

3rd Sunday after Epiphany
Year A

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm 27:1, 5-13

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

In the Gospel reading last week, John gave us his version of the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the calling of the first few disciples. Today, we have Matthew's version. While these two versions are very different, it would not be appropriate to say one is wrong and the other is right, as each of the evangelists have their own story to tell their unique audiences. In each case, a specific point is being made which differs from Gospel to Gospel.

John focused on the encounters with Jesus that caused people to seek a fuller understanding of what a relationship with Jesus might entail. Matthew's focus is different. In this early stage of the Gospel, Matthew is pointing out how the ministry of Jesus grows out of the ministry of John the Baptizer. In both of these ministries, we see a continuation of God's interactions with the Jewish people from the earliest times to the present. Thus, after the report of the arrest of John, we have the quotation from Isaiah and the statement from Jesus that mirrors the message of John. The message of Jesus throughout the Gospel of Matthew is not about how to get to heaven, but about God's rule coming on earth as it is in heaven.

Many commentators have looked at the calling of the four fishermen and questioned why these men dropped everything without question and followed Jesus. What was in that call that was so compelling? First, it was not a call to some future life, but a call to contemporary action. Jesus said He would make them fishers of men in the present. Therefore, instead of a call to "come and see," Jesus gives the direct command to "follow me." It is a call to action. That action was to usher in the Kingdom of God.

The response to this command to "follow me" was somewhat surprising in the context of this story. There was no preparation, no hint that these men knew Jesus, and yet, they acted immediately. There was no hesitation or questions. Unlike Elisha in the Hebrew Scriptures, these men did not need to tell family or qualify their response in any way. They just dropped everything and followed Jesus. In addition to their promptness in reaction, these men left what may be assumed as a good living in their profession. They were not day-laborers, but owned their own boats and may have hired men working for them. There was no suggestion that, by following Jesus, they would improve their lot in life – just the opportunity to follow this charismatic man. These four men, all engaged in the fishing industry, left family and business in response to a command.

The call Jesus made to these men is the same call He has for us. Jesus calls each of us to follow Him without conditions or qualifications. Each of us is asked to leave whatever we might hold dear in this life and embark on a journey with Jesus to proclaim the nearness of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is not waiting for us to decide if we might want to engage in this work - He is calling us, gathering us for the work of spreading His message. We have a choice, though. God never

forces anyone to do anything. The call has gone out – it is up to us to decide how we will respond. We may not know what that call will entail, but we are asked to react as these men did so long ago. The Kingdom of God is near, here in Christian County. The entire Gospel of Matthew is packed with information of how we might live and work in that Kingdom here and now.

We are called. How will we answer?