

January 26, 2020

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

Prophecy. Prophecy fulfilled. As Christians we have come to understand that much of what we know as the Old Testament is filled with prophecies, great and small, but prophecies that point to a future when God will come to his people in the form of a Messiah, one who will bring God's word to the world in a new and exciting way. Without knowing exactly what this Messiah would be like, God's people continually looked to each new day for the coming of God's promised Messiah.

We know that those prophecies were fulfilled with the birth of Jesus and his life of teaching about God's kingdom and what it meant to be God's people in relationship with one another.

We also understand prophecy, and prophecy fulfilled as we look at Jesus final days and his death by crucifixion and his rising three days later.

Our present season, Epiphany, is the season where we find Christ manifested, Christ made known. We don't learn all there is to know about Christ during this season, certainly, but we recall some of the highlights of how Christ is made known in the world of his time.

Matthew's gospel text today reminds us that when John the Baptist was imprisoned, Jesus left Nazareth and moved to Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.

And further, Matthew would have us recall this prophecy of Isaiah- "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."

This prophecy of Isaiah came after the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali had been defeated by the Assyrian military. And in the midst of this devastation Isaiah prophesies that they will come out of their despair and suffering and they will once again be joyous and celebrate because God will deliver them once again. Demonstrating once again that God is a faithful God.

And just so, Matthew is reminding us that in a very real way that when John the Baptist was arrested God's people were not celebrating with joy. Life was rough. The Romans were oppressive. Taxes were high. The outlook was only bleak.

And yet, in this desolate geographical landscape and the desolate landscape within people, a light has shined. That light is Jesus, who begins his public ministry by proclaiming – "repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Jesus begins his public ministry by gathering disciples. Rabbis have students, disciples, who are together virtually 24/7, so that they can gain and assimilate the knowledge and wisdom of their rabbi as they hope to become learned and perhaps rabbis themselves. Being a disciple is a commitment like none other.

Today Matthew tells us that the first four disciples were fishermen. They weren't community leaders, they were not wealthy, they didn't have great influence in their community. They were hard working men who needed to be as good at fishing as possible in order to eke out a living.

And Matthew would have us believe that Jesus simply asked them to join him and they did. No questions asked. They left their nets and boats and followed Jesus. My cynical self often wonders if they hadn't just had the worst luck fishing for an extended time and thought Jesus' offer was better than going bankrupt fishing. But that's me.

We must remember that the fishing boats these four owned were not the fishing vessels we see leaving harbors in our day for a day's fishing. They didn't have radar to find fish. They didn't have a large crew who could help harvest a large catch if they were fortunate enough to find one.

In fact, in 1986 a first century fishing boat was found by the Sea of Galilee. This fishing boat was built of largely low quality materials and held together with resin. Yet it is also a very moving testimony to ingenuity born of perpetual hardship. Fishermen made do with what they had. They simply had no choice.

So we might want to ask – just what did Jesus see in these four fishermen that led him to ask them to drop what they were doing and follow him? What qualities did Jesus see in them that we might not notice as we read Matthew's story of their calling?

Good questions. Jesus apparently thought they had the right stuff to be his disciples. These fishermen were: practical, they were adaptive, and they were resourceful. We don't know their ages, but Jesus must have been able to assess them long enough to believe that they could be part of his inner circle.

Fishermen needed to be practical, certainly. They needed to be focused on their craft. Days and days at seas gave many opportunities to be practical people who need to produce a product that everyone needed on a daily basis. If you weren't practical, you were probably not pushing off from shore each day, hoping for a catch large enough to more than pay for expenses.

These fishermen were also adaptive. As a fisherman you couldn't help but be adaptive if you wanted to survive the changeable sea. Storms at sea often come quickly with no real warning. Adaptability is essential to survival.

These fishermen were resourceful. Again they needed to be. Wood for building ships was expensive. So you made do with what you could scrounge, what you could find,

what you could glue together with resin. What you could make do with for another year, or month, or day. Resourcefulness was essential for a fisherman to be in business.

And yet, we know that Jesus and his disciples would become the movement that would change human history.

It is often said that God doesn't call the qualified, rather he qualifies the called. And to a great extent that is true. But I can't help but believe that God has not looked into the heart and soul of everyone he has called throughout history – including you and me. And that's an awesome thought, isn't it?

What does God see in us – in you and me? Does he see us as being practical, adaptive, and resourceful? What does he see in us that would have him call us to be his disciples for the world today?

You and I thank God each and every day that we are his people, that we are baptized into his very large and diverse family. We have the salvation that Jesus' life, death and resurrection bought for us. We are the saved. And with that comes a response of thankfulness. How then do we respond?

What qualities do we possess that we can use daily as disciples who would venture to move forward the movement that changed history?

We can't get out of this by saying: "nothing special," or "I don't know," or "nothing worth mentioning."

We must take the calling of the 12 disciples seriously. And just so we must seriously meditate and study and come to understand how we serve God's kingdom and Christ's church with the qualities that God sees in us.

We are inundated with world news that is depressive. We are inundated with all sorts of things invading our space and time that need our attention with regularity. We seem to have a full plate all the time.

And yet, in the midst of all that life is about for us daily, I'm going to leave you with a challenge for this week, and perhaps the remaining season of Epiphany – to come to an understanding and appreciation for the qualities that are within us that God can use to further the gospel, to further his mission here on earth. And then the further challenge is how do we put those qualities to their best use?

Thanks be to God.
Amen