

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.

What got you going on the path of your vocation? What was that one event that seemed to direct you? Who or what called you to the path you took? John's arrest spurs Jesus to action. This is the event that says to Jesus, “Now is the time you must begin.” And he does so, with eyes wide open, for John's arrest warns Jesus about picking up where John left off. With John handed over, silenced and imprisoned Jesus takes up his public ministry and moves to the forefront. He picks up John's message of repentance for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. Turn from your old ways to the new way of God's kingdom. This is his message and his call to others.

Many scholars think this is an apocalyptic proclamation and indeed, there is debate with many current scholars holding that Jesus was an apocalyptic, God will act to set things right, type of preacher. They believe that Jesus was expecting an end-of-time intervention by God. Other scholars see it as a more existential kind of proclamation. The moment to decide has come and people are called to choose between the way of Rome and the way of God; which is your kingdom? Matthew calls it the kingdom of heaven as a circumlocution, a way of avoiding using God's sacred name.

So Jesus moves to Capernaum to begin his public ministry. He moves to a new base of operations at Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. This new location is more than just incidental geography. The Isaiah 9 quote referring to Zebulun and Naphtali was the heart of the Assyrian conquest some 700 years earlier. The northern kingdom, Israel was attacked and part of the population deported. The original Hebrew upper-class population was moved out and foreigners relocated to the area. This area had suffered since then from Babylonian, Greek, and Roman Occupation to name a few. Jesus begins in this region of continued conquest with the message of a different kind of kingdom. Because of the import of foreigners years ago, these people were considered unclean and uncivilized. This was the area of the Gentiles and the Jews. In the midst of all this Jesus begins his public ministry. And it is here in Herod's face Jesus begins, even though he knows what Herod did to John.

He begins calling people to God's kingdom in an area that sees God forsaken and foreign domination a way of life. Jesus begins to call fishers. These were no “drink beer and drop a line fishers”, no bass boats, no homemade wet or dry flies. This was hard work, heavy manual labor in economic conditions that were bad and

getting worse. The fishing industry was regulated and taxed to the point that it was hard to sustain a family on the income generated. It was moving from a mom and pop subsistence industry to a revenue generator for Caesar, Herod and the 1 percenters. The actual fishers were at the bottom of this economic ladder.

We don't know if Jesus had contact with the disciples before calling them; I tend to think so. But they respond to his invitation to another type of work, a vocation of seeking people for God's kingdom. Jesus sees more in them than they probably see in themselves. Jesus interrupts these ordinary people in their ordinary routine and calls them to the extraordinary life of discipleship, a call that he repeats through time. He calls these folks to the work of being and beginning God's new community.

So today's scripture is about calling to a new vocation. I love these call scenes in classic movies, whether it is *The Dirty Dozen*, *The Magnificent Seven*, or *Oceans 11, 12, or 13*. In those we see people called from where they are, as they are to enlist in a cause. Even the reluctant respond. It was not like Mission Impossible sorting out the people with the right skills for the job from a wider selection. Jesus calls everyday people to be part of his new order of the spirit.

The assembling of a team is not just for Hollywood or a land long ago and far away but for us as well. We are called to be followers of Jesus. We are called to be part of Jesus's team, and that is hard for us, for we have so much that is important going on. It is always hard when Jesus calls because it is right in the middle of something else we are busy with. The disciples were busy fishing.

What about us? Are we busy with the coming of age or are we too comfortable with who we are? I think for us it is hard to acknowledge that we are being called, called from where we are to be what God needs us to be. We may have many spheres of influence but we are not being called because of greatness, rather because of who we are. We are being called because we are children of God. And that is what God needs us to be.

The most important part of our calling I think is to recognize who we are. We are to recognize that we are children of God. The first part of our calling is not doing something but being something. Sometimes we feel as if the church is always calling us to do something, add one more thing to our busy lives to lay one more burden on us. But that is not the case. Remember Jesus telling us to come to him, we who are toting heavy burdens and he will give us rest. In Matthew 11:28-29 (CEB) we hear his invitation:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves.

He does this by first calling us to be who we are. We are called to be who we were created to be. Our call to vocation is first just about being. Jesus sees more in us than we probably see in ourselves. We are invited to see ourselves as Jesus sees us. He sees us as God's precious family. And that is how we are to see ourselves.

This means that many will have to give up one of their most valued possessions. We will have to do something very difficult for so many people. We will have to give up our victimhood. All the reasons and excuses why we can't and aren't equipped will have to be cast aside. We can no longer be victims of circumstance. Sure there are things beyond our control but they do not define us. God does. We have to give up our victimitis. The fact that we are ordinary people doing ordinary things does not make us victims. We have to stop putting ourselves down. The disciples who were essentially oppressed fishers did not wallow in their victimhood. They refused to use it as an excuse for not following Jesus and doing extraordinary things. They heard the call of Jesus and followed. And we are here because of them. We are God's precious people.

Then, after seeing ourselves this way, do we get about doing. We cannot begin to be the light of the world until we begin to see ourselves that way. And the world needs our light. I have heard that last Monday was called blue Monday because studies have shown it is the day where people are the deepest down with cases of the winter blues. In my office I have a light that helps me with my Winter Blues and just the presence of this light helps me. We are called to be the light for other people to help them in their area of pain. But we can't do that with sustainability until we see ourselves as children of God rather than victims of circumstance. We are called to remember we are in God's image.

You've heard the expression used in derision, "She thinks she is God's gift to the world." Well, in reality, when we see ourselves as children of God we are God's gift to the world. We are blessed that we might be a blessing. We are called to be like Abraham to whom God said in Genesis 12:3, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

This is God's promise to us, but also the Church. What are we called to do? What must we do to reverse this terrible decline in numbers and influence? We too need to give up our victimhood and nostalgia for our glory days and start being who we are, children of God. Only after recognizing that do we embark on a mission to others. When we see ourselves as called to be the healing light for others we will find what to do. I believe the church too is blessed to be a blessing for all people on earth.

When we start to see ourselves as children of God, God will generate in us the ability to see others in the same way. How we see others is vital. There was an old saying that I think holds some validity: "I see myself as I think you see me." If we can see others, treat others as children of God we are well on our way.

Social media has been on my heart lately. I mentioned it in my newspaper article. Many of you don't do social media or even email. But what I am applying to social media and electronic communications applies to other forms of communications such as print, TV and radio. In all these areas we have taken freedom of speech to mean I can say whatever I want about anyone and it is okay. This ranges from the calling of people who don't agree with me names to the race baiting of people who did not like our former president.

Our society, public and private, in many ways considers demonizing the other as acceptable. Just so there is no misunderstanding, in almost every case, demonizing another person for their beliefs is not okay. It is wrong, and it is sinful. The people we attack or call names are God's children, in the image of God. What about someone like Hitler or Pol Pot? Okay, there are some egregious exceptions, but for the most part, if we refrain from disparaging all people, we will be well-served. This includes our current and past Presidents. If we see people as children of God, we can no longer hurl hateful insults and derision at them.

We, the light of the world, are called to shine. We are to help people see that they, too, are God's children. Jesus calls us to be the light that we are.