

January 22, 2023

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Mathew 4: 12-23

I thought it might be best to start at verse 17. It contains the message, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”. Now if these words of Jesus’s sound very familiar, you would be correct. In Mathew 3:2 they trip off the tongue of John the Baptist. Jesus however would use the same words again when He sends the disciples out in Mathew 10-7.

Jesus’s words and instructions are consistent with John the Baptist who prepared the way for the Lord. This is a beautiful continuation from John’s ministry to Jesus’s.

A few weeks ago we saw that repentance was strongly connected with judgement in John’s ministry. This does not seem to be the situation with Jesus’s ministry. Something has changed. Repentance takes on a new focus and meaning. With Jesus’s ministry, repentance means to radically change your thinking and actions.

We see such radical action and focus in the actions of simple fishermen who leave their old familiar lives behind and go off and follow Jesus. Our Lord chose these men who were not trained in any sacred schools or traditions. The great majority of them were unlearned or illiterate. The Jewish religious authorities would consider them people of the land or peasants. Their leaving of their nets and boats are symbolic for what true repentance requires from us. Repentance is a turning from ourselves to God. This is why it is a radical shift in thinking and action. These four men would have known about Jesus. They may have personally met Him before. Andrew was a follower of John the Baptist. So, he would have heard the stories about Jesus from John. The big shock was that they sharply turned their backs on their old ways of life, their fathers and fishing partners. Some scholars have speculated that this may have been more political in nature. That these fishermen had catch quotas with the Roman authorities. So, for them it was better to follow Jesus than to work all day for the Romans.

The quote from Isaiah is very telling. With the coming of Jesus there is a new understanding of repentance and the Kingdom of God. This is the light that has dawned on an ungodly people. They are now being challenged to turn from their old ways and turn to the light that is Jesus Christ. The light that He offers will change your life daily and eternally.

There is a lot of change in this morning's gospel. People are thinking and acting very differently. Jesus's concept of repentance is what is happening. The disciple's actions are symbolic of repentance and the deeper spiritual meaning it contains. I believe that the disciple's lives have been changed with their being called by Jesus. The bigger change and true repentance will come at Pentecost. They will have smaller moments of change and repentance as they follow Jesus for the next three years. This will be best felt and understood at Pentecost.

Turning our back on sin requires a very radical shift in our actions and thinking. That if I repent of this sin, I am committed to not repeating it again. I am turning from my old self and turning to God. Very similar to the shift we saw in the disciples today. When we are able to do this,

then we are truly free of that sin. Forgiveness then means a lot more because of the greater effort we put into turning away from that sin.

God Bless and have a great week, Pastor D.