

This is the Holy Gospel for Lord Jesus Christ according to St Matthew, the fourth chapter.

Glory to Jesus, O Lord.

Here Jesus begins his public ministry shortly after John the Baptist is imprisoned by Herod.

He proclaims the nearness of God's reign and calls for fishermen to be his disciples.

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee.

He led the Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea in the Charatorium of Zebulim and Naftali.

So that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled, land of Zebulim, land of Naftali, on the road by the sea across the Jordan Galilee of the Gentiles.

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has gone.

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

As he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter and Andrew, his brother, casting the net into the sea, but they were fishers.

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I'll make you fishers of people."

Immediately, they left their nets and followed him.

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 inculment.

And immediately, they left the boat and their father and followed him.

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

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus.

The Sermon

Quick question for you.

You heard God's voice.

How would you know?

How would you describe that voice to your friends?

Would it be so clear that you respond with joy knowing you were part of God's saving world in this world?

Would it be like in the alarm clock waking you up to the life that God wants for you, a direct conversation with the Almighty that gives you clarity and confidence?

Even if the clarity makes no sense to anyone else, how would you explain that to your family?

Or is God's voice quieter than that?

A whisper, a tug in your gut, a sense that God wants to be part of your life quietly at work as you move through your days, trusting your instance, bubbling in the dark or inflashal.

Or maybe God's voice comes through scripture, and that's enough.

No explanation is required.

But for most of us, this isn't an easy question.

Stories about hearing God's calm, hearing God's voice and calmness do something are often met with skepticism, raised eyebrows, or laughter.

It takes courage to speak about hearing the divine.

Not everyone will believe you, some may even discourage you, that can get you into trouble.

I know this from experience.

What I first sent my call to pastoral ministry in my life's work, it was in my third year of my music degree.

I didn't hear a voice, they had this didn't go away.

No doubt descended.

There was no divine announcement about why the future in ministry.

That wasn't the plan.

I was going to be an orchestra conductor.

That was a dream.

And that call that I experienced a way for that path was not dramatic, but it was real.

It was a strong sense that my life was about to change in ways that I hadn't planned, and I needed to pay attention.

It was surprising me that all of this was how little affirmation I received when I told people that perhaps God was calling me to be a pastor as my life's calling.

Friends, teachers, colleagues that didn't encourage me in some actively discouraged me by conducting a professor who had been mentoring me toward a career in the music then.

She responded strongly.

When I told her I was considered a seminary after I finished my degree, she stood up, pointed her finger at me and said, "No, I forbid it.

I thought she was going to have aneurysm."

After that, our relationship changed.

Opportunities disappeared.

It felt as though I had wasted her time.

And the campus pastors' response might know him a blessed memory, a pastor of God and a baby.

When I told him I thought maybe God was calling me to ministry, he said, "I suppose no harm in that."

Okay.

At the time, I was in Anglican, and so I've been with my bishop in the Niagara Nisces to ask them about the path to ordination.

And I was told, "There's too many clergy already."

I needed to wait ten years after finishing seminary before receiving a parish."

And other bishops from Canada told me the same thing.

It's not as if they could look at the numbers and see the mass retirement that were coming just five years later.

No more after door closed.

I began to wonder if everyone was right.

Because this really God's call, who was just talking with them.

If God was calling me, why was it so hard?

Why was there so much resistance?

Plus, graduation was a four months away.

I had to decide.

Eventually, I met with Eastern Synod staff at ELCIC, and there was no fanfare.

But there was something better.

I was encouraged to keep this sermon.

I was given room to listen.

So I entered seminary in the fall of 1995, and trusted God for the rest.

And what happened next surprised me?

I'm until seminary, I supported myself through music, played the trombone.

Then suddenly, the work stopped.

The phone stopped ringing.

I had composition of commissions.

And when I finished those, I didn't get any more.

It felt like a quiet announcement that one life ended and another had begun.

I felt severed from who I had been.

It was lonely.

But it was also a strange kind of confirmation.

And I imagine that something like the first disciples experience.

James and John left their father's remedy and the family business with just two words of Jesus.

Follow me.

We often romanticize this moment, but it had consequences.

Zebedee lost his sons.

His business suffered.

The decision lightly looked reckless.

Zebedee was collateral damage.

Follow me, Jesus, and have repercussions.

But Jesus saw something in them.

A hunger for a new world, compassion for the burden, softness of harm.

And so he called them.

So what about you?

If you're here.

It's because God already plays the claim on your mind.

And baptism, Jesus said to you, follow me.

And you did.

But how do you hear that call now?

Your scripture.

Do the spirits quiet, you nudging.

Do the wisdom of community.

Or are you still waiting?

Unsure what to listen for.

Does God's call candy unsettling?

And it doesn't end.

I don't know what God will ask of me tomorrow, ten years from now.

But I do know this.

That I have been drawn into God's group of healing and hope.

Wherever God leads, I go as a beloved child of God, buried light into the world that can be painfully dark.

And the same is true for you.

You will be caught in God's net.

God has a call on your life.

Do your gifts, your compassion, your presence.

God is already bringing healing into the world.

That is your ministry.

That is the work of God's beloved community.

As God has a hope on your life and will not let go, a hand reached from eternity has drawn you and drawn you into the life that God has for you.

So that God may be glorified through you, through who you are and what you do.

Following Jesus is a light of service and transformation.

It is good news and vital.

It is a new way of seeing the world, others and yourself.

Jesus saw something in you worth sharing.

A hunger for justice that refuses to accept the world as it is.

A tenderness towards suffering that notices what others overlook.

A compassion that does not turn away when things get uncomfortable or complicated.

Jesus did not call you because you are perfect or certain or fully formed.

He called you because you have what the world needs.

And so Jesus said to you, "Follow me, not as a demand, but as an invitation into a deeper life.

A life shaped by mercy, more than fear, by courage, more than certainty, by love, more than sin.

And so, more than self-protection."

Following Jesus does not need having all the answers.

It means trusting that the one who calls you by your name knows your gifts and knows the particular way the world will be healed through your presence.

And step by step, often without clarity, you follow.

Because of this, God's light shines through you.

Not because you are flawless or fearless, but because Christ has drawn you here and refuses to let darkness have the final word.

In Jesus, God has stepped into human life.

Into ordinary bodies and fragile stories.

And to clear the love is stronger than sin, mercy is stronger than fear, life is stronger than death.

The light that shines through you is not self-generated.

It is the risen life of Christ moving through broken people who have been claimed like grace.

The kingdom of heaven has come near.

Not an abstract idea or a distant promise, but a living reality.

Breaking into the world wherever Jesus is followed.

It comes near with forgiveness and corrupts resentment.

When justice disrupts cool, when compassion refuses to look over you.

It refuses to look away.

It comes in kitchens and hospital rooms, in more rooms and classrooms, in quiet acts of courage.

No one else sees wherever Christ is trusted and loved is chosen.

The reign of God has already had work.

Because among us, God's light has shone.

In this community, in these lives, in this shared story, God is doing something real and redemptive.

You are not waiting for God to arrive.

God has already appeared.

Christ is alive among us, calm, heal, and send me.

Because of Jesus, the world is being renamed one faithful step at a time.

Thanks be to God, and may this be some of us.