

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
January 25, 2009  
Epiphany 3  
The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Jeremiah 3:21-4:2  
Psalm 130  
I Corinthians 7:17-23  
Mark 1:14-20

Our Gospel lesson this morning finds Jesus entering Galilee, where he inaugurates his public ministry by announcing what Mark calls “God’s Good News.” That Good News involves the message that the Kingdom of God has drawn near, and it’s time to turn from sin and believe the Good News which Jesus brings.

Mark is fond of the term “immediately,” and he employs it a lot in his Gospel. I’ve always been somewhat intrigued and even puzzled by the matter-of-fact way in which Andrew, Peter, James and John respond to Jesus in this encounter. Mark tells that upon Jesus’ invitation, Andrew and Peter leave their nets “at once” to go with him. In the case of James and John, we are told that they “immediately” leave their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men, to go with Jesus.

1 Every time I read this text I ask myself: “What did Andrew, Peter, James and John *see* in Jesus, to leave everything behind and go with him like they did?” They had to see something. Something must have happened, because they had never seen this man before!

Turns out I am not alone in my question. The ancient church Father Jerome also was puzzled by this radical course of action by these men. In a sermon on this passage, Jerome's reflections were very helpful to me. Here is his take on this incident:

*There must have been something divinely compelling in the face of the Savior. Otherwise, they would not have acted so irrationally as to follow a man whom they had never seen before. Does one leave a father to follow a man in whom he sees nothing more than he sees in his father? They left their father of the flesh to follow the Father of the Spirit. They did not leave a father; they found a Father. There was something divine in Jesus' very countenance that seeing, they could not resist.* [Jerome, Homily 83]

May I ask each of you a question this morning? The question is this: What do *you* see in Jesus?

Do you see something compelling enough to abandon your own selfish desires and attitudes?

Do you see something compelling enough to lay aside your own wisdom and embrace his will and purpose for your life?

Do you see something compelling enough to trust him when things in your life don't make perfect sense?

Do you see something compelling enough to trust in him during times of sickness and calamity?

Do you see something compelling enough to embrace totally his call on your life, whatever that may be?

When was the last time you took a really good look at Jesus? And what did you see?

That's an important question this morning. But important as it is, it is not the most important question. There is a greater question. Do you know what it is?

The ultimate question is not "what do you see in Jesus?" The ultimate question is: *What does Jesus see in you?*

I think there are two miracles that occur in this Gospel text. The first miracle is that Andrew, Peter, James and John saw and perceived something about Jesus that was extraordinary. This is Jerome's take on the text.

The second -- and perhaps greater miracle -- was that the God of the universe and the agent of Creation *saw* something in these men, and called them to participate in a collaborative mission to save the world.

There is a collection of early oral interpretations of the Scriptures compiled around 200 A.D. Known as the *Mishnah*. In the *Mishnah* there is written an intriguing piece of advice for those who were wanting to be disciples. The *Mishnah* says to such persons, "procure for yourself a teacher." The Hebrew word for "teacher" here is the word *rab*, from which the word "rabbi" comes.

The common practice, then, was that if you wanted to be a follower of a given teacher or rabbi, it was your job to go and actively seek that person out, and seek permission to become his disciple.

But in the case of Andrew, Peter, James, and John, something is different. The typical pattern is not followed. These guys are not seeking anything. They are minding their own business, which for them meant *mending* their fishing nets. The only thing they are looking for is a way to provide for their families. In the words of an Alan Jackson song, they're just "working hard and trying to make a living."

The important issue, then, is not that they are looking for Jesus. The important issue is that Jesus is looking for them! Would-be disciples are not seeking out the teacher; the Teacher is seeking out disciples. It's not so much that they see something in Jesus, but that Jesus sees something in them! (Remember last week: "I saw you under the fig tree before Phillip found you...")

The real miracle here is that what the Savior saw in *them*, he also sees in *us*. And his call to them is also a call to us. A call to be his beloved children, a call to leave behind our old way of life in order to embrace a new one, a call to bear witness to all those we meet that Jesus sees something *in them* that is special and unique.

Our collect today asks for God's grace, that we might answer readily Christ's call and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, so that we and the whole world might perceive the glory of his marvelous works.

As we come to the Table of the Lord this morning, I want you to come and take a good, hard look at Jesus. Ask yourself: What do I see in Jesus?

And then I want you to hear and see what Jesus sees in you. The gifts of bread and wine are reminders to you today that in you he sees something very special. In you he sees someone very precious. In you he sees a common, ordinary person called to an uncommon and extraordinary mission, the mission of sharing his work in the world.

As we come to the table this morning, I encourage you to listen attentively to the voice of Jesus as he says to you, “come, lay aside what you’re doing, and follow me.”

1 With the help of the Holy Spirit, I am convinced we will do just that this morning. Do you know why? Not just because of something compelling we see in Jesus -- but because of what Jesus sees *in us*.

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