

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

The gospel reading for this Third Sunday after Epiphany is taken from the beginning of Mark's gospel, beginning at the 14th verse of the first chapter.

Last week, we heard the story of Jesus calling upon Philip to 'follow me'. Philip finds his friend Nathanael and invites him to join with Philip in following this new teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. According to the gospel attributed to John, Philip and Nathanael were not the first disciples Jesus called into his core community of followers. Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John were already part of the band of followers of Jesus when Philip and Nathanael hear Jesus' call to "follow me." Each of the disciples that Jesus called, were ordinary people. Jesus picked people very much like you and like me. They were everyday people. Some were fishermen, used to hard physical labour; some were healers, Luke was a physician; others like Matthew, were tax-collectors. All of them were anything, but perfect. They were very much as we are today, people just trying to make their way in the world.

There would be many times during his public ministry when the disciples would just not understand what Jesus was teaching them. There would be times when they would hesitate to follow his lead. Why, even Peter, Peter would three times deny knowing him. And Judas Iscariot would betray him to those who wanted him dead. But these, for the most part, would be the persons who would continue Jesus' ministry on earth after he had left. They were ordinary people, like you and like me. And like you and me, they were called to this ministry, by God.

In today's gospel, we hear a similar story of the calling of this core group of Jesus' followers through the words of the gospel writer we know as Mark. Mark begins by telling us that John, the Baptist had been arrested by the authorities and was no longer able to publicly advocate for the repentance of sin, to baptize repentant people in the river Jordan, and to proclaim to any who would listen that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

Jesus, for his part, has just spent the past forty days in the solitude of the wilderness, discovering what God has planned for his own life from this point onward. Up until now, Jesus has maintained a low profile. He has stayed out of the public eye. With the arrest of John, the Baptist, Jesus begins his public ministry by proclaiming the good news of God with the words found in Mark 1: 15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

When I think about the 'good news' which Jesus is talking about here, and what it means to repent, I believe that we are being told this - to repent is not necessarily a negative thing. To repent can mean to turn around. To make a 180 degree change in our direction, a change in our understanding, and a change in our acceptance of this 'new reality' of the kingdom of God breaking into our troubled existence. Maybe God is saying to us, "enough is enough". Might God be saying to us, today, listen to the call I am giving you to become my disciples? Are we listening to his call? Do you think we are, or is there room for us to repent?

Jesus may have been saying "enough is enough" as he watched John's ministry end with John's arrest. Jesus begins his ministry by pointing

to the presence of God right there among all humanity. In Jesus' own words, "The kingdom of God has come near" and again with this, "the time is fulfilled". God wanted us to know that the kingdom was not in some far-off celestial realm but was there among his people, then and as it is right now.

Jesus teaches his followers about this 'new reality' that God wants to share with all believers. Jesus calls the disciples to be 'fishers of people' so that others may be brought into the presence of God and share in the Creator's divine delight, so that all creation would come to know His grace and love. To know God's unconditional love, just as the disciples were experiencing in their relationship with Jesus, that is God's gift for our age. Do you feel it around you? I can!

God calls us to not only be followers of Jesus, but also, to we find ourselves being called by God to be fishers of people, just as the disciples were. God is turning the page on history and pointing us in a new direction, as disciples of Jesus Christ. God wants us to share the peace of His kingdom and His love for His creation with every human being. His gift to us is peace and love. Peace and love which are meant to be shared, even in times of calamity and in times of unrest. The same love God has offered throughout all of history, is here for us and for all God's people. Did you know God even loves the people we have a hatred for? If God can love them, why do we still live in hate for others? Are we still needing to repent? What do you think?

Our job is not to try to get our heads around what this "new reality" looks like or feels like. Our job, as disciples, is to share the "good news" about God's love for all creation. The reign of God in the kingdom of heaven can be glimpsed in the faces of those with whom

we share what we believe; that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord of all creation. God comes to us in the most unexpected moments of our lives, through the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit. It is our task, our task to spread the good news of God's love for all creation.

Love is the new order, the 'new reality' which Jesus Christ has come to prepare for all God's people. Now that Jesus has left us, we have been given responsibility to share his peace and love with all God's kingdom here on earth, just as he did in his own time, when he lived as one of us, the people of God, and heirs to the kingdom of heaven. Thanks be to God. Amen