

Not a stained glass vision

God of all mercy, your Son proclaimed good news to the poor, release to the captives and freedom to the oppressed: anoint us with your Holy Spirit and set all your people free to do your work in Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Collect for Epiphany 3, Additional Collects, Common Worship, Church of England

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Isaiah 9:1-4, Psalm 27:1, 5-13, 1 Corinthians 1:10-18, Matthew 4:12-23

January 22, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 4:12-23

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – 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." From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

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

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.

Today's gospel reading that includes the calling of the disciples by the sea of Galilee lends itself to being a stained glass vision – something beautiful but distant and unreal. In fact we have a stained glass window of this scene, a window originally in the Solvang

church and now in our chapel. Jesus approaches Simon as he crouches, clutching his net.

Does this story have anything to do with us? ...anything other than being part of the dusty lore of "the tradition" of our "religion?" Is there anything alive, immediate,

current? Is there anything here that transcends the confines of religious practice?

As I've pointed out before, the chapel window is a fascinating blend of old and new – the highly representational older windows combine with the abstract/expressionist newer glass.

In connection with this gospel reading, the newer glass patterns and colors flow out from the lower middle light of the older windows – from the hands of Simon balloon forth the four large panels of newer glass, the large dancing net reaching out through the watery light. If you stand or sit in the chapel, that net appears to envelop you, surround you and gather you in – with any other people nearby.

The large, present net of light is the much larger experience of the chapel window. That relative scale may give us some clues about this gospel reading, about how to perceive it – not as an ancient narrative, but a beginning point for a net of light that gathers us in today.

The calling of the disciples in today's gospel reading – Simon and Andrew, James and John – is in some ways substantial, and in other ways incidental. In terms of substance, it matters less who they were in character. They were probably more sweaty and grimy

than holy. They knew more about fishing than religion. Their training was not for the life of the mind but for the physical work of boats, nets, and tackle and for knowing the weather and the natural elements. While later years have accorded them statues and portraits and icons and medals, in fact they had no significant social standing or prestige when we meet them by the Sea of Galilee.

And as Jesus calls these fisher folk – simple workers – we can reflect on what that says not about them but about Jesus. We can reflect on what that says about us.

One of the ways we distance ourselves from our own calling is by looking through the lens of intervening generations when it comes to Simon, also known as St. Peter – or these others: St. Andrew, St. James, St. John. And we can think, rightly, that there's never going to be a statue of St. Randall or St. Whoever – no holy card or stained glass window; no one is going to name a church after us... So we imagine this whole matter of calling is reserved to a spiritual elite... and some other place and time – as on the Sea of Galilee... in ages past.

But Jesus was not forming a spiritual elite – it was never his interest. I will guess still not his interest.

He was gathering, instead, very ordinary humanity together to both hear the truth of the presence of God here and now – and to call forth from them the light that God intended them to be for themselves and for the life of the world.

In a couple of weeks (in the 5th chapter of Matthew) we will hear Jesus saying quite explicitly: “you are the light of the world...” and he was speaking not to the over-achievers but to the people who were mostly mindful of their limitations, their distractions, their failures in faith and in all manner of other earthly endeavors. In John’s gospel we hear him speak of Jesus as “the light of the world” but Jesus turns that around, as he did so many expectations.

So what does it mean for us to be light of the world?

What does it mean to be called?

What is our future as objects of the love and attention of one who was not so impressed with the impressive but offered opportunities to shine to everyone?

People mattered to Jesus. All people mattered to Jesus.

And in this we can realize that this is the utterly real context of Christ’s calling of actual, not idealized humanity.

It is this humanity that Jesus cared about and it is this humanity

from which he fashioned, and still fashions communities of light, communities of people who are called.

In this story we have heard today about Jesus calling Simon, Andrew, James and John we also heard that they immediately left their nets or their boat and followed.... They went into action and they moved into the unfamiliar.

And we heard that their work was “proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.”

This work of Jesus and his followers continues to be our work today in a world that has more than enough of bad news and disease and sickness of heart, mind and body that staggers the imagination.

There is an old quotation of the late Bishop of Zanzibar Frank Weston, that was often posted in the narthexes of Episcopal Churches - not for people arriving to church but for people departing from church:

“You are Christians, then your Lord is one and the same with Jesus on the throne of His glory, with Jesus in His Blessed Sacrament, with Jesus received into your hearts in Communion, with Jesus who is mystically with you as you pray and with Jesus enshrined in the hearts and bodies

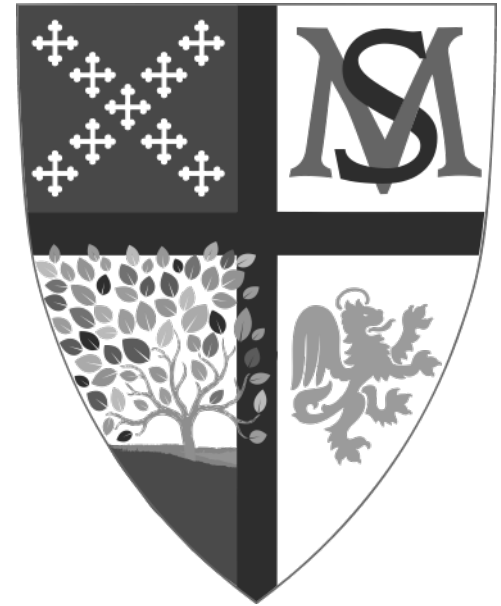
of His brothers and sisters up and down the world. Now go out into the highways and hedges, and look for Jesus in the ragged and naked, in the oppressed and sweated, in those who have lost hope, and in those who are struggling to make good. Look for Jesus in them; and when you find Him, gird yourselves with His towel of fellowship, and wash His feet in the person of His brethren.”

In calling the most ordinary, Jesus was revealing what is possible for us, for everyone, if we move out, move into the streets, “the highways and hedges,” take on as our work not only what we see to do, but what God sees we can do, who we can be in this world that God so loves.

How do we hear Jesus’ call today? What love is in it for us and for others – how will we receive it and express it? And how will we move? What unfamiliar territory will we discover? What light can we be for those who sit in darkness, in the shadow of death?

The call of Jesus: if it is anything, it is anything but a stained glass vision.

Amen.



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