

Title: "A Light for Dark Times"

Texts: Psalm 27: 4-9

Matthew 4: 12-23

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Psalm 27:1, 4-9

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

The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

⁴One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:

to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

⁶Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;

I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"
Your face, LORD, do I seek.

⁹Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!

Matt. 4:12 -23

¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so 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--

¹⁶ the 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."

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

¹⁸ As 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. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As 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. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

²³ Jesus 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.

Matthew says in 4:17 that Jesus came preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Odd isn't it? The story that follows is not about thieves or murders, or thugs. It is not about kings or queens or even princes with an attitude. It is not about corruption in the courts, or bribery of the town officials, or even cheating on taxes. It is not about drinking, adultery, gluttony, or pride. It is not about either religious fanaticism or even unapologetic atheism. Yet, we are told that for Jesus, John the Baptist's preaching had made Nazareth a dangerous place to live.

Oddly, or at least it seems odd to me, the story right after the arrest of John the Baptist in the Gospel of Mark is about Jesus making a home at Capernaum and walking by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is not defending John. He is not finger pointing at King Herod who arrested his cousin. Jesus leaves family and friends and takes off for Capernaum. At least on a first reading of the archaeological facts as we have them, the scene seems to be a fishing community and a tranquil vacation spot. King Herod had a summer palace not too far away. Fishing was the primary vocation and the people ate a great deal of fish. Such a location has a great deal of appeal to me. I could picture myself living in such a place. Couldn't you? **I know a lot of people who define a good day as any day they go fishing. One Thursday evening my son came to visit us. He has had precious little time to come for a visit. With election dignitaries visiting the state, protest marches, and gang violence, things were simply too busy. So what did we do Friday? We went fishing. He caught one spot the size of my hand. I didn't catch one. Now, some people would say that was a waste of time. We certainly couldn't make a living that way! For us, that wasn't a waste of time. It was a good day to feel the warm sunshine, watch the pelicans and gulls, catch up on the news of my granddaughters. God was in heaven and all was right with the world.**

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Simon, Andrew, James, and John grew up by the sea. The story is about these four fishermen, preparing to go fishing. They were working, making a living by honest labor. They were family men in a family business. What happened to the families of these four disciples after they left and followed Jesus, we have limited knowledge. Whether we understand these men to be the future owners of the business and well to do or laborers' making do until the end of the week really doesn't matter. These are four men who don't seem to be doing anything wrong. They are making a living, feeding their families, and sharing the fears, anxieties, hopes, and dreams of their community. Nothing especially noteworthy seems to set them apart. We do not know their net worth. We cannot tell if they are educated or ignorant. There is nothing in this story to give us a hint. Scripture tells us that Jesus will heal Peter's mother-in-law. We cannot even tell if they were regular worshippers at the synagogue or rarely seen in religious circles. We simply do not have a great deal of biographical information.

The facts that are mentioned do not seem to even be remotely linked to these disciples at all. John is arrested. These fishermen had nothing to do with that. Nor were they going to become a rescue team to extract John from prison. John the Baptist dared to voice his moral opposition to King Herod and his affair with Herodias, his brother's wife. That's what got him into trouble with the royal household. It had nothing to do with Simon, Andrew, James, or John. They just lived in Galilee. **Yet, Matthew's Gospel would lead us to conclude that the arrest of John his cousin might be the event that led Jesus to move his home from Nazareth to Capernaum. This was not happenstance, but part of God's plan. The son of a carpenter moves his home to the Sea of Galilee. He swaps the tools of a carpenter for life in a fishing community. This commonplace event became a theological watershed; a call to change lifestyle.**

An article by William Willimon on this passage drew my attention to a *Peanuts* cartoon. The first frame shows Lucy at her five cent psychology booth, where Charlie Brown has stopped for advice about life:

"Life is like a deck chair, Charlie," she says. "On the cruise ship of life, some people place their deck chair at the rear of the ship so they can see where they've been. Others place their deck chair at the front of the ship so they can see where they're going."

The good "doctor" looks at her puzzled client and asks, "Which way is your deck chair facing?" Without hesitating, Charlie replies glumly, "I can't even get my deck chair unfolded." [Pulpit Resource](#), January, February, March 2005, Year A, Vol. 33, #1 (modified)

I have felt that way, haven't you? There are some days that things just don't go right. There are some days when the direction and purpose of life just do not stay in view, because I'm busy fooling with deck chairs.

The kingdom of God was near. Without these disciples, there was a real danger that the Kingdom of God would go unnoticed. This kingdom was unlike any kingdom

here on earth. In this kingdom the power of the sword would not prevail. In this kingdom women would not become the pawns of mutual defense pacts – traded and wedded to keep the peace. In this kingdom children would play and sit at the master's feet rather than slave away to earn their parents' freedom. In this kingdom the truth would be told simply rather than twisted by the price the speaker was willing to pay. In this kingdom, one will work all day for the reward of the master's kind words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." **In this kingdom it will not be a disgrace, rather the highest compliment, to be a servant of others and master of no one. In this kingdom love shines brightly and drives away the darkness of hate and bitterness.**

In Matthew's Gospel there is a radical claim upon the life of those who follow. The lives of Simon, Andrew, James, and John will never be the same again. They will close a chapter and open a new one. The kingdom drew near during a walk by the sea when a stranger named Jesus Christ, came exploring his new community. It was enough to make those men give up the family business. It was enough for them to leave their family ties. It was enough for them to lay down their lives. You say you want to be like them, drop everything, break new ground, start a new movement, change things, and be a pioneer? Maybe it would be wise to reconsider. **As Erwin Potts once said, "The pioneers are the guys with the arrows in their backs." (Rowell, p.103) These disciples are persecuted and killed for following Jesus.**

THE NEW INTERPRETER'S BIBLE, VOLUME, VIII, p. 171, notes:

"...The fishermen are already at work, already doing something useful and important, thus they are not looking for a new life. Jesus' call does not fill an obvious vacuum or meet an obvious need in their lives, but, like the call of prophets in the Hebrew Bible, it is intrusive and disruptive, calling them away from work and family. The divine sovereignty is clothed in the call to human response: 'I could not seek you, if you had not already found me.' Discipleship is not an offer man makes to Christ. It is only the call which creates the situation."

Jesus went looking for the disciples, not the other way around.

As – LaVonne Althouse writes in the Minister's Annual Manual 2004-2005:

"Jesus also went fishing in the gloom – among the desolate of Capernaum. In the gospel today we hear Jesus call four skilled fisher– folk who should understand best what he was doing because they fished for a living. Jesus walked among the oppressed who lived in Capernaum. He went fishing for people whom he would weld into a new covenant. He would make them a commonwealth of God where they would find ways to see that no one would be friendless or in any kind of need. He would make them what they would call the kingdom of God – a colony of heaven that lived in the light of God's

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love in the midst of despair.”

The light of Christ illumines not only our lives, but the lives of others. It gives us not only strength for today and hope for tomorrow, but a light to share with others who share the darkness. God created us with limited night vision compared with many other creatures, but we do not need to remain limited. We can expand our horizons with light that God gave us to produce. Turn on the lights for Christ! Let us pray.....