

Grace to you and peace, from the one who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Why did they do it?

Why did they drop everything and follow Jesus?

And more than why ... how?

In today's Gospel, we hear the story of Jesus calling the first four of his disciples,

Simon and Andrew, James and John.

These guys drop their nets, leave their boats and even their loved ones,

and follow Jesus.

I'll be honest ... on the surface this can seem like a scene out of a bad zombie movie,

or like something out of an old *Gilligan's Island* or *I Dream of Jeannie* episode,

in which someone watching a pocket watch swing

back and forth, in front of their eyes

falls into a trance and does whatever the holder of the pocket watch says.

For in the Gospel we don't see that those who Jesus calls to be his disciples

sit around and think about it.

They don't stop and pray, make a list of the pros and cons and consider their options.

They don't even speak a response to Jesus.

Upon hearing the call from Jesus, they just get up and go with him,
leaving nets and boats and family members behind,
without even finishing their tasks of mending those nets,
or saying a word of goodbye to loved ones.

I've been struggling with this story all week, because I find it just so stinkin' strange,
just so implausible that these four people
could hear a total stranger say, "follow me,"
and unhesitatingly respond with their lives.

We have no indication that up in Galilee these guys had heard any news about Jesus,
whose baptism was down in Judea,
and we'd do well not to speculate too much about such things.

The text is amazingly simple in its narrative of this scene –
Jesus speaks, the disciples follow.

So I can imagine that countless sermons will be preached this week
about how we are called to drop our nets,

Preachers will ask their hearers to consider
what *they* are willing to drop and leave behind for Jesus.

Simon and Andrew, James and John will be set up as some sort of archetype

for the life of discipleship,

and church members will be told that they should strive to answer God's call in their life

as Simon and Andrew, James and John answered God's call.

And while I think these questions are good and wonderful to consider,

I'm not going there,

because ultimately today's Gospel text is not about

Simon and Andrew, James and John.

It can be too easy for us to descend into a discussion of what

Simon and Andrew, James and John did when they heard Jesus' call.

And it would be too easy to get wrapped up into pious consideration of what

we ought to do when God calls *us*.

But you know something?

It ain't about us.

Today's Gospel text is about the power of God to do something new.

Yes, today's Gospel reading, reporting on the start of Jesus' preaching ministry,

is about the new things that God is doing –

new things in the lives of Simon and Andrew, James and John, for sure,

but they're not the main actors.

God is doing a new thing in this new community of promise that Jesus is forming
with the twelve disciples,
twelve people who represent a new Israel,
a new covenant between God and the world.

A new thing.

Of course, we could have seen this coming.

The great story of Jesus calling the first of his disciples has this wonderful prelude

in verses 12-17 of today's reading,

for there Matthew tells us that John the Baptist had been arrested –

signaling the end of one chapter, so to speak –

and that Jesus then moved to Galilee ...

signaling the beginning of another chapter.

Now, Galilee was a rather nondescript region to the north of Jerusalem,

populated by Jews and Gentiles alike,

a region that throughout Israel's history had been at the edges of its control,

and was subject to direct or indirect control by foreign, occupying powers.

So why doesn't Jesus begin his preaching ministry in Jerusalem, at the heart of it all?

Perhaps because he's doing a *new* thing ...

And to signal that something's quite special about this new beginning,

Matthew quotes the prophet Isaiah,

speaking of the promise that would come from the Galilee region,

the light that would shine from there,

shining life and hope on those who were once in darkness.

Indeed, the quoted passage comes from Isaiah chapter 9, today's first reading.

But if you dial back to chapter 8,

you'll find God's people in a rather depressing state of affairs.

God had hidden himself from his people,

a people who were increasingly consulting ghosts and the dead and strange spirits,

in violation of the covenant they had with God.

For these people Isaiah foretells darkness, anguish, and distress.

But those who had been undergoing another kind of anguish,

those who suffered under foreign rule in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali,

they will see a great light, the prophet declares.

Isaiah here tells of a reversal of fortunes, of sorts,

with those at the center of it all – in Jerusalem and all Judea –

succumbing to the darkness of their rebellion against God,

and with those at the margins –

up north in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, the Galilee region –
basking in a great light with joy and exultation.

From the prophet Isaiah to the Gospel of Matthew,

the Good News for us today is that God is doing a new thing,

casting light where there once was darkness

and renewing a covenant of unparalleled love

through the creation of a new community of promise.

We see today the beginnings of the unique community of the twelve disciples

who follow our Lord at times with grace and at times with grumbling ...

kinda like us.

So, what about us?

Today we are going to gather for our annual meeting.

There may be some grace and there may be some grumbling,

as is always the case when we Christians get together.

Yet looking beyond that,

this meeting will be a chance for us to consider the new thing that *God* is doing here.

New members of Council will be elected this day.

New ministries from the past year will be celebrated,

and new ministries for the coming year will be anticipated.

We will discuss and vote on a budget,

and we will recognize some of those who have made extraordinary contributions
to this ministry we share.

But just as today's Gospel text is not about Simon and Andrew, James and John,
today's meeting is not about us.

What we do today we do in the name of God and in response to our Lord's call ...

This is about the things, the new things, that God is doing here at Resurrection
and in our community,
and it is a time for us to discern

how best to be a part of God's holy presence and blessed work here.

For we didn't bring God to this neighborhood ...

we simply built a church so that we could dwell with God for a little bit in this place.

And so we dwell with God here and we do special God-things here,

such as worship and study the Bible and pray and share Christian fellowship ...

But we also go from this place to those other places where God dwells,

we go to serve among the poor and the needy, and God is there.

we return to our homes and workplaces to carry out sacred vocations,

and God is there.

we find ourselves in the love of friendships and the heartache of loss,
and God is there.

we walk in the public square and we wander in our private thoughts,
and God is there.

God promises to show up and do something new in all of these places,
here at Resurrection and beyond.

Thus our work today can be summarized by the words of today's psalm,
the author of which asks of God one thing:
that he may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

May we this day dwell with joy in the house of the Lord,
and gaze upon the beauty of God's presence and work,
for we know that God is with us,
calling us to be his people,
and doing a new thing among us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.