

Epiphany 3-January 22, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 4:12-23

“Called and Sent” Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen As we work through the season of Epiphany, we continue to see the ways that Jesus reveals himself to us. To retrace what has happened since the birth of Jesus as recorded in Matthew, first Joseph receives a dream that he should take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to protect the life of Jesus from the death threats of King Herod. Then after Herod died and it seems that the coast was clear, Jesus returned from Egypt and made his home in Nazareth. John the Baptist appears in the wilderness to preach a sermon. Apparently when he preached that sermon, his congregation of hearers must have been having an annual meeting that day because he delivered a very short sermon. My typical sermons are around 1300 words long. John the Baptist’s that day was nine words. **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** Next Jesus is baptized and then immediately he is tempted by the devil in the wilderness. We are now only in the 4th of 28 chapters in Matthew. Before Jesus begins his ministry on his own, he knows that he will need help to spread this message of repentance. For Jesus to reveal himself to as many people as possible, Jesus calls and sends disciples.

It will not take long to train the new disciples that Jesus calls and sends out. The message that they are called to deliver is the exact same message that John the Baptist preached and the exact nine words that Jesus began to preach before calling his disciples. **Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** The newly called disciples did not have a long list of classes they would have to take before being sent. The only message they needed to proclaim was the repentance and forgiveness of sins.

The call process for the first disciples was quite a bit simpler than calling pastors today. There were no candidacy committees to evaluate the intentions of the disciples that were called. It seems that Jesus just called whoever he happened to stumble on. Since he happened to be walking by the Sea of Galilee, he found fishermen. I don’t think Jesus only wanted fishermen because of his clever play on words saying that now these fishermen would now fish for men. And not all of Jesus’ disciples were fishermen in their first careers before being called by Jesus. Jesus created disciples just as God created the world. He spoke and it happened. Jesus called his disciples by saying, “Follow Me” and sent them by saying, “I will make you fish for people”.

Sometimes the best people to start working for a new job are people who have no previous experience. These people have no preconceived ideas of what to do and are willing to listen and simply do as they are told. This was the case with these disciples that Jesus called. The first two brothers that Jesus called left behind the equipment that they used to fish for fish. We are told they left their nets. They brought nothing with them to their new calling. Jesus would give them all they needed to start fishing for people. His disciples would deliver words of repentance just as John the Baptist and Jesus had been doing.

It seemed that nepotism was not a problem for Jesus. The first two disciples were brothers and so were the next two. Once again as James and John were called from fishing for fish to fishing for people, they left all they had and knew behind. Jesus would provide all they needed and give them the words to say. I wondered why Jesus didn’t encourage James and John to at least keep their boat. Maybe this boat that was once used for fishing could have been repurposed for transportation for the new disciples as they would travel to new places to deliver this message of repentance and forgiveness. But James and John left their nets that they were mending, their boat and even their father. Again, Jesus created disciples with his word when he said, “Follow Me.”

The list of the first 12 disciples is not complete until much later in the book of Matthew. It is after Jesus declares that the harvest is plentiful, and the laborers are few that Jesus calls 8 more disciples. Unlike some people whose names are never revealed in scripture, every one of the disciples of Jesus are called by name. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot. These twelve disciples were specifically called by their names and were sent to work in the plentiful harvest.

Each of your names have since been added to this list of disciples that are called and sent. In your baptism, Jesus has called each of you by your name and you have been called to work in God's plentiful harvest. The harvest is still plentiful and each of you have been sent to do God's work. Like the first disciples that were called and were sent trusting that God would provide them with what needed to do His work, you too have each been given unique gifts to use in the harvest.

Today more disciples will be called by name in our annual meetings. You may not feel that you have all the gifts necessary for the jobs that you have been called to do, but you have nothing to fear. You will be given whatever you need as you are sent into this congregation to do God's work. We give thanks for people that have heard God's call and will simply follow. Amen