

Sermon Notes – January 22, 2023
The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 4: 12-23
Peace Lutheran Church
“Let’s Get Out of the Boat and Go Fishin’!”

Twin themes run through today’s lectionary readings: time and transformation. Evolving contrasts invite listeners to ask how their lives reflect the ever-bubbling message of grace. Contrasting what happened in the past with what’s happening now is a key avenue of approach. This is true normatively, as well as in grammatical tenses. Which things have happened and have reached a finite conclusion? Which are rolling onward into the future?

The announcement that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near in Matthew 4: 17 provides the fulcrum. “Near” in the Greek can be translated, “Within arm’s reach, next to and all around you.” This kingdom is already present, neither a speculative future nor a gift awaiting fulfillment of fine-print conditions on the part of the hearer. It has come. It’s near. It’s real, and it rolls onward. The listener’s response - repentance, or *metania* - translates as “being brought beyond oneself.”

The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, once considered forsaken, become vessels of life,. Disciples are called from fishing nets into apostleship. Israel’s exiled people find gloom transformed to light, depopulation to increase, ravaged lands to bountiful harvest, burden into freedom. The psalmist finds fear filled up with strength, trouble met with shelter, and enemies transformed into a comforting face.

In all these things, past points of reference - usually negative - are overwhelmed by a new living reality full of spirited hope. New light does not erase the past wrong. It illuminates it, admitting truth, and concurrently delineating the boundaries of its power to control or define us.

Release from limitations runs through multiple points in the readings. The disciples are in the business of trapping fish in familiar

waters to feed themselves. They will soon be in the businesses of freeing humanity across multiple borders and feeding thousands. A psalmist once hemmed in by enemies is raised high above, with the world in view. Members of a divided church in Corinth - picking allegiances, restricting themselves and their teaching - hear Paul recount how the ultimate limit of death on the cross was transformed into the freedom of life everlasting.

This transformation bears fruit! In Isaiah, people build. In the psalm, they sing. In First Corinthians, people come together, boldly proclaiming salvation. In Matthew, they walk throughout the region, sharing good news and healing every hurt. Whatever we once were, we find fulfillment and new purpose as the kingdom sweeps us along.