

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
2023—A Cycle



“Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

What do I see?

How does this lone fisherman on Santa Cruz Beach (CA) speak to me of Jesus' calling two sets of brothers—first Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew... then James and John—to drop everything and follow him?

How open am I today for an unexpected invitation from Jesus to do something, go somewhere, change something in my life...? (Photo by AJG)

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

A Prayer for Discovering My Purpose in Life

Father,
as I begin to take steps
in the direction of finding my purpose,
grant me the wisdom and faith that,
as your Word promises,
you will give me wisdom...
in every decision large and small...
as I seek and find your purpose.
I thank you that I don't need to rely
on just my own understanding.
I trust your wisdom to guide me.
I thank you for the gift and power
of your Holy Spirit.
Amen

Source: [ABBA Connect](#)

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 8: 23 to 9: 3 “Anguish has taken wing; dispelled is darkness....”
Psalm 27: 1, 4, 13-14 “The Lord is my light and my salvation.”

I Corinthians 1: 10-13, 17 “Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel....”

Matthew 4: 12-23 “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Introduction to the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

In this weekend's reading from Matthew 4: 12-23, we see how the death of John the Baptist affected Jesus. Later gospel stories portrayed Jesus going from day to day, moving from place to place—even into the foreign territory of Samaria preaching his “new way” of salvation. He spent time in local synagogues, patiently debating with the Scribes and Pharisees. He found time to accept dinner invitations with friends... and even strangers like Zacchaeus, the tax collector in Jericho, who climbed a tree just to get a glimpse of him.

That's not the pace in this week's gospel! In Jesus we see a man on a mission. Or, to quote [Sr. Mary McGlone, CSJ](#), “Matthew described Jesus as a prophet on the move” ([National Catholic Reporter](#): January 6-19, 2023 Issue). Jesus understood he had no time to waste. If Herod could kill John the Baptist, his next target might just be this upstart from Nazareth.

So, what did Jesus do? First, he got as far away from Jerusalem as he could, relocating in Galilee. In a more than casual walk-by, he called the sons of Zebedee, Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew to drop *everything*—their families... their profitable fishing business... any sense of routine and security they might have enjoyed to this point in their lives.

“Follow me,” the stranger said. “No time to waste. I'll turn you into fishers of people.” Jesus didn't say, “At least think about it. I'll come back tomorrow.” They had one chance—a single moment—to say, “Ok”... or forget about it. Jesus did the same with another pair of fishermen brothers, John and James, Zebedee's sons. No waiting around, no long goodbyes, no time to settle affairs.

Next, Matthew tells us, Jesus began a fast-paced ministry of preaching in local synagogues... baptizing... healing “all kinds of sickness and disease”—seemingly all at once.

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (8: 23 to 9: 3)

“The gloom will be dispelled for those who were anxious. In earlier times Yahweh humiliated the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, but now he brings honor to the way of the sea, the region beyond the Jordan, and Galilee of the nations.

“The people walking in darkness see a bright light; light shines on those who live in a land of deep darkness. You have enlarged the nation; you give them great joy. They rejoice in your presence as harvesters rejoice; as warriors celebrate when they divide up the plunder.”

Personal Reflection

This passage dates from the seventh century BC/BCE. The forces of King Shalmaneser V of Assyria had shattered Israel's land and society. According to custom, the conqueror hauled away as slaves many of the Jewish people. The terrified and oppressed exiles found themselves in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali which—

centuries later—would become Galilee. Dispersed among the pagans, the Israelite slaves entered a period of impenetrable darkness.

Isaiah—the original—described the end of the twenty-year captivity (ca. 711 BC/BCE). After a three-year siege, Sargon II, king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, defeated Shalmaneser V and freed the Hebrew exiles. Isaiah described the liberation peace as Yahweh's victory. "The people walking in darkness" referred to those dominated by their oppressor. Yes, they saw the light... but without much hope.

- *When in my life did I "walk in darkness"?*
- *At what point in my life did I "see a great light"?*
- *This very day, what is my primary source of spiritual light?*
- *What "darkness" still remains within me?*

Responsorial: Psalm 27 (1, 4, 13-14)

A psalm of David. Triumphant trust in God.

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

The Lord delivers and vindicates me!

I fear no one!

The Lord protects my life!

I am afraid of no one.

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

I have asked the Lord for one thing—
this is what I desire!

I want to live in the Lord's house all the days of my life,
so I can gaze at the splendor of the Lord
and contemplate in his temple.

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Where would I be if I did not believe I would experience
the Lord's favor in the land of the living?

Be strong and confident!

Rely on the Lord.

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Personal Reflection

This psalm of David features rapid mood swings, showing that it's normal for our prayer life to have its own fluctuations. It's not surprising that high confidence should suddenly give way to urgent appeals for rescue. David's trust had no limits. He made his case for not giving up in the face of life's struggles but instead clinging

to threads of hope that Yahweh would bring to an end the conflicts endured by the Chosen People.

— *What limits do I place on my hope and trust that God guides my life, no matter what else is going on at any given moment?*

— *When did I ever come close to losing hope that God was “at the wheel”?*

A Reading from St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians (1: 10-13, 17)

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree together, to end your divisions and be united by the same mind and purpose. For members of Chloe’s household have made it clear to me, my brothers and sisters, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each of you is saying, ‘I am with Paul,’ or ‘I am with Apollos,’ or ‘I am with Cephas,’ or ‘I am with Christ.’

“Is Christ divided? Paul wasn’t crucified for you, was he? Or were you in fact baptized in the name of Paul? Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with clever speech, so that the cross of Christ would not become useless.”

Personal Reflection

Division among believers became the “original sin” of first century Christianity. Because of Corinth’s size and location in south-central Greece, several apostles and Christian teachers passed through and interacted with this burgeoning community. Certain members had affirmed their own identity by causing division. How? By declaring allegiance to one leader rather than another. In this way they satisfied their vanity and desire for self-promotion. In this passage, Paul scolded the troublemakers, insisting that they heal their divisions. He envisioned local Christian communities as one united family.

Paul understood the challenge of gathering people of different backgrounds into a united body of believers. He urged the Corinthian community to unite, not by ignoring reality and never discussing inequalities. Instead, he insisted that a local community could still form a cohesive family held together by one faith initiated by their common baptism. The community had to acknowledge individual and collective differences in their ethnic backgrounds and social status as a given. Only then could they unite as one loving body of believers.

— *How does this same scenario in Corinth still play out today in my own worldwide and local faith communities?*

— *Am I a uniter or a divider in my community? If I claim “uniter,” what concrete evidence can I produce to support my answer?*

The Gospel According to Matthew (4: 12-23)

“When Jesus heard that John had been imprisoned, he went into Galilee. While in Galilee, he moved from Nazareth to make his home in Capernaum by the sea,

in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled:

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, and on those who sit in the region and shadow of death a light has dawned.”

“From that time Jesus began to preach this message: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”

“As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (later called Peter... The Rock) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea (for they were fishermen). He said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will turn you into fishers of people.’

“They left their nets immediately and followed him. Going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in a boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. Then he called them. They immediately left the boat and their father and followed him.”

“Jesus went throughout all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of disease and sickness among the people.”

Personal Reflection

It's noteworthy that none of Jesus' first four disciples had previously shown any aptitude—or desire—for what lay ahead of them. For Jesus, “conversion” meant a renewal of life from inside out... and that would take time. Even after all they had seen and done over the next years, they still abandoned him in the Garden when an armed mob came to arrest him.

The Gospels reveal that this kind of renewal could only follow discovery of God's internal, personal mercy. Jesus taught that only the work of his Spirit within could bring about individual and interpersonal love and forgiveness. He proclaimed that God's coming to reign among us meant definitive salvation.

- *What am I doing with my life today that I never dreamed possible at an earlier stage? What turning point—epiphany moment—did I experience when the true meaning and purpose of my existence on earth came into clearer focus for me?*
- *How can I identify with Jesus' sense of urgency, as recorded in this gospel passage?*
- *In what area of my life do I need to “slow down,” as Jesus did later in his ministry?*

For Inspirational Listening, Watching, Reading

Watch

[3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time](#) (Cycle A): a homily by [John Michael Talbot](#)
(2 min)

Listen

[“My Confession”](#) composed by [Richard Page](#) and sung by [Josh Groban](#)

Josh Groban is the son of Jewish immigrants who later became Episcopalians.

He still identifies as an Episcopalian.

Read

[Forgive Everyone Everything](#) by [Gregory Boyle](#), S.J. with artwork by [Fabian Debora](#)

Jesuit Father Gregory Boyle spends his days at Homeboy Industries in East Los Angeles (CA) accompanying ex-gang members as they rebuild their lives. Forgive Everyone Everything is a powerful collection of his most poignant writings based on decades of experiences of loss and pain, redemption and renewal. All 50 reflections are accompanied by stunning street art from acclaimed artist and ex-gang member Fabian Debora, making this book a modern-day devotional that will provoke and inspire readers.

Journaling Prompts

Based on this weekend's Scripture readings, what does the Jesus ask me to do TODAY regarding...

- (1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships... and
- (2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God's love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

*Who needs to receive from me this week a moment of laughter and personal concern?
Why do I hesitate?*

In light of this weekend's Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Zephaniah 2: 3 and 3: 12-13 "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth...."

Psalm 146: 6-10 "The Lord keeps faith forever...."

I Corinthians 1: 26-31 "God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise."

Matthew 5: 1-12 "Jesus began to teach them, saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit....'"

Closing Prayer

(adapted and abridged for use here)

A Prayer to Find Purpose and Direction in My Life

Lord Jesus,

help me to reflect your love and humility,
as well as the Father's will,
in all of my choices and interactions
with others to bear much good fruit.
Lead me to effectively balance my time,
my energy and my resources

between fulfilling my purpose
and other priorities in life.
Lord, make me sensitive
to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
Guide me in what you want me
to do *next* on my path of purpose.
Amen

Source: [Live Inspired by Purpose](#)

Gender usage in these reflections: *We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.*

Note: *Some internet links endure online, others come and go. If a link fails, you can assume that it has been taken down by the owner of the site.*

The Sunday readings are from the New English Translation (NET)

Questions and Commentaries © 2023 by [Alfred J. Garrotto](#)

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