

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

The past two Sundays, we have heard about Jesus' baptism, the occasion of His baptism and the days following it. Today, we skip over the temptation of Jesus, which happens next, and turn to the start of His ministry.

In our Gospel, Jesus has heard about John being thrown into prison. The spotlight is now on Jesus, and so He withdraws from "*Bethany across the Jordan*" (John 1:28), in the vicinity of Jericho — that's where John had been baptizing — and goes back to His home stomping grounds near the Sea of Galilee, to the land once known as Zebulun and Naphtali, just as the prophet Isaiah had foretold it.

Using Capernaum as His home base, Jesus, "*the true light*" (John 1:9), "*the light that shines in the darkness*" (John 1:5), begins to shine the light of the Gospel on the people dwelling there in darkness. This light is manifested in word and deed as Matthew makes clear, for Jesus went about Galilee "*teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*"

Jesus' preaching isn't totally new. "*Repent,*" He preaches, just as John the wilderness voice had done, preparing for His coming. "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" And, truly, the reign of the Christ has come in the person of Jesus. Jesus' preaching of repentance and His proclaiming that the kingdom had come is really a call to discipleship.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus has taught us to pray: "*Thy kingdom come,*" and truly it has come in Jesus, and its coming is not dependent on our prayer. As Luther taught: "The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer."

God Himself determined "*when the fullness of time had come,*" and He Himself "*sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law*" (Gal. 4:4-5). This Jesus did by the folly of the cross — the Lamb of God that we heard about last week offering up Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Surely, God did it with a purpose, namely, "*to save sinners*" (1 Tim. 1:15); and this salvation is yours personally, as Paul says in Galatians, when you "*receive adoption as sons*" (Gal. 4:5). It's an adoption that comes through faith: "*for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith*" (Gal. 3:26). The Father sends the "*the Spirit of his Son into our hearts*" and we are called to faith (Gal. 4:6).

Thus, when we pray "*Thy kingdom come,*" we are praying that the kingdom "may come to us also"; we are praying that He might keep us as His disciples; and we are praying for more disciples.

We ask with Luther: "*How does God's kingdom come?*" And we answer:

"God's kingdom comes when He gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy word, and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity."

That's a prayer for disciples, made so by the grace of Christian baptism. It's a prayer for believers who hold fast to the good news of Jesus' word.

Which is what Jesus does in our Gospel — He makes disciples. He calls disciples unto Himself. We heard a bit about that last week, with Andrew seeing and hearing Jesus, staying with Him that day, and then telling his brother Simon Peter about Him. There was grace given; there was the Holy Spirit at work creating faith in these two brothers. But apparently this faith was just beginning; so Peter and Andrew didn't continue to follow Jesus then. They must have gone back to Galilee to their day jobs.

But, in today's Gospel, Jesus approaches them as they are casting their nets, and He calls to them. *"Follow me,"* He says to these fishermen, *"and I will make you fishers of men."* And miraculously, they cast aside their nets and follow Jesus ... *"Immediately."*

Similarly, the sons of Zebedee, James and John. Perhaps Peter and Andrew had gone back to Galilee and told these sons of Thunder about Jesus. We don't know for sure. Scripture doesn't say. Regardless, Jesus called them, and *"immediately, they left the boat and their father and followed him."* There was no "risk-reward calculation" going on here; no Pascal's wager; no making a decision.

For Matthew wants to make a point — for he leaves out the part about Jesus providing these fishermen a miraculous haul of fish that Luke tells (Luke 5:1-11). Matthew wants to make it clear that "no one becomes Jesus' disciple by his own initiative" (Gibbs, 216). "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength ... come to [Jesus, my Lord]" (Small Catechism, Creed, Third Article). It is always God's work — He does it. He calls disciples. He makes *"a people for His own possession"* out of *"not a people."* He calls *"people walking in darkness"* *"out of [the] darkness into his marvelous light"* (Is. 9:2; 1 Pet. 2:9). When it comes to Jesus, it's not the disciple that chooses the teacher, but the other way around, as Jesus would later teach His disciples: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit"* (John 15:16). *"I will make you fishers of men."*

So Jesus did with these men. They heard His call; they had heard some of His teaching; and they followed Him in faith ... even though their faith did not have full knowledge of what their change of vocation would mean. For surely these Galilean fishermen could not imagine what they would see and hear from this rabbi from Nazareth—miracles and teaching. Surely, they had no idea that following Jesus would mean watching Him be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and put

to death. Surely they could not even guess that they would witness their leader rising from the dead. Surely, they had no idea that following after Jesus would mean taking up their own cross, too.

Some knowledge is necessary for faith, but understanding the whole counsel of God is not a prerequisite, not for disciples young in faith, and not for disciples mature in their faith.

So it is for us. Whether we were called to be Jesus' disciples as an infant through the waters of Holy Baptism, or later in life through someone proclaiming the marvelous words and deeds of Christ, with baptism following, there is God, as we pray, giving us the kingdom. Through these means, the Holy Spirit is working in our lives with His grace, to give birth to faith and strengthen it—for our life of faith is one of beginnings and growth in knowledge; it's one of faltering and repenting and being restored in the forgiveness of sins; it's one of enduring in faith, hoping in Christ, and rejoicing in the reign of Him who is near us.

No boasting. For whether I preach here at Zion on Sunday or at LSUS on Tuesday or Thursday, I point you to Jesus, to His cross, to His blood shed. And though many in the flesh may say, "*Folly*," (1 Cor. 1:18), God by His Spirit gives us an "Amen" to say, for He takes the message of the cross and gives us His saving power through it. We are made disciples as we hear this message and understand it, as we give assent to it, and trust in Him who is the object of it all: Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So, rejoice, you disciples of Jesus, not in your own brilliance or wisdom or power, but in the power of God to save and convert you, to give you repentance and faith. *“Come; follow me,”* Jesus says to us still. By His Spirit, cast aside whatever nets you are tangled up in. Follow Jesus. In this life, none of us knows on what paths He will lead us, but we do know the end. We know He will lead us at last to Himself in heaven, and we will reign with Him in His kingdom, which has no end.

God grant it ...

In the name of the Father and of the **†** Son and of the Holy Spirit.