



Third Sunday After Epiphany, Lectionary 3, Year A

Pastor Scott Torkko, North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Assistant to the Bishop
Gospel Text – Matthew 4:12-23

Matthew 4:12-23

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

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

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

²³ Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

SERMON TEXT:

The pastor was teaching a Bible study on God's call. He was trying to help congregation members learn what God's call looked and sounded like in the Bible...and what God's call might look like for those taking the class. And so the pastor walked through some of the great call stories: Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Gideon, Esther, Mary and Joseph, Paul. The pastor reports the class went quite well. Conclusions were drawn about some ways that God's call comes and how one might understand and know that they were being called. Class members were challenged to discern times they had experienced a call from God in their own lives and how God might even be calling them in the present.

The pastor felt good about how the class went. Those in the class were given tools that would help them listen to God and for God. The pastor himself felt closer to knowing how to listen for God.

But then the pastor began discerning his own call. By way of an interview process. In fact, the pastor was asked by the call committee to lead them through a Bible Study and he chose a portion of the Bible study he had taught on discerning God's call. It seemed right. It seemed like a topic that would be useful to all involved as they tried to discover if they were called to walk together into the future.

For his part, the pastor knew what he thought God was calling him to do. He thought God was calling him to this new place and these new people. There were so many possibilities for this congregation. The call committee decided they wanted to call him as their new pastor. But the pastor's spouse wasn't so sure. There was so much happening for this couple in their personal lives. Their family life was chaotic and changing rapidly. What she wanted, what she craved in fact, was stability. Every time they talked about a possible move, she cried. Even as the pastor sensed a call from God, he knew what he had to do. The pastor picked up the phone and contacted the call committee chair. As much as it pained him to admit, he wouldn't be taking the call. The call was right, but the timing was wrong.

And when the pastor hung up, he reports laughing at the fact he ever tried to teach a class on discerning a call from God. Sometimes discerning a call from God is messy.

When Jesus came calling, those first disciples were so eager. They were fishing. Jesus came by and called their names, "Simon...Andrew...James and John, follow me. I'll make you fish for people." The 4 heard the invitation from Jesus, got up from their boats, and followed him. So that we don't miss the point, Matthew added the word, they followed him "immediately." "Immediately, they left the boat and their father and followed him."

Don't you want to know what made them so certain? Don't you want to know what it was about Jesus that led them to immediately follow him? What didn't those first disciples know yet about Jesus?

Because there was conflict brewing. John the Baptist had been arrested. By Herod. John's ministry had become a threat to a powerful leader. You know what powerful people sometimes do when they are under threat. Powerful people sometimes attempt to create fear. They bottle up those they are threatened by. They seek to silence those who share what they see and know. So, Herod arrested John the Baptist.

Jesus was set in motion by this arrest. With tension and conflict in the air, Jesus began creating a community around him. Did the 4 fishermen know what was taking place? Had they heard about John the Baptist? Did they know what the weeks, and months,

and years ahead of them would hold? Did they know that when you follow Jesus, you begin to see the world differently?

When you follow Jesus, the poor no longer look like obstacles along life's way but instead become central to living a life worthy of the call. When you follow Jesus, the sinful no longer are on the outside looking in but rather become the forgiven in whom much is entrusted. When you follow Jesus, religion no longer rests on what people can do for themselves, but instead grace becomes the defining action.

All of this will make following Jesus the most complicated decision the disciples would ever make. They would never be the same again. For better and for worse, the disciples would never be the same again. Had they counted the costs as they sat in their boats when Jesus came calling?

Have you counted the costs? A life of following Jesus means participating in the world differently.

Former secretary of the ELCA, Lowell Almen, once wrote an article for the Lutheran Magazine about baptism. His topic? Why parents should think twice before having their child baptized. Pastor Almen pondered if parents knew what was taking place in baptism. Far from being a cute little ritual, baptism is the death of one way of life and the birth of a new way of life. He quoted Charles Colson's suggestion that if you want a comfortable way of

life, then you probably ought to find a different person to follow than Jesus.

While the kingdom of power and destruction was at work in Herod, Jesus set about bringing together a different kind of kingdom. It turns out that when the kingdom of heaven comes near, God begins calling people to participate in a new way of life. It turns out that when the kingdom of heaven comes near, a blessed community is formed.

That day by the sea, a new community. If the 4 fishermen didn't know it at the moment, they would know it soon enough. The essence of being part of the Jesus community is found in how they loved one another and how they loved the world around them. It is an uncommon love that Jesus demonstrated while confronting Herod's kingdom of power that arrested John.

What about this Christian community? How is the uncommon love of Jesus known among you all? How do you love one another when conflict arises, as it inevitably does? What practices help you to engage one another as beloved children of the same loving God even when you'd like to do the opposite?

In a country that is increasingly divided, how does the uncommon love of Jesus help you to care for the most vulnerable while not losing your soul to cynicism? "Love your enemies," Jesus will declare in front of his disciples. "Pray for those who persecute

you," Jesus will say as the disciples listened. "Pick up your cross and follow me," Jesus will tell them before Jesus was literally lifted up on his own cross.

God's calling on those 4 disciples would get a lot more complicated than the words, "follow me." But one thing never changed: Jesus called them. And because Jesus called them, the disciples hung in there. Because Jesus called the disciples, nothing in all of creation could stand between them and Jesus. He was with them always, to the end of the ages, no matter what.

Jesus called you by name when water was poured over your head. Jesus will never forget you nor forsake you. God's call to you will get a lot more complicated than this. Life has a way of twisting and turning. Life has a way of being complicated. In the midst of life's complications, in the midst of trying to discern what God would have of you in any given situation or moment, you are grounded in this: Jesus has called you his own. You belong to Jesus. Nothing can stand between you and Jesus. Come what may, Jesus is with you always, to the end of the ages. Whatever else is unclear about discerning God's will, this much is clear....

Copyright © 2026 *The Sermon Supply*

This work is the intellectual property of clergy from the synods of Region 6 of the ELCA. It is provided for use by congregations within these synods for worship, study, and other ministry purposes.

This project is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)**.

This means:

- Congregations may use and share this material for **non-commercial purposes**, provided proper attribution is given to the *The Sermon Supply* and its contributors.
- The material **may not be modified or adapted** without explicit permission.
- Use beyond congregational purposes requires permission from the contributors.

For permissions beyond this license, please contact rwissler@neos-elca.org

License Details: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.