

**Sermon Notes – January 21, 2023**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 3: 13-17**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Called to Discipleship”**

I'm wondering.... How do we rise and shine into the new life that the Gospel calls us toward? We have to decide what is dead. We have to live into the new life we are given in Christ!

What a start into a necessary invitation. It only takes one declaration from God, spoken through the reluctant prophet Jonah, for the people of Nineveh to repent. One declaration from God and they are all in, putting even their animals in sackcloth.

Simon, Andrew, James, and John follow Jesus “immediately!” (Mark 1: 18). It doesn't take them any time at all to decide what's dead. So then, what will it take for us to decide what's dead? To turn from the violence in our world? To follow Jesus into a life of justice, mercy, and peace?

In the early days of January, when all is at rest here in our land, the church celebrates Epiphany. It's a joyful recognition that we are not alone; the Word of God dwells with us. It's an invitation to follow Jesus as he casts an alternative vision: that the lost are found. The last are first. This is a world beloved by the Father. Jesus - not your mirror, nor your calendar, nor your scale, nor your wallet - is your life.

“The present form of this world is passing away,” Paul writes to the Corinthians, all reason enough for them to “deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it” (1 Cor. 7: 31). It may be helpful for us, though. To continue reading into verse 32: “I want you to be free from worry.”

How can we be free from that worry here and now? How can Jesus show up, after John's arrest, and proclaim that “the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1: 15)?

How can there be good news amid continued oppression and pain, in the face of cynicism, division, suffering, and grief?

Is it possible that that we grow ...even as we grieve? We are still tied together in the victory found in Jesus, not because we will never again experience defeat ...as we will. Not because we will never grow weary... as that too we will. Jesus came unto us so that in the end, His victory is ours too.

The plan of God is alive and well and enacted - day in and day out - in Christ. Jesus came to tie this world together - not to condemn it, but to save it -

that all creation might be victorious over sin and death and division in every vile form it takes.

How can it be that we insist on hope? How can it be that we repent, turning our back on the forces that defy God? How can it be that we believe the good news? JESUS IS HERE!