

Isaiah 9:1-4
1 Corinthians 1:10-18
Matthew 4:12-23
Psalm 27:1, 5-13

Drop everything! Come right now! There's a crisis that needs your immediate attention! Don't delay! Do it quickly!

Those are the words of Jesus to James and John, the sons of Zebedee and Simon Peter and Andrew when he calls them to follow him. He explains as he calls them away from their labor as fishermen that he will make them fishers of men. Incredulously, they do exactly that what Jesus says. They drop what they are doing, walk away from their boats and their families, their homes, their circle of friends and all they have known in life and they follow Jesus into unknown territory on an unspecified mission.

Who does that? What rational, sane person would ever do that? It sounds crazy and irresponsible. And yet, that's what Jesus asks his disciples to do and they do it! You have to wonder about the power of the physical presence of Jesus.

The gospel lesson this morning tells us that when John the Baptist was handed over to Herod and imprisoned, Jesus withdrew from his hometown Nazareth and settled in the city of Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee. This is on a major trade route where lots of people from lots of places are coming and going. This move puts Jesus exactly where God wants him and fulfills the scripture from Isaiah that we heard in the Old Testament reading today and again in the gospel.

"Land of Zebulun, Inad 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 sate in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

Galilee.....the land beyond the Jordan.....Gentile territory. Jesus begins his ministry by sharing the good news with those who have lived in a land of deep darkness and he calls his first disciples to join him. Jesus called ordinary people in the midst of doing ordinary work. These people did not have advanced academic degrees. They did not undergo multiple scrutinies by committee and mentors. They did not possess highly valuable skill sets that are sought after in the job market. They were fishermen.....just good, hard-working fishermen. But they had one valuable quality that Jesus spotted in them. They had open hearts and they could hear the

Master's voice when he called. They recognized the compelling nature of Jesus and the urgency of Jesus' call to them.

Jesus is still calling disciples.....today.....2017.....right here in northern Virginia. Jesus is saying to us "Drop everything and come with me." Jesus is still not looking for the academically accomplished. He's not looking for folks with skills sets that are valuable in the marketplace. He's looking for ordinary people doing ordinary jobs. And he's still looking for people with open hearts and a willingness to hear him when he calls and a desire to respond to that call. For most of us, however, it doesn't seem likely that we are going to quit our jobs or sell our homes and move out of town. But consider this: maybe following Jesus does not require us to do all of that literally. Perhaps God has already put us exactly where he wants us just as God put Jesus in Galilee.....the land of the Gentiles.

Every person in this room has been called by God to some task or ministry. You wouldn't be here in this sanctuary if that were not the case. God calls each of us in different ways and to different situations.....and perhaps God is not calling us to new vocations or new jobs. Perhaps God has put us exactly where he wants us. The call, you see, is not about vocation. It's not about what you do for a living. The call is not about abandoning jobs and responsibilities. The call is about entering into relationship with God, with Jesus and with those around us. God has put in our lives the people that he wants us to reach. God has put the fish right in front of us and all around us. All we need to do is reach out to them with the love that we know to be from God.

Jesus asks us to let nothing be more important to us than the relationships that we have with the people in our lives and our willingness to love them and to share with them the love that God has for them and the nature of the kingdom of God that Jesus has brought with him to earth. That's it. Show the love.....explain the kingdom!! That's the fishing that Jesus wants us to do. That's what Jesus wants us to do as disciples.

So consider this: Maybe we aren't being asked to abandon our jobs and our homes and our families in order to be disciples. Maybe we are being asked to abandon attitudes that prevent us from having a good relationship with someone else. Maybe it's a family member who has hurt us or a co-worker that just annoys the daylights out of us. Maybe it's a parent or a child that has disappointed us. Who in your life is trying to change but you won't let them because no matter what they do or say, you are still interpreting their actions in the same old way that hurts both of you? Who in your life is taking up so much space in your thoughts that you hardly have a chance to think of anything or anyone else? Which of your co-workers, schoolmates or family members is proving to be difficult for you? All of us have those folks in our lives. What is Jesus calling us to do to forget ourselves and bear witness to him in these relationships?

As Jesus began his ministry, the gospel tells us that he 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.

Chances are, even as devout disciples, we are not going to be curing every disease and every sickness we encounter among the people that God has put in our lives just by virtue of our love for God and our faith in Jesus. Unless we are trained physicians with appropriate medical supports and supplies, that probably isn't going to happen.

We aren't going to be able to set a broken arm: but we can mend a broken heart. A kind word.....a reaffirming statement.....a willing ear to listen.....may be all that we need to provide to soothe that heart.

We aren't going to be able to restore sight to someone whose vision is impaired or perhaps gone completely: but we can help someone see a situation differently...maybe in a way that will restore a relationship and help both people feel better.

We probably aren't going to cure all the mental and emotional issues that we encounter: but we can sit down next to a kid in the cafeteria who is eating alone or ask someone that we notice usually gets left out to join us in play. And we can put our arms around a person who is grieving a loss and love them and be with them without ever uttering a word. When of my favorite evangelical slogans is: preach the gospel always: if necessary, use words." Emotional pain can actually be felt physically and we can help ease that by just taking a few minutes to notice and then acting on our empathy and kindness.

Jesus is still calling us to be his disciples. He is still telling us to "Drop everything!" He still wants us to set aside what is important to us and attend to the people he has put in our lives. Being Jesus' disciples is not about making things work out the way we want or getting our own needs met or being sure that people embrace the gospel itself. It is about being aware of others. And being aware that as we make assessments about other people's actions and motives and the information is ambiguous, the loving thing to do is to think the best of them, not the worst. That's the loving thing to do for them and the most peaceful thing to do for ourselves. Sharing the kingdom is so often about our attitudes and how we behave with other people in a loving way.

As we pursue our discipleship with Jesus, we know, too, that we are taking some risks. We might fail. The way to the cross with Jesus is fraught with pitfalls and danger. It's not an easy road to travel. Our efforts to share the good news of the kingdom and the power of God's love may fail and we may feel rejected. We need to keep going anyway. Our motives may be questioned. Keep going anyway. Our goodwill may be spurned. Keep going anyway. We don't really want to do it. Keep going anyway.

Our discipleship is not about changing anyone else. Our discipleship is about changing us and about our relationship with Jesus. Answering his call is to enter into relationship with him that binds us to him in every important way. How would *your* life change, if you truly set all cares aside except for the ones that Jesus brings to your attention? How would *your* life change if you were more concerned with the welfare of the people God has put in your life than you were about your own? How close would the kingdom of God come to you if you deepen your realization of the incarnation of God in Jesus and answer his call with an open heart and a willingness to change yourself? The incarnation of God in Jesus is practically impossible for us to compute. We have trouble just wrapping our brains around that reality.

But Jesus is still calling. He is calling each of us with a sense of urgency. Drop everything! Answer Jesus now! Set aside all the cares about your own life that occupy your thoughts and begin to focus on what God is asking you to do in the lives of those he has put before you. Therein lies your greatest joy, your greatest sense of peace and your deepest sense of fulfillment. The fish are all around you.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.