



MINISTER
DAN YEAZEL, PREACHING
KIM JOHNSON

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 27, 2008

Matthew 4:12-23

Changing Minds

Intro: Our New Testament lesson is from Matthew. Jesus calls ordinary people to be his disciples, promising them that he will teach them how to catch people. Let us listen for God's word to us.

As I read the scriptures for this week, I was drawn in by the first two sentences of this passage: "Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea. This nudged my image of Jesus, I don't often think of him having a home as an adult. I have thought of him as a child in Nazareth, learning at the synagogue, having friends there. I have thought of him apprenticing with his father, leaving home as a young man. I imagine him staying with Mary, Martha, and Lazareth in Bethany, traveling to Jerusalem for festivals, wandering, with no place to lay his head. But I have never thought of him having a home where he invited people to eat his food, or his own living room to have people over to sit and talk.

I never have thought of Jesus having a door you could knock on in the middle of the night, or a neighbor you could borrow milk from. It is interesting to think about.

It's even more interesting to consider how he got there. When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. John's arrest sets Jesus' work into motion. In response, Jesus does what he will do in Matthew many times when there is conflict: he withdraws, pulls back, and finds a more hospitable place to begin his work. It's not exactly management by confrontation. Jesus' parents had fled to Egypt when Herod was about to kill young children, and then they made a new home in Nazareth where they were

strangers. Jesus now goes to Capernaum where folks aren't all stirred up about John, and makes his home.

Capernaum was on the road by the sea. The water was blue there and it was an easy place from which to travel. There were many Gentiles there. Matthew was writing to a church that was full of Gentiles, foreigners to the Jews. Here he shows that even at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he was a light to the Gentiles. If Jews and Gentiles could worship and live together anywhere, it would be in Capernaum by the sea, where Isaiah had foretold it long ago.

So, having made his home in Capernaum, Jesus began to preach and gather his first followers. It is the barest message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. Jesus offers a different call than John. John said repent so that you may receive forgiveness. Jesus says repent so you can believe in the good news. John's emphasis was in the power of the forgiveness of God. Jesus speaks of the power of the love of God.

What that means will be revealed as the story unfolds. The Greek word for repent means, "to change your mind." It's related to the Hebrew concept of repenting as turning around, going in a different direction. But where Hebrew is always concrete, describing complex

ideas through bodily movements, the Greek reminds us that repentance is not just a change of behavior, it is an internal reversal of how we think, how we look at the world.

Jesus is in the business of changing minds. One day by the sea, Peter and Andrew are fishing, James and John are mending their nets. Jesus stops and says, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." There are no job descriptions, no interview with human resources, no talk about tenure track or succession planning. Just a straight forward invitation. Follow me. Matthew doesn't offer us any sermons they might have heard, any miracles they might have witnessed to help them make up their minds.

We don't know why they respond. But they change their mind about the focus of their lives, change their actions, and turn their attention to a whole different dimension of life. They will use their gifts in a new way and for a new purpose. They won't fish only for fish anymore. From now on they will look for signs of God's kingdom, help others see God's power among them. When Jesus says, "Follow me," they follow.

Jesus' first followers had to change their minds about the Gentiles. For so long they had imagined the Gentiles outside the circle of God's chosen ones. Now the

Gentiles responded to Jesus with more fervor than the original group. It was beginning to look like the kingdom of heaven would include both groups. Could Matthew's church repent, and follow, even though it was all so strange and new?

As politicians are hoping to persuade us to vote for them, what does it take to get us to change our mind or make up our minds? Do we listen and think about issues and then the implications of what we hear? When is the last time you changed your mind? Maybe this morning, over what to wear, what to have for breakfast, what route to drive here, or what you think you'll do this afternoon. On these things we change our minds all the time. It is our prerogative. But on the big questions, we don't change our minds very often. Being consistent is a trait we admire. It can be hard to accept change as a good and necessary thing. If you visit your college roommate, after many years apart, one of the best things you can say is that they are the same person they used to be. It's always with a catch in the voice that someone says, "Well, he's changed a lot." But we all change, that's what being alive is about. Whether we grow and mature as we change, is a good question.

True repentance, changing our mind and direction, is a rare and surprising thing.

Although
Sometimes it is a conscious, disciplined choice, often it is an outside force that takes us by surprise, pulls us along, it can feel like it almost happens to us than from within us, we know it has happened when we find ourselves responding to the world in a new way. It nearly always comes as a shock.

What makes people change their minds, turn away from thoughts or behavior that is destructive or wrong? What makes us even admit the possibility of change? And especially the possibility that we need to change? How do we move from seeing the world as a competition where we'd better make sure we come out on top, to a place where everyone has a seat at the table? What makes us move from having to earn every penny and every friend we have, to the confidence of knowing that we and all people are infinitely loved? What makes us move from believing nothing is new under the sun, to affirming that God is doing a new thing among us?

According to Jesus, it is the kingdom of heaven. When God's reign draws near enough to feel, near enough to see, then we begin to see our lives as God sees them, with all the potential that God sees. We begin to figure it out when we are walking around in the dark or

spinning our energy on things that don't count and we don't want to sit there any more than Peter and Andrew wanted to sit in their boat, once they heard Jesus' call to them. We might leave what we thought was home all along-that view of the world, that plan of how we would live-and change our minds about lots of things. And then perhaps we find ourselves at home, maybe for the first time, seeing the world as a place where God reigns, in a community that fishes for people and brings Good news to the world. Then we may see that even our minds can be changed.

There are all kinds of things we need to repent, that we need to change our minds about, need to turn away from. They are big things and little things, private things and very public things. There are the silent angers, the well-nursed resentments, the behaviors that harm our bodies. The kingdom of heaven is near, right close to us. The risen Christ doesn't live that far away. He is to be found next door and in the person next to us. We don't have to be stuck in our old lives, in our old thoughts once the Kingdom of God breaks into our lives. May we get out of our boats, leave our old nets, and allow ourselves to follow the one who lived at Capernaum, walked by the sea, bringing light and life to us all. Amen.