

3 Epiphany Jan 22, 2023

Isaiah 9:1-4

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.^[a]

² ^[a] The people who walked in darkness

have seen a great light;

those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,

on them has light shone.

³ You have multiplied the nation;

you have increased its joy;

they rejoice before you

as with joy at the harvest,

as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

⁴ For the yoke of his burden,

and the staff for his shoulder,

the rod of his oppressor,

you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Psalms 27:1, 4-9

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom then | shall I fear?*

The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I | be afraid?

² When evildoers came upon me to eat | up my flesh,*

it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who stum- | bled and fell.

³ Though an army should en- | camp against me,*

yet my heart shall not | be afraid;

⁴ and though war should rise | up against me,*

yet will I put my | trust in him.

⁵ One thing have I asked of the LORD; one | thing I seek;*

that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days | of my life;

⁶ to behold the fair beauty | of the LORD*

and to seek him | in his temple.

⁷ For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe | in his shelter;*

he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling and set me high up- |
on a rock.

⁸ Even now he lifts | up my head*

above my enemies | round about me.

⁹ Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation with sounds | of great
gladness;*

I will sing and make music | to the LORD.

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers,^[a] 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 judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported
to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling 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? ¹⁴ I
thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that
no one may 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.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach
the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ
be emptied of its power.

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who
are being saved it is the power of God.

Matthew 4:12-23

¹² 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."^[a]

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."^[b] 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.

Message: Fishers of Men

They had done this since they were kids. The art of swirling the net overhead until it fanned out over the surface of the water like some giant mesh lariat was as second nature to them as to press a clutch, move a computer mouse, make coffee or get out of bed for you or me. It's all in the wrist; at just the right time a little flip and release, and the net settles like some gentle moth on the waves...pausing just a moment before sinking down into the depths of the Sea of Galilee. The results were not so much predictable as dependable. They never knew for certain what, if indeed anything, their nets would yield upon retrieval. Sometimes it was empty. If a few more casts of the net produced similar results, the brothers and their father would lift the anchor and move to a different spot on the lake. (Not too different today...ever been ice fishing? After a couple days coming up empty in the ice house and no hits on the tip boxes, you drive the pickup out on the ice and drag the house to what certainly promises to be a better location.) Sometimes it was just a few rough fish, hardly fit to eat. But frequently, more often than not, dragging the net back into the boat and dumping it out on the deck disclosed the harvest of the sea they sought; enough to feed their family plus enough to sell at the market.

Theirs was not an easy life and it was easy to see parallels between the fish they caught and themselves. Once in the net, fish certainly had no control over what happened to them. Ironically, the fishermen had little control over getting the fish into the net! They were constantly at mercy of the

elements, the wind, waves, water temperature, seasons, changes and chances of life: broken nets, leaky boats, hidden shoals. And yet, what was a person to do? This is what they were! They were fishermen! They were caught!

Do you ever wonder just what was it that Jesus used to lure these men into following him? Scripture only records that he said, "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men (of people, of humanity)." Upon hearing Jesus' call, the brothers could have done a number of things. They could have ignored him. After all, why waste valuable fishing time on some nut on the beach yammering about fishing for people. Must be some kind of cult...better stay the heck away from a guy like that!

But the scripture says that immediately they left their boats, nets and all, even their Dad, and followed Jesus. Ever wonder why? Maybe they were simply bored. Maybe their last few days on their lake were like the last few evenings some of you have spent on our lakes: pointless! Maybe they were genuinely curious. Fishers of men? Fish for people? How could that be? What could he possibly be talking about? They knew what fishing was like...when you get a decent net of fish, you've got a struggle on your hands! Once caught in a net their destiny was fixed and certain; the fish would die. But you could count on a struggle. Even fish don't give up, let go of control, die without a fight.

Why did they go? Why did they follow? We don't know for sure, but I think they were caught! For reasons even they could not totally understand, they just had to find out, had to learn more!

A couple translations of our gospel text this morning used a phrase that included the word *'teach'*: "Come, follow me and I will teach you how to fish for men (or people)." For me the idea of *'teach me'* had a very different feel or connotation than the notion of *'make me'*. If some one *teaches* me how to do something that is much different than if he or she *makes* me do it. In the case of teaching, there is an element of sharing, of cooperation. Some degree of both accountability and performance falls on me, the learner. "*Come, follow me and I will teach you how to fish for people*", has the connotation of partnership; that somehow Jesus is going to take my skills and abilities and help me become or perform just a little better than I could on my own. I rather liked that idea. This notion of teaching me was certainly better than what I was understanding the alternative to be, that Jesus will make me, force me to engage in some task whether I happen to like that task or not!

Unfortunately, *most* of the translations I encountered did, in fact, read, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Consulting the Greek here is interesting. The first thing we discover is that the Greek word used to quote Jesus is not the word for teach. That word is **didasco** and is where we get our English word didactic. On the contrary, the word used to quote Jesus here is the word **poiaso**—This word does not mean teach; it means to *make*. Right away I started getting nervous! Does Jesus mean he intends to force me to do things I might not want to do? That does not seem to go along with the image I want to have of Jesus!

A little deeper searching into the word poiaso disclosed something fascinating and exciting! This word is used in two primary places: it is used to describe human activity and it is used to describe God's activity. But in neither case does the word *make* suggest twisting someone's arm or forcing them. It does not mean to exert pressure to coerce or make someone do something. When describing human action, the word poiaso means to *construct, to shape, build or form*. Peter uses this word while talking to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. He suggests to Jesus that it would be good if he, James and John poiaso— build - three houses; one for Jesus, one for Elijah and one for Moses! The best example of the word used to describe God's activity is found in the ancient Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. In Genesis 1:1, it says that in the beginning God created —poiaso— the heaven and the earth.

What Jesus is saying is that he intends to form something, create something brand new out of these men. He may indeed draw upon their God-given skills and talents that they use in the world, but what he intends is something radically different!

Another surprise comes from searching for the verb in the sentence. Understanding Jesus to be saying, "Follow me and I will create, form or construct you", it's intriguing to see that the verb he attaches to us was not the term for "do". Instead, it was the term for "to be"! In other words, Jesus was not calling the disciples to do something, but to be something! It was not about a list of activities, behaviors, "do's and don'ts" or how to do something differently, but a call to be, to become something different, something new and exciting!

And for Peter and Andrew, James and John, something clicked! Regardless of what their original reason or motivation was for putting ashore at that moment and following Jesus, they were hooked! They were caught! And life would never be the same again! Ever!

Martin Luther tells us that our creed, the one we confess every Sunday, promises that the Holy Spirit of God, of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ continues to operate today in us exactly the way the Spirit operated in Simon, Andrew, James, John and the rest of the disciples. When in the Apostles' Creed we confess that we believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, Luther explains that we are making that confession in and through the power of the Spirit of Christ. Like fish in a net, we are not in control, we are caught! We cannot by our own power or understanding believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called us through the gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, sanctified us, made us holy and keeps us in that true faith!

Jesus says, "Come, follow me and I will create you into something completely new and different. I will form you into a new being, a worker for me, and for my Father's kingdom."

We're caught! And life will never be the same again!

Thanks be to God!

Prayers of the Church

Let us pray that the light of Christ may shine upon the Church, the world, and all people according to their need.

A brief silence

Lord, sometimes we think you see us only "From a distance." Sometimes that's right where we want you! But in Christ, you have promised to be God-with-Us, Emmanuel. Be gentle, Father, as you shed your holy light on our sin-darkened world! Thank you for the grace and comfort of your Holy Spirit, who helps us to repent and to delight in your "joyous light of glory."

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

The world scorns the Cross as folly and stumbling block. Therefore, give your Church faith, courage, and wit as it proclaims Christ crucified as the only means of forgiveness, salvation, and life with you forever. Make it lovely with the light of Jesus' strong saving love for us sinners.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Bring light and clarity to the people of this congregation, so that every act of worship, fellowship, outreach, stewardship, service, study, and support is centered in Christ alone.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are persecuted on account Christ. Keep them steadfast in faith and gracious in witness. Soften the hearts of their enemies, and bring them to repentant faith in Jesus.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

This is a hard prayer, Father: to pray for the evil and wicked; for abusers and killers, cheaters and deserters, and those who commit every sort of despicable act. When their victims cannot forgive, help us to pray the prayer they cannot: Forgive, dear Lord. Cause the wicked to repent of their evil ways and cling to the Cross of Christ as their only hope.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Shine the light of reason, justice, and mercy into the minds of our earthly rulers. Make them want to do your will and benefit the people entrusted to their care. Remind them that they, and all who have power and authority in society, must give an account of their stewardship to you, the Lord and ruler of all. And bestow upon us all a measure of your peace.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Bring healing, hope, and the light of your dear presence to everyone who sits in the darkness of suffering, shame, or sorrow. Especially we pray for Pr. David Andreae, Amy Cooper, Claire Littlefield, Pr. James Puotyual, Delores Rodela, Norma Schlee, and Donna Schminke. Let them, and all who care for them, say with confident joy: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?!

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Lord, you are the imperishable light, even in the darkness of death, for all who cling to you. We entrust our beloved dead to you, and we commend our lives to you as well. Be the lamp to our feet and light to our path throughout our earthly pilgrimage. For the sake of Jesus, lead us, and all whom you redeem, into your bright courts of heaven, and into your endless day.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**