

Nativity Lutheran Church  
Palm Beach Gardens, Florida  
January 21, 2018

Third Sunday after Epiphany  
Text: St. Mark 1:14-20  
Theme: CALLED FOR ...

In Nomine Jesu

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,  
<sup>15</sup>and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

<sup>16</sup>As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup>As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

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Remember that fabulously well-known but now infamous desert prophet, John the Baptizer)? He hasn't been the focus of our attention for a while ... almost a month.

Since we last checked in it seems he'd fallen on bad times. Well, that's way too nice a way to put it. Prison and all. And, knowing the "Paul Harvey the rest of the story" we know also all about the provocative dancing and platters at the end of his life. Death by decapitation. It's just so ... how do we say it? ... uncomfortably and maybe embarrassingly vivid.

We'd like to forget that stuff, wouldn't we. We'd had so much more in store for John as his ministry story unfolded, but we're left with just this arrest and prison and death business. And then Jesus took over.

I'm not aware of anyone here this morning who has ever been imprisoned. If you have, by the way, I don't expect you to get up and straighten me out. We all know how foreign such a thing is to at least most of our experience.

Don't know for sure, but I get the sense we're the sort of folk that might even not have gotten a speeding ticket or a parking violation. At least none of you've ever fessed up to me about (or maybe your kids). So

prison? ... Impossible, we'd say. Except, well, you and I have been there. We can let the truth out today. It's safe here.

Just think about it ... what prison is like. I bet it will feel all too familiar for all of us if we try this for a definition: **"Prison is being held against your will justly or unjustly under the ultimate authority of someone else as to when, if ever, you'll be able to exercise free choice about the future direction of your life."**

Now, that's not a "Webster" definition, just sort of a "Lutze proximation." But it does sound like one's life when you're waiting to finally be done with school, maybe tech school, maybe college, maybe middle school, maybe preschool – maybe singleness, maybe young parenthood, maybe no parenthood, maybe midlife crisis, maybe .. well, whatever details and hoops might be there ... or might have been there ... for you.

But all things doing what they do in God's gracious reign, "good" is what worked out or will work out in that process for you. There will be a time you can ... or did ... find yourself celebrating what must feel like your freedom from what might have felt like your special prison. There came ... or will come ... a time in which you're free to pursue your own future however you choose. Right?

Wrong! Big time wrong! Because what this text reminds us about is that when Jesus gets going into our Galilees proclaiming the good news of God, announcing the kingdom's nearness, here's what he calls us to do: Repent. And believe.

That's the call. Repent and believe. And it sure doesn't sound like freedom from something, does it. It sounds, rather, like a call to another "burden" ... dare we say another "prison"? But more on that later.

I think that this text's verses are among the most fabulous (as in unbelievable) of any in the Bible. Just think about it. Four grown, down to earth, practical men – count them: Simon, Andrew, James, John ... tied to the sea as only those who fish for a livelihood can be. And when they encounter Jesus ... well, they do the unthinkable.

They walk away from it all ... everything they knew, everything they'd learned they could trust, everything they'd come to depend on (like tides and winds, fair and foul, and all) and did what this compelling stranger asked them to do. They chose to follow him.

Follow him. Not after "all due deliberation" or the careful and prayerful discernment and thoughtfulness we might prefer if we're "responsible" folk. They did something ... well, impetuous, impulsive, thoughtless ... dare I say "careless"? They simply left it all ... and went with him.

To what? Where? They didn't know the way, but we do, thank God. They might have dropped out part way if they knew what was in store ... after all, we want to do that many times even though we know the real rest of the story -- about not just death in Jerusalem, Jesus' burden for us, shameful as it was and is ... but also resurrection from the dead ... not just a miracle for those who were faithless then but for all. And that includes us, who spend lifetimes struggling between faithfulness and faithlessness all our breathing days. They simply put one foot after the other ... and walked to and through Jerusalem with Jesus.

Now, whether we remember it or not, we've all heard the same call from Jesus to "follow him." Since it began for us in our baptisms, some folk refer to it as "living wet" – one way of describing how our baptism call is always with us.

For many of us the life we've lived have found us living in and for that call in a much more extended fashion than the apostles in our text. For them it was an incident that could have been charted within the day's lengthening shadows by the movement of a foot or two ... they didn't have watches, remember.

For us ... well, it was years, truth be told. And even a couple of fits and starts in other directions than how we find ourselves living out our faith and call in our lives on our best days.

Whenever we heard and answered to that "follow me" that's exactly what happened. God took us in God's hand ... life and love and all ... and since then nothing in our lives or loves has been the same.

Our lives haven't gotten less complicated the longer we respond to that call. They've gotten a lot more complicated ... and will be still more as time goes by. But never forget the joyful and elegant simplicity. It's – for each of us - about you and God, first and finally. And you'll never be alone ... however lonely you may feel from time to time. Even in the greatest chill of challenge in life or service to others, you'll get a hint ... really more ... of warmth. And that warmth you'll feel is God's presence, God's loving arms, surrounding you.

So let your baptism's waters be remembered each day as a morning shower that cleanses your physical body. And let each table of home or hospitality you experience be a reminder of the table you've shared in this and every other place you've come ... for bread and wine ... for body and blood ... really present for the forgiveness of sins. For life and salvation. For you and all who've heard and followed that forceful, that surprising, that compelling, but always promising ... "Follow me."

In the Name of Jesus. AMEN!

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Soli Deo Gloria