

WELCOME 15th January 2023 – 2 Epiphany '23 A

Matthew 4:12-22

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... Turning points. Those moments in life when everything changes. Some are the result of hard work & detailed plans...blood sweat & tears. Some are complete surprises...bolts from the blue. Some are awesome...I do. You've got the job. Yep...you're pregnant. Some are not...I'm sorry, there's nothing we can do. You need to leave now. Guilty.

But whether it's a moment filled w/ excitement or mired in despair...Whether they affirm everything we know to be right & true or leave us dazed confused & unsure about what we believe...from that moment...nothing is as it was. We're pointed in a new direction. We see w/ new eyes. We're offered new purpose & travel a new path. There's transition, but more importantly transformation.

"Repent! *The Kingdom of Heaven is near.*"

"Come, *follow me, & I will show you how to fish for people!*"

We could all share stories of our life's turning points. But what Jesus invites us to share is how in each one he was present guiding & reshaping our lives, whether we knew it then or not. What Jesus invites us to see & share is how in excitement or despair, boredom or joy, dazed & confused or confident & assured...he was at work in that moment...In. Us. For. His. Purpose.

Again today Jesus stands before us & invites us to live in a real responsive relationship with the Father that leads us into the world for the purpose of widening the reach of his kingdom. We are entrusted with a kingdom calling that radically alters our place in the world & our role as God's people in this place.

We'll explore & experience that together today...

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, giver of all good gifts, you have given us life. You have bestowed upon us your love & that love includes your plans for us. You call us to yourself & into your world in your name. Our lives are a response to your call. Give us grace to hear your voice & hearts that respond in boldness. Today we listen again. Let us not be overwhelmed with fears of the future or of our failures in the past. Guide us to that place where your will is to be accomplished through our hands hearts & words...

Through Christ who is alone Lord & Saviour - Amen

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. Has Jesus ever called you to leave something familiar into something new? What did you do?
2. What do you think it means to "fish for people?" Why does that seem such a difficult calling in 2023?

2 Epiphany '23 A – It's TIME! KINGDOM CALLING

Late in my 1st uni experience...as a business major...I learned about **Vision** Statements. Every business was supposed to have one. **Why** does your business exist? We do X. Produce widgets. Deliver stuff. **“Create** happiness...” by providing the best in entertainment for all people everywhere was Disney Theme Parks. As students we were even encouraged to write personal statements. Short/sharp/shiny manifesto of sorts: Who are you? Why are you here? What are you doing? There is **value** in that process...not mocking it. We all need a target...a goal...a preferred destination...trajectory & purpose for our lives. If you aim at nothing you're sure to hit it. And we need to be able to say it – own it. **Catalyst** in peoples' lives...for the name/BtTh of Jesus...was how I visioned me because...

By the time I entered seminary/pastoral training...the trend hit churches. We have one...maybe you can quote it? It's been there 10 years...you ought to have it... Say it w/ me: **God** has called... LWF to be a vibrant Xn community that glorifies God by inviting all people to become disciples of Jesus who grow in his grace & go in his power to show his love to the world. That's our vision...preferred destination...who we are, why we're here, & what we do.

The only real problem w/ those sorts of short/sharp/shiny/punchy/powerful stmnts? Too often they're like New Year's Resolutions. Make 'em & lose track of/forget 'em. There's no...**What** happens if we don't? They're aspirations...abstractions...hard to nail down so you know when you're “there.” If you're not serious or you give up... Then what? Which is why I've always kept another “list”...I've never really written it down, but it's so much a part of my life I know it like the back of my hand. It's my **“Examples”** list. Examples of what? It's people who over the course of my 60 years have been living **examples** of faith in Christ & faithfulness to him in me. It's people who pointed at Jesus...who held me accountable for my life in him...who modelled devotion, patience, persistence, lifelong walk in Christ's presence. **Ruby** Schaper... **John** Clifford...**Mike** & Libba Maddry...**Stan** Sultemeier...**Leona** Bogish...**Mike** Yaconelli...there are others...& a fair number of you make that list as well.

The statements, as necessary as they are, can too often be just statements... intentions goals aspirations & end up w/ no more substance than a dream. But my “examples” list is real...concrete...unwavering & hopeful. I look at the lives of these saints & I am encouraged. Some finished well; some are finishing well. When life starts getting rocky...I remember them & where they were in my life...how they were the presence & voice & faithfulness of Jesus at those “turning points” in my life when they turned me around or pointed me in a new direction. They helped me see w/ new eyes. They helped me hear Jesus define my purpose & guide me on his path. They were there at moments of transition, but more importantly they were part of the

transformation by the Holy Spirit. I say their names & wonder if maybe I can be a little like them...I can be used by the Spirit in a turning point for someone else...

As badly as I need aspirations targets goals dreams visions I need faces. I need to see embodied obedience. I need someone who'll show me what living “*by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” looks like when it's lived out in the hard places & confusing spaces in the midst of the complexities of life. Who'll tell the truth @ any cost.

Heb 13:7 - Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. It's funny...in Heb 11 he gives them a bunch of names...faith hall of fame...but then he says, ‘make your own list!’ Find godly examples, watch ‘em study ‘em, then follow their example. Why?

Because following Jesus...being conformed to his image...remade in his likeness... living his life in your daily living...*being crucified with Christ. (so that) It is no longer I who live, but Christ (who) lives in me* does not happen in the abstract but in the context, circumstances, & relationships of our lives. Our relationship w/ Jesus takes place in the people, events & situations of every day. Just like it did for Peter, Andrew, James, John & the others. Matthew's gospel describes not only the life & ministry of Jesus but the ongoing shaping & forming of the lives of the 12 & the dozens of others who were part of the cluster around Jesus. Who all heard:

“Repent! The Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

“Come, follow me, & I will show you how to fish for people!”

I said last week & it bears repeating because we have this mostly wrong...we hear the word “repent” & immediately think, “Uh oh, somebody's been naughty & needs to change their evil ways.” We attach feeling sorry sadness remorse to the word. It's **not** really that. It's “You are in danger & need to stop playing w/ fire!” “You are off course & heading for troubled water.” **When** our Lord & Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Mt 4:17), he willed **the entire life** of the believer to be one of repentance. – Luther began the 95 Theses w/ the understanding that our lives were to be lived in constant re-calibration toward Jesus...that every day in every circumstance situation & encounter we were to be looking for Jesus in that moment. Not just WWJD? but how is he working in me right now for his purposes? How can I make his love & life evident right here right now for this person...because his promise is that when you allow him to draw you into his life & you stay close...he will make the necessary transformations changes adjustments in your heart & life so that you become more & more like him in all things...so that he becomes more visible in & through you in the routine every day stuff of life...in the conversations & interactions...love hope joy truth generosity contentment in Christ become real in you & evident in how you live.

Mt 10 Jesus says: **Look,** *I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes & harmless as doves. But beware! For you will be handed over to the courts & flogged with whips in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors & kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell the rulers & other unbelievers about me. When you are arrested, don't worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time.*

The promise is that as Jesus takes over our lives & hearts we are able to stand unbowed/unbroken/unashamed & say to the world the way of Christ calls me to a higher greater grander existence right here in the midst of the muddle & muck of this world. The call & way of God causes my life to shine even when I'm beat down battered by the stuff thrown at me. The call & life of Christ in me lifts me when I got nothing & puts me on solid ground when everything else shakes loose. The call & life of Christ in us causes us to hurt for the hurting & love our enemies & act in grace toward those who would destroy us - to trust in God when our world is on fire & to live to a different set of hopes & aspirations because the call & life of Christ in me is founded on the life of Christ that destroys sin, death & evil – forgives & restores – heals & grants hope – brings joy & peace & unleashes the Holy Spirit in ways that we can never predict or imagine...

We tell ourselves this “fish for people” business is beyond our ability...no longer possible in 2023 because the world is too sophisticated too cynical too whatever to be drawn in...But Jesus never gives up his call...*Follow me*...draw near to me live in my presence take hold of the promises I give & everything you do will accomplish that command...your life will “fish.”

In the gospels, for some that call meant they left everything they had ever known & struck off on the wild adventure of following Jesus. But there were yet others... healed lepers, nameless prostitute, freed demoniacs, re-sighted blind, woman at the well, Jairus' daughter, widow of Nain's son, Lazarus & others who were sent back into their lives...told to go back home back to their families, back to their village so that they could show others what Jesus had done in them...so that the Kingdom of grace/sovereignty of love/rule of peace could be seen in them.

That's us...Jesus calls us by God's Good News (death/rez/rule) into that Good News & says very clearly that along with the professional fishermen we too are going to learn to fish for people. “*Follow me*” is a simple invitation into transformed living...Living by the power of his love/life in the reality of his right now rule of grace/peace/love wherever however whenever whatever that requires of us. “*Follow me*...” wherever I need you for whomever I need you.

That's going to look differently as we each live it out. Your call may not be the same as yours or mine. I don't expect all of you to head off for Lakemba...or Bible College Seminary...although some might do all those things. But what I hear in that call is that each of us will make real through Christ who gives us strength of HS - grace to the outsider - forgiveness to the enemy - hope to the despondent – comfort to the sorrowing – fresh start to the struggling – support to those in need - \$\$\$ generosity to mission/work of the church...give voice to the hope ^{w/in} us.

What I hear in that call is the challenge to each of us to make visible the life of Jesus – the Way of the Kingdom – the Character of the Father wherever we are in what seems the routine of our lives... See...now that the call has gone out...our daily routines takes on an urgency & significance because our routines are packed with people who have never heard that call. Who have never known they could drop their nets for something eternal. Never experienced grace/love/peace as transforming & life-altering & life-directing turning points. Never known there was Good News for them.

TAKE IT HOME –

Think of 1 place you will definitely be this week...

How can you “fish for people” in that place to make Jesus visible to the people there?

Let's pray...

Lord Jesus, speak to us for we are listening. Today and every day; more of you, less of us. You must increase and we must decrease. Use us for your purposes here on earth whatever the cost whatever the challenge however strong the opposition of the enemy. We pray in your name...Amen.