We are alone and loveless no longer.

That is really good news! Good news to shout from the rooftops. It is no surprise when the simple fisherman heard about it that they followed Jesus *immediately*. Both the authors of Matthew's and Mark's Gospels use that word: *immediately* they follow Jesus.

Sometimes these days we may tend to get that excited. Usually this happens when we hear about a very good sale price on something we have been wanting, or we receive a fantastic coupon in the newspaper or mail for that item. We immediately head out to get what we have been looking for. We have learned when we don't go right away that we can miss the opportunity: either the store runs out or sells out of what we want, or worse yet, by the time we get around to redeeming our special coupons, they have expired.

The love of God does not have an expiration date. It does not spoil or go bad. And God does not abandon us and allow God's love to run out. This love is never

out of stock, never out of date: *Grab it and go with it!*
AMEN