

January 26, 2020 Third Sunday after Epiphany
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Peace Lutheran Church - Austin, Texas

GOSPEL Matthew 4:12-23

The holy gospel according to Saint Matthew, the fourth chapter.
Glory to you, O Lord.

¹²Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so 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—
¹⁶the 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.”

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

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

²³Jesus 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.

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

I don't know about you, but I'm a go-through-life-with-30-tabs-open-in-your-browser-window type of person. The type of person who clicks "remind me tomorrow" approximately 24 times before installing the software updates. There is always a little bit more happening than I can keep up with. Too many shows to watch, podcasts to listen to, books to read...

This world is so full. It's hard to keep up. Since information has begun to flow in such volume in the last few decades...now that we carry the equivalent of the library of Alexandria around in our pockets...it's impossible that we could keep up...even if we were really trying.

It can be hard to keep track of what matters most.

But sometimes, the browser freezes. The phone reboots...starts running updates it won't let you put off anymore. Sometimes things are out of whack enough that you have to do a hard reset just to function. Just to get past everything being frozen in place.

Maybe I'm not the only one. Maybe it's happened to you. And not just to your phone or computer, either.

When was your last hard reset? Are you up and running again? Maybe still rebooting? Just waiting for that progress bar to crawl to the other side of the screen?

Maybe you're still frozen.

We had a hard reset kind of day on Friday.

I hesitate to go into detail...and not just because of my solid reputation for crying in front of all of you on the regular...

You see, at the end of the school day on Friday, we got the call from the office. The one you don't want to get. The voice on the phone was saying it seemed like Isa had had a seizure. 911 had been called. We had to get there right away. Ryan pulled up about the same time as the fire truck.

See why I wasn't sure about mentioning it? It's still very close. We still don't know much about what happened, and have more doctors to visit. I don't know if any of us have a lot to say about it...though we appreciate love and prayers. Isa doesn't seem to remember it...so while your loving attention of her is appreciated... I do also worry about how confident she already is of her own centrality in the universe. You can just treat us like we're ok. Like we're normal.

And we are OK. We are normal. The reason I bring it up isn't because I want to talk about it or want attention. It's not because I think what happened to us was so unusual. The reason I bring it up is because it wasn't...because I know you know that feeling.

How everything froze. And then the world restarted...but 30 things very quickly became one...one thing that mattered. Nothing else existed.

And you know...that happens...sometimes in terrifying ways...sometimes in overwhelmingly joyful ones.

When I imagine what it might have been like to meet Jesus, I wonder if it was like that. In the good way...mostly... The world frozen - everything else on your mind fades out of focus...and Jesus is just there...showing you the one things that matters in your life... and nothing else exists.

It must have been that way...right?...for James and John to just up and leave...not only their half-done work...their half-mended nets...but also their father...sitting and working right there next to them? Zebedee is there...silent...but present...in Matthew, Mark, and Luke's tellings of how the disciples are called. The father who is left behind.

That almost always hits me really hard...but since I'm especially pensive right now about parent-child relationships...it hits me even a little harder.

I wonder a lot about James and John and their dad. Those boys seem to have all kinds of stuff going on as they journey with Jesus...still jockeying for power and position...fighting with the other disciples about who is going to be the greatest. I wonder if they got it from their dad, too. I mean...What do you really expect from a guy named 'Thunder' (which is what Zebedee means)...It kind of calls to my mind a Chris Hemsworth as Thor sort of mental image.

I wonder if James and John were like their dad. I wonder if their family business was a happy one. Or if Zebedee had higher hopes for his boys. I wonder how he felt when they dropped everything that day...

I wonder if he was angry...still calling after them as they walked away...or if maybe he was close enough...got enough of a glimpse of Jesus...to understand or feel glad....even though he stayed behind. Maybe he knew they were off to do the work of the next generation...and that someone had to keep catching the fish.

I tend to imagine it that way. It seems like he just let them go. Knew the best thing they could do was go on a new adventure...that they had a different purpose than him now.

I think sometimes we forget to honor the particular work of elders in letting the younger generation go and be what they will be and do what they will do. It's not so glamorous...but it's no less heroic. Sometimes it is very heroic, really. Did you read about the Skilled Veteran's Corps in Japan? They are all engineers over 60 years old, and after the damage at the Fukushima Nuclear Plant, they volunteered to go in to stabilize it. They said that the young people should be more protected from the potential harm from radiation. That it made the most sense for them to face the danger.

Different generations have different callings. All of us do. And sometimes it's hard to let each other go. Or to honor the callings that are different from our own. But Zebedee seems to know how.

It's especially hard to do for someone who've cared for...letting them far enough away that you can't even fool yourself anymore that you can keep them safe, chart their life.

And it's hard to be the one who leaves, too...if you're the one who's grown up...who is being called into the unknown...while others are staying behind.

The shapes of our relationships and even our families change when Jesus comes close to us. The world freezes. It's a hard reset. And we don't always know what we will lose or what we will find when the world starts to move again.

We aren't doing 30 things at once anymore, though. If we're honest, we probably never were. We may not have as much as we thought we did. And sometimes the clarity of that simplicity is exactly what we need.

Because what we do have is the assurance of Jesus is right here with us...in the middle of our everyday life and work...and God's love is surrounding us and goes with us into the future that Jesus is calling us to...So we can know that even when we are in control of nothing...on a road we may not have chosen...even when we have to let go of someone we love...or they let go of us...we will find what we need.

There used be art on the train bridge downtown that you could see from the Congress Avenue bridge. I heard it was painted for the crew teams that row on the lake...It said "Focus One Point and Breathe." Focus on Jesus. Breathe. Reset. Follow what matters. You'll know where to go.

Amen.