

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany (Year A)

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*Matthew 4:12-23*

*Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

*'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, 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 for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.' 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 is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for 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 he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.*

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

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Last week we journeyed through John's account of Jesus calling his first disciples. Today, we see what the Gospel writer Matthew had to say about it. Instead of proclaiming a baptism of repentance by the river, John has been arrested and Jesus feels like he needs to relocate himself for safety's sake.

He walks by the Sea of Galilee and sees two brothers, Andrew and Peter, casting their nets into the lake. Then Jesus turns to them and says 10 words that will forever change their life: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Without a word, they drop their nets and follow him. The three of them continue on their way until they stumble upon James and John. Jesus calls out to them with presumably the same invitation and they, too, follow him in a manner even more dramatic than Andrew and Peter because the two of them abandon their father who was right there in the boat with them mending the nets.

Together, the five of them - Jesus, Andrew, Peter, James, and John - go all throughout Galilee doing the work of the Gospel. This work to which Jesus invites them is described with three verbs - teaching, proclaiming, and curing.

They taught and proclaimed the Good News of the Gospel and then they physically manifested it by curing people.

It's a pretty simple story; not without its curiosities, of course, but simple nonetheless.

Jesus recruits regular folks and then travels with them teaching, proclaiming, and curing.

The focus of this sermon is, hopefully, going to be as simple as the story which inspires it. This week, as I was preparing this sermon, there was one simple detail of this story that stood out to me: the movement of the passage.

Jesus begins his ministry in today's passage by being on the move. Jesus didn't start his ministry by erecting a church and building a new gymnasium to attract folks. Jesus didn't hire a young pastor to attract other young families. Jesus didn't find followers by sitting still and asking them to come to him.

Jesus found followers by being out in the world - their world - and finding them in the ordinariness of their lives.

Now, that may seem like a foreign concept to us but, in a way, that's not unlike how this congregation was founded. In the 1950's, this part of Lexington was flourishing as the suburban boom happened and folks from 2nd Presbyterian Church decided to plant a church here where the people were beginning to move.

Today's passage is a helpful, and perhaps unsettling, reminder that we are not called to remain stationary in our journey to be followers of Christ or, as this passage puts it, fishers of people. In fact, if we take it a step further, we can also glean this truth: going to worship once a week does not make someone a follower of Christ; it makes them a church-goer.

Now please don't get me wrong: what we're doing right now, this act of worship, is not unimportant. I in no way wish to suggest that worship is some meaningless exercise. On the contrary, worship is the single-most important way in which we are molded into followers of Christ to go and serve him in the world. However, worship must always be focused on training us for what we do in Christ's name "out there."

You may have noticed that for the past few weeks I've led the charge and benediction from the rear of the sanctuary. I've been very intentional in doing so because it redirects our gaze from the front of the sanctuary to the back of it where most of us exit this place. It changes our focus to what we've been doing to what we're about to go do.

Worship prepares us to go out in the world and be the Body of Christ. Worship prepares us to share with the world the gift of bold action. What Andrew, Peter, James, and John did was nothing if it wasn't bold. They left the comfort of what they knew how to do and followed Jesus into the unknown.

To put it another way: Jesus left the building, and so did they.

So, today's passage compels us to ask ourselves the following question: what are we, as a congregation, doing outside our doors that is serving our community where they are? Another more dramatic way to ask that question is to ask another: if this church were to close its doors today, what percentage of people who live within a two mile radius of us would notice? What void would that leave here in the west end of Lexington?

So, to end this sermon, I'd like to lift up a few examples of how some of us at Beaumont Presbyterian Church were "church" outside of our doors over the past 72 hours.

On Thursday evening, we began our Exodus Bible Study at Panera Bread. 13 of us crammed around a table, broke bread with one another, and dove into this dramatic book of the Bible. Something about meeting outside of the church walls changes our conversation. Also, more than once, we've had a random person come

over, intrigued about what we're talking about, and ask to listen in. Who knows the seeds that could be planted?

Then, on Friday, a handful of us drove to Central Baptist Hospital to sing to Russell Huffman. With hymnals in hand, we surrounded him - literally - with songs of God's grace. After singing to him for about 30 minutes, we placed our hands on him, anointed him with oil, and prayed with him.

Then, yesterday, about 10 of us gathered to go see the movie Just Mercy at the mall, witnessing a heartbreaking but hopeful story of the relentless search for justice.

These are only three examples of ways that Beaumont Presbyterian Church has been church outside of our walls. I know there are many other ways. Some of you volunteer at God's pantry. Others of you volunteer in other ways. I'm very aware the behind the scenes much goes on to fulfill our calling to be followers of Christ.

But we can't stop here. We can't stop now. Christ compels us to take bold action in following him. Because if Jesus has left the building, we need to as well. I hope this physical place is a refuge for each of you. I hope that this church building is a safe space to come and pray, play, eat, serve, and sing. But, at the end of the day, this building is nothing more than a building. If it burned to the ground, Beaumont Presbyterian Church would still exist.

So come to this building, friends! Let us gather here to work and worship. But let us not get "stuck" in this building. For Jesus is on the move, and we'd do well to keep our walking shoes on.

In the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us, God's children, say: **Amen.**