

Church of the Divine Love

Sermon Sunday January 25, 2026

Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27; 1 Corinthians 1: 10-18; Matthew 4: 12-23.

Sisters and brother in Christ,

Following Jesus does not happen in the abstract but in the context, circumstances, and relationships of our lives. Our relationship with Jesus is grounded and experienced in the people and events of our lives and world. So it was for Peter, Andrew, James, and John. We see that throughout the remainder of Matthew's account of the gospel. He not only describes the life and ministry of Jesus but the ongoing shaping and forming of Peter's, Andrew's, James' and John's lives. That shaping and forming happened in Jesus' teaching of the beatitudes, in his healing of the sick, in his telling parables, in his feeding the 5000, in Peter complaining that they had left everything behind, in James and John arguing with the others and hoping to sit at Jesus' right and left, in Jesus' crucifixion, in his resurrection and ascension, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Every one of those moments echo with Jesus' words, "Follow me." Every one of those is as much a turning point in the lives of Peter, Andrew, James, and John as was the day Jesus first saw them by the Sea of Galilee. Turning points always resound with the invitation to follow Jesus. They are the intersection of our lives and his life. Isn't that what's happening in today's gospel? We hear it in Jesus' words. He only says two things: "Repent," and "Follow me." At some level they are two sides of the same coin.

So often we hear the word "repentance" and think, "Uh oh, someone's been bad. Someone better change their evil ways." It can mean that and sometimes that needs to be the focus but it also means more than that. Repentance is more than just a moral change. It is a life change, a turning point. We look in a different direction. We see with new eyes. We establish new priorities. We travel a new road.

The turning points of our lives bring us face to face with Jesus and they come in lots of ways. Sometimes they come as we planned, worked, and hoped for. Other times they are completely unexpected and take us by surprise. Sometimes they bring us joy and gladness. Other times we are filled with sorrow and loss. Sometimes they affirm everything we thought and believed. Other times they leave us confused and not knowing what we believe. You've probably experienced all of those and more in the turning points of your own life.

Think about your turning points, times when, for better or worse, your life was turned around:

Moving out and beginning life on our own, Falling in love and getting married, The birth of your child, The death of a loved one, Words or actions that hurt another and forever changed the relationship, Graduation from school and beginning your first job, The failure of your business or the loss of your job, Your divorce, A success or accomplishment that was really significant or meaningful, Discovering the passion that excites, inflames, and drives your life, An anniversary grounded in commitment and deep satisfaction, Going to your first AA meeting, Your new role as caretaker of your spouse or parent, A longtime dream that finally came true.

The list could go on and on. We could all tell stories of our life's turning points. It seems as if our lives are a series of turning points, some big and others small. Regardless, with each turning point we see ourselves, others, and the world differently, we think differently, we focus on different concerns, we ask different questions, and we move in different direction. What they all have in common, however, is Jesus' invitation, his command, to follow him.

Each turning point comes with the opportunity for and the promise of Christ to refashion our lives. That's what Jesus did for Peter, Andrew, James, and John. "I will make you...", he says. That's what he does for us as well. He makes us more who we truly are to be. In him we begin to recognize ourselves.

This does not happen in spite of our life's circumstances but in and through our life's circumstances. That's where and how it happened for Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Their turning point came in sailing the same boats, on the same lake, using the same nets, doing the same work they had done the day before, and the day before that, and the month before that, and the year before that.

Look at your lakes, boats, and nets, the circumstances of your life. What is the turning point you face today? What's happening? What do you see? Somewhere in your life today is a turning point, a place of repentance. Maybe you know exactly what it is. Maybe you've not yet recognized it. Maybe you've closed your eyes to it. Regardless, it is there and so is Jesus, beckoning, calling, longing, desiring. He stands there saying, "Follow me. I've picked you."

Repent, not because you've been bad, but because you are worth it. Repent means you cannot keep doing what you are doing. Repent means you are going to stop asking Jesus to follow you. Repent means you are going to make a radical life change today, leave behind the nets you have been focused on, and truly follow Jesus. **Amen.**