

Third Sunday After Epiphany

Year A RCL

January 26, 2020

North Fork Ministries

Gospel:

**Matthew 4:12-23**

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, 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 sea—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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Matthew tells us that Jesus left his home in Nazareth and journeyed to Capernaum by the sea so that, as the ancient prophet Isaiah had proclaimed, “the people who sit in darkness, might see a great light, and for those who sit in the shadow of death, light may dawn.”

In the midst of responding to this mystical quest, while proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven has come near, Jesus encounters Peter and Andrew fishing in the Sea of Galilee. Jesus tells them to follow him and he will make them fish for people. And, rather miraculously, the fishermen left their nets, followed Jesus, and their incredible journey together began.

Today’s gospel lesson is a call story - two call stories actually. The first was Jesus’ call to leave home and embark on his quest to let people know that the kingdom of heaven was near. The second call story occurred when the two disciples, Peter and Andrew, decided to walk with Jesus and help him share this good news.

In his seminal work, *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell describes

the stages of the hero's journey. Campbell's recognition of these stages emerged from his study of the ancient myths found in *The Aeneid*, *The Odyssey*, and Native American culture. But our contemporary understanding of the hero's journey is shaped more by Hollywood. In the narrative pattern found in countless films, from the *Wizard of Oz*, *The Lord of the Rings*, to *The Matrix*, to *Star Wars* and *Spiderman*.

As Campbell describes it, each heroic journey begins with a call to adventure, a call to the unknown. The sons of Zebedee were called to lay down their nets and join with Jesus in fishing for people. What a mysterious and unfathomable prospect that must have been! But they left their boat and followed him.

If you hold the gospel of Matthew in one hand and hold Joseph Campbell's *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* in the other it is rather easy to recognize how the journey of Jesus and his disciples through Galilee and onto Jerusalem, closely parallels Campbell's description of the mythic hero's journey.

Campbell describes a phase of "refusal of the call", characterized by the hero's sense of inadequacy for the call, or the hero's desire to hold on to present circumstances. Next is a "meeting of the mentor" –the would-be heroes' encounter with a teacher's wise advice or practical wisdom. Then a "crossing of the threshold", where the hero overcomes fear or steps beyond old belief and travels into unknown territory.

Then there is the "belly of the whale" in which the hero proves willing to undergo a metamorphosis, a real change, a rebirth, a baptism.

Next comes a period of initiation, with a series of trials, tests, some of which the hero may fail miserably, but through the challenge, the hero finds something sustaining within, an inner strength or conviction. It's the beginning of a series of quests, accompanied by discouragement and brief moments of illumination.

Eventually the hero meets with temptation – an urging to abandon the quest, a sense of the challenge being too difficult, a longing to fall back on an easier, less ambitious course.

At the center point of the journey there occurs an atonement with the Father, a recognition that power lies outside of himself or herself, and an abandonment of attachment to the ego. As Campbell as written, "One must have faith that the father is merciful, and then a reliance on that mercy."

Armed with new strength provided by the trials and an understanding of the true nature of the calling, the hero ultimately triumphs, the mission is accomplished, resurrection happens.

But then the hero is called to return home. Armed now with the insight gained on

the hero's journey, he must take his enlightenment back to where the journey began. Just as the disciples, after the resurrection, after Easter morning were then called to emulate their teacher's example and go about the business of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.

I bring this depiction of the hero's journey to your attention, partially because it is an interesting lens through which we can look at Matthew's gospel story and perhaps gain some insight into the lives of Jesus and the disciples. But most of you have heard me preach long enough to know that what I'm usually talking about when I stand at this pulpit is us – we the people of Holy Trinity and the Church of the Redeemer.”

To be sure, God calls individuals to play particular roles in the work of the Kingdom of God – just as God called Moses and Elijah and Peter and Andrew and Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther King. But most of the history of the Bible is a history of God calling a people. In the Hebrew scripture, it's God calling the people of Israel to play a special role in establishing God's kingdom on earth.

I submit to you that we too, the people of the Episcopal church on the North Fork, have been called to a particular assignment. It has been a task that we have been prepared for since our beginnings more than a century ago. When other churches are still struggling with the notion of full inclusion of the LGBT community, we open our doors widely, and made it clear that all were welcome. When other churches ignore the growing Hispanic presence on the North Fork, we are helping to establish and grow a congregation where Latinos can worship in the language they know best. We make a home for progressive-minded Christians, whose faith had moved them beyond the fundamentalist beliefs of their childhood, and seek a way to be a Christian, unashamed to use their intellect. We open our doors widely to the entire community, hoping to provide pathways to the Divine for those who call themselves spiritual and not religious. And at the same time, we respect and nurture an ancient worship practice so that we don't lose touch with beauty, and poetry, and the sacraments, and a rich and meaningful faith tradition.

We have embarked on a hero's journey, to be sure. Years from now we may look back and see every stage – the call to adventure, refusal of the call, supernatural aid, crossing the threshold, and the road of trials. Sometimes it may feel as if we are a band of reluctant Hobbits, joined with Bilbo and Frodo Baggins in the quest for the ring. Or Luke Skywalker and Princess Leah doing battle with the Empire. But the mission is clearer than it has ever been, and the need never more great.

Each of us has a role to play in this mission, whether it be cleaning up after coffee hour, leading a Bible Class, serving on the Vestry, tilling the soil at our Common Ground garden, preparing the altar, starting a completely new initiative, or if you have been financially blessed, generously sharing the monetary gifts God has given you.

As a people of God, as members of Holy Trinity and of Redeemer, like Jesus' first disciples, we are the inhabitants of the Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea. And as citizens of that kingdom we are people who have sat in darkness and have witnessed a great light. We are a people called to respond to the dawning of the light, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near. And when we answer the call, we are granted a glimpse of that kingdom.