**Weekend of Sunday, January 22, 2022**

**3rd Sunday after Epiphany/Lectionary 3/Year A**

**First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-4**

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18**

**Gospel Reading: Matthew 4:12-23**

**Sermon Title: *“The Kingdom of Heaven Has Come Near!”***

**Theme**

*Jesus begins his public ministry by calling fishers to leave their nets and follow him. In Jesus the kingdom of God has come near. We who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. We see this light most profoundly in the cross—as God suffers with us and all who are oppressed by sickness, sin, or evil. Light dawns for us as we gather around the word, the font, and the holy table. We are then sent to share the good news that others may be “caught” in the net of God’s grace and mercy.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-4**

1There will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time [the Lord] brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.  
 2The people who walked in darkness  
  have seen a great light;  
 those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
  on them light has shined.  
 3You have multiplied the nation,  
  you have increased its joy;  
 they rejoice before you  
  as with joy at the harvest,  
  as people exult when dividing plunder.  
 4For the yoke of their burden,  
  and the bar across their shoulders,  
  the rod of their oppressor,  
  you have broken as on the day of Midian.

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18**

10Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. 11For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” 13Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.  
  
 18For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

**Gospel: Matthew 4:12-23**

12Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:  
 15“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,  
  on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
 16the 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.”  
17From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”  
 18As he walked 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. 19And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.  
  
 23Jesus 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.

**Sermon**

Today's Gospel Reading is about the fulfillment of prophecy and the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. I will begin with the fulfillment of prophecy segment first.

Matthew, more than the other three Gospelers, was interested in portraying Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and directed his Gospel toward the Jews. Throughout his Gospel, we can see him making the argument that Jesus was the one about whom the prophets foretold hoping to win the Jews over. Remember, early on the original apostles understood their mission was to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews. So Matthew used language that Gentiles wouldn't have necessarily understood or cared about – such as including specifics about where Jesus made his home, fulfilling what was written by the prophet Isaiah (9:1-2) which is the First Reading for today.

Moving on to the beginning of Jesus's public ministry, just to be clear, last week we were in the Gospel of John and we heard about Jesus calling his first three disciples, Andrew, another unnamed disciple, and a little later, Andrew's brother, Simon Peter.

This passage, our Gospel Reading for today, is Matthew's version of the calling of the first disciples. So you can get your head around just where we are on the timeline, according to Matthew, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in chapter 3, and then in chapter 4, was led into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and forty nights, and then when Satan thought Jesus would be his most vulnerable, he tempted him. We will hear that story on the First Sunday in Lent, February 26. Jesus prevailed over Satan's temptation and then our passage for today begins, rather abruptly, in my opinion.

It could be said that according to Matthew, Jesus's public ministry began in verse 17 by proclaiming that in him, the kingdom of heaven has come near.

18As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, (a freshwater lake that I will boat on Thursday, February 9, for those of you keeping score), he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 19And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

"But Pastor, it was just last weekend that we learned that Andrew was a disciple of John along with the other unnamed disciple, and the first to leave John the Baptist and follow Jesus." Oh man, this issue is much more complicated than you probably know, and we could get into the weeds and discuss this, but a) the issue would be better discussed in a Bible study setting, and 2) the discussion, though confounding, is off the mark for us today. Suffice it to say that Jesus was calling disciples and according to Matthew, his first disciples called were the fishermen, Peter and Andrew while they were fishing. And a little farther along the lake shore, he called James and John.

Pic of Jesus

I mentioned last week, that they must have seen something special when they looked into Jesus's eyes to just drop what they were doing a follow him. I mean, follow him where? To do what? For how long? I tell you, if you don't want to follow Jesus, don't look into his eyes.

So the first four disciples Jesus called, according to Matthew, we fishermen. That reminds me of a story. I'm told it’s a true story.

Three fishermen were fishing when they came upon a mermaid. Did I mention I'm told this is a true story? The mermaid offered them one wish each.

The first fisherman said, “Double my I.Q.” So, the mermaid did it and to his surprise, he started reciting Shakespeare.

Then the second fisherman said, “Triple my I.Q.” And sure enough, the mermaid did it and amazingly he started doing complex [math problems](https://www.scarymommy.com/best-math-jokes-puns/) he didn’t know existed.

The third fisherman was so impressed he asked the mermaid to quadruple his I.Q. and the mermaid said, “Are you sure about this? It will change your whole life!” The fisherman said “Yes” So, the mermaid turned him into a woman.

Just to be clear, Jesus didn't wait to call disciples to begin his ministry. In verse 17, before he called these four fishermen, Matthew wrote that

17Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

That expression, "the kingdom of heaven has come near" and what followed the call story is as follows:

23Jesus 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.

This is where we will spend the rest of our sermon time.

Matthew's understanding is that in the person and ministry of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven, aka, the kingdom of God, has come – period. He lived it, taught it, and gave himself as an example of it, even to the cross. However, while we still live in the present age, this kingdom is not fully realized on earth as we know it, but will reach completion when we see 24:30“the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Meanwhile, in this in-between time, after his first coming and before his second coming, those of us who accept the call to be one of his disciples in every age will turn our backs on our old sinful ways, so that the new godly way of the kingdom of heaven is made visible in us *as we live*. Even now, we who accept the call to be one of his disciples, live according to the kingdom values and practices he taught and demonstrated. How are you doing with that?

When Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven has come near, and asked his disciples of every time and place, including us in the present time, to proclaim the good news, we are part of bringing it ever closer to its completion.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

Someone might ask, "Pastor, do you mean to say that if every person in the world became Christian and started living according to Jesus's example the kingdom of heaven would be complete?" To which I answer, "Geez, I don't know, but isn't that something to ponder? Let it begin with us and we'll find out!"

In the Second Reading, the apostle Paul had his hands full with the church in Corinth. There was dissension among the Christians. One-ups-man-ship regarding who baptized whom. Paul wrote that they were missing the point. Christians should be

10b'in agreement and that there be no divisions among [us], but that [we] be united in the same mind and the same purpose.'

That doesn't mean we all have to agree on what color the women's bathroom on the third floor will be. We won't quarrel about the things that don't matter. We will teach up the things that do matter. And we will live according to Jesus's example and be a part of the completion of the kingdom of heaven, at least that little corner that we can affect. How are you doing with that?

Paul even recognized that what he espoused was foolishness to those who are perishing, but, oh to those of us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Do you want access to the power of God? Does that sound attractive to you? Be careful looking into the eyes of Jesus because he will take you there.

Now I came across another fishing story. I am told this one might be true too. Do we have time for it?

While sports fishing off the Florida coast, a tourist capsized his boat. He could swim, but his fear of alligators kept him clinging to the overturned craft. Spotting an old beachcomber standing on the shore, the tourist shouted, “Are there any gators around here?!”

“Naw,” the man hollered back, “they ain’t been around for years!” Feeling safe, the tourist started swimming leisurely toward the shore. About halfway there he asked the guy, “How’d you get rid of the gators?” “We didn’t do nothin’,” the beachcomber said. “The sharks got ’em.”

This is like the situation in which we find ourselves. There is one God and that God is revealed in Jesus Christ – there are no other gods. So we can either participate in advancing his kingdom of heaven, or take our chances swimming with the sharks.

**Prayer**

Lord God, it was out of your great love that you sent Jesus your Son to show us the way back to you. Continue to draw us to yourself, through him. Give us his light that our steps might be directed in godly ways that end in you. And then Lord God, whenever your kingdom comes in all its glory, we will be ready. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen