



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

January 27, 2008

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Matthew 4:17-23

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 27

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-23

Come, Follow Me

Driving back from a wrestling tournament yesterday, I saw a sign for a dog obedience school. Have you ever thought about dog obedience, training a dog? It's kind of impressive. A dog that jumps all over company when they come over goes off and these people train the dog and then you say a few simple commands and the dog stays, the dog sits, maybe it shakes, maybe it rolls over or plays dead. It's kind of amazing, isn't it? What kind of power do these guys have that? Those simple commands and they have the dog doing what you could never get it to do.

Have you ever noticed that all of those commands are pretty simple and straight forward? You don't teach the dog to go up in the third drawer from the top and get out the large serving spoon, do you? That's a little too complex, right? It's not going to happen. Even after that dog has been trained so that it obeys these simple commands, how much power does the trainer really have? It's still a dog, right? Its breath hasn't change at all I'm pretty sure. It still does everything else a dog does. It hasn't changed into a hippo or changed into another child you can send off to do some chores, right? The dog remains a dog.

This morning in our gospel reading we see some simple commands that are pretty easy to understand, right? Come, follow me—simple commands. But this command has some power as well as these other commands that Jesus speaks that are simple in our text. Repent—simple. It doesn't take a whole long time to explain, but these commands that our Savior speaks have a power that goes beyond the simple words because the One who speaks them is incredibly powerful. He infuses these words with the power to do what he is saying, what he is urging us to do. That is an amazing thought when you think about it—the power that is in these words that our Savior speaks.

Simple commands though, right? Joyce, can you come up here for a minute? No? Why not? You don't understand what "come up here" means? It's pretty simple and straight forward, isn't it? It's not hard to understand, but I imagine the rest of you are thinking to yourselves, "I'm pretty glad he didn't say my name," right? It's not that we don't understand it, maybe that's something we don't want to do. You probably don't want to be near me first of all. Secondly, you don't want to be in front of everyone with everyone looking at you right now because you've never seen that happen in a worship service here probably ever, have you? So it's out of the norm. It's unusual. But it was simple to understand, right?

Jesus went around preaching “Repent, the kingdom of God is near.” It’s a simple and straight forward message. Repent, turn away from your sins. Then, as he came one day at the water’s edge, he sees those four guys in the boat and says to them “Come, follow me.” To some he says, “I will make you fisher of men.” To others he says, “Come, follow me.” Simple to understand, yet these words have a power that is just amazing because they enable the person that they are spoken to to do what was said.

Peter, Andrew, James and John had seen Jesus before. We had seen that in our reading last week when John the Baptist said, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” They were familiar with who he was. Now he calls them again to “come, follow me,” and they do it. Can you picture that scene? What do you think their father was saying when they got out of the boat from preparing the nets and started following this Jesus? Do you think Dad had a hard time understanding it? Do you think it took a lot of faith and a lot of courage to go and follow him? And this whole idea of being fishers of men, that had to sound pretty strange to their ears as they hear that. Fishing they can understand, but fishers of men? What in the world could that possibly be? But these words that Jesus spoke had the power to lead them to do what he was asking them to do?

It’s really no different for you and me today. When our God says to us “repent,” he gives us the strength to turn away from our sins. He is the One who works this repentance in us. The gospel imperative—believe the good news—which Jesus also said. In that command comes the ability and the strength to do what we cannot do on our own because we are by nature spiritually dead. We can’t make ourselves alive. It’s kind of like the guy that got lowered through the roof, remember that? The guy that couldn’t walk and he was on that mat. Jesus said to him a command, right? “Get up. Take your mat and walk.” Why didn’t anyone think of that in the 30 years or whatever the guy had been alive before, right? How come no one said to him “Get up and walk” so that he could do it? It’s because none of them had the power Jesus had, right? When he said it, he had the power to do what he was commanding this man to do—to heal him so he could stand up and take his mat and go.

When Jesus says to you and me “Look at your lives. Look at where you have fallen short of what I have asked you to do. Look at where you have not loved me with all your heart. Look at where you have loved yourself more than your neighbor, more than me, more than anything, and repent. Turn away from it. Turn back to me and there you will find forgiveness.” His word has the power to do that in our hearts.

God has called us also to be fishers of men and it might make us nervous at times, but God has given us the same promises and the same powerful word to use. But before we can do that, there is something that we really need to do with ourselves. We need to see that the message of the cross, that forgiveness through the life and death of Jesus, applies to us. There are going to be times in your life and in my life where we are going to look at who we are and we are going to just be disgusted with the things that we have done, with the things that we have left undone, with how we have failed as parents or spouses, how we have failed as employers or employees, the times that our selfishness just won out and we did some incredibly stupid things as we reflect on it—but before you and I can become fishers of men and teach that good news to someone else, we

need to learn to apply it to ourselves. We need to learn that Christ has taken away that sin, and we don't have to stand there and beat ourselves up for our failings. Christ was scourged. Christ was beaten. Christ was nailed to the cross to take away our failings. Punishing ourselves when we have failed is not going to make us feel better. It's just going to make us feel punished.

So acknowledge your sin, but then take it to where it belongs—to the cross. In the cross, find forgiveness so that you can go forward knowing you're not perfect, but you are forgiven, knowing that you don't know everything, but you know who forgave you, knowing that there are people that are hurting just as you are hurt by your own sins and you have the message that says "you are forgiven." You are loved by the One who made the world. You are loved by the One who will judge the world. You are loved by the One who has created heaven so that you can spend time, eternal time with him.

As you and I follow Jesus and want to be fishers of men, that's what we are called to do. We are called to follow him, but we are not called and left on our own. We are called to use his powerful word—first for ourselves and then for others. God's powerful word works in us. God leads us. God guides us. And God is with us.

So when you hear this imperative from God, "Come, follow me" or "Be a fisher of men" or "Repent," don't look into yourself. Look at the powerful God who has died for you.