

“Fishers of Men” (Matthew 4:19)

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 26th, 2014

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Matthew, chapter 4 is not the first time Jesus called Peter and Andrew and other disciples. John, chapter 1 records that Jesus had already called them to be disciples. This call in Matthew, chapter 4 was a call to full-time ministry that would eventually lead Christ -- as recorded in Matthew, chapter 10 -- to send out the twelve with authority as apostles. The meanings of the two biblical words are good to know:

Disciple = is a *hearer* or a *learner* [and in application to the Christian faith, it is about hearing and learning the Word of Christ] and such a one *follows Christ*.

Apostle = is a *sent-one* of Christ who goes forth to proclaim the Word of Christ.

Every apostle in Scripture is a disciple, but not every disciple in Scripture is an apostle.

By the way, to be a disciple (or even an apostle) does not mean that you cannot still have a “regular” job in society. When the apostles were still disciples they were fishermen, but they did not totally forsake their vocation of fishing as we find them working the fish during one of Christ’s resurrection appearances (John 21). Furthermore, we know that St. Paul was a tentmaker by trade even during his apostolic ministry. Thus being a disciple or an apostle as presented in the Bible does not mean that you become a separatist! God wants you out in the world, living in your various vocations, living with your families, living in society and being God’s light to the world with Christ in your hearts and His word upon your lips.

Now strictly speaking, there are no longer any apostles in the biblical sense or original sense of the word. These sent ones were called directly and immediately by the Lord Jesus Christ. These apostles actually saw the risen Christ. The only exception to the rule would be Matthias who was appointed by the other apostles, but note that Matthias also saw the risen Lord (Acts 1:22). At any rate, there are no apostles in this sense in the world today.

There is still, however, an office that stems from the apostolic ministry that maintains the distinction between the following ones and the sent ones: the office of the public ministry (as well as its auxiliary offices). Those who serve in this office are called “pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4) and “evangelists/[missionaries]” (Eph. 4). When it became evident that apostles needed help to continue emphasizing the ministry of the Word of Christ, God also established

the office of the deaconate. Deacons and Deaconesses serve the special needs of the people of God while enabling pastors to proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments (Acts 6). These are exceptional servants who show the Servant Christ through their ministry of the Word and putting others before themselves. We are blessed to have an LC-MS deaconess in our congregation as well as having sponsored other deaconesses ("church daughters") as part of the heritage of this congregation in addition to our having sponsored several men ("church sons") who went on to become pastors. This has been a rich tradition here at Saint Paul's and you'll see this reflected in our missions budget proposal if you attend the voter's meeting today...we continue to have a vision for future church workers in the Kingdom!

Now having these distinctions, the Christian might be tempted to think to themselves: "Well, I'm so relieved that this attention is put on apostles, pastors, deacons and missionaries...looks like I'm off the hook in terms of spreading the light of Christ and the Word of Christ!" But *that* would be an inaccurate analysis. It is easy to forget that the entire purpose of having pastors is so that the disciples – all of you – would be equipped through the Word of Christ (Eph 4:12). That is, yes, pastors are sent, but *why* are they sent? They are sent so that the disciples – all of you – would be equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit through the magnificent Word of Christ and the Holy Sacrament.

But at this point, we might also want know *why* it is that you as a disciple are to be equipped with the Word and Sacrament at all. Well, the reasons are under two major headings: One major answer to "why be equipped?" is "for your *own* salvation and benefit". You are to be equipped with the Word so as to keep *you* in the forgiveness of sins. In this context of Matthew 4 Jesus takes up where John the Baptism left off; He was proclaiming, "*Be repenting!*" And under this heading of personal benefit, we often forget the significance of how Christ was preaching: His admonition and call isn't "repent once!" but rather ***be repenting*** every day, constantly, perpetually, throughout your life until the day you go to heaven.

Thus pastors are to keep you in the forgiveness of sins, because it is possible to lose faith in the forgiveness of sins. No, we cannot ever take away the reality that Christ came to forgive us, but we *can* take away the personal benefit of this forgiveness by forsaking Christ when faith itself is forsaken. So you are equipped by remaining in the forgiveness of sins; constantly repenting; constantly having a living faith; ever holding to Christ so that you *never* fall away.

This is the self-sustaining purpose of your pastor feeding you. That is why we are called to thirst for the Holy Sacrament. ***"If you ask how often you must go [to receive the Sacrament], it may indicate a stubborn heart that wants to buy God's grace as cheaply as possible and that does not really want to be with Jesus. If that is the case, you must pray God to convert***

you. If, on the other hand, you ask how often you ought to go, our Lord's answer is, 'As oft as ye do this,' and that means that you must do it oftener than the great majority, who commune four times a year just for the sake of propriety. And if you ask how often you may go, you are showing the right hunger for grace, and my answer then is: Go in the joy of the Lord as often as you can. But do not be careless about the preparation!'" (Giertz, Bo. *The Hammer of God*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973: 79)

Think of your being thirsty for water because you're dying of thirst. You would never dream of trying to quench your thirst by saying to yourself, "Well, I just had some water last week!" Of course not! If anyone ever dies of thirst, it is because they did not have water within a few days, while the sufficiency they received from the water before that is far less at issue! God calls us to *thirst* for the Sacrament. Why? For the forgiveness of sins! In this way we never come forward to receive the Sacrament because we are so worthy as forgiven people, but rather we approach the altar because once again we confess our sin and our need for forgiveness...needing forgiveness just as much as on the day we were baptized.

Some people foolishly and smugly say, "I don't need the Sacrament like that; I already know that I'm forgiven!" To say such a thing is to reveal the most profound ignorance of what Holy Scripture actually teaches. Disciples, you are forgiven because Christ keeps you forgiven, and Christ keeps you forgiven by keeping you in His Word and Sacrament. Yes, the food is Christ who is our forgiveness, but the food is to be received and eaten constantly. Yes, Christ won our salvation, but that salvation must be distributed and received...stop receiving it and you and I may lose our faith.

Now all of that is just the first heading as to why you as a disciple must be equipped. The second heading is that you are equipped not only for yourselves, but for others. Now under this second heading, you as a disciple are called by God to be a blessing to others through the following: through your prayers, through your service, and through your witness: sharing the light of Jesus Christ with your neighbor.

God calls the sent-ones through you – the disciples – *and* calls you to intimately and passionately guarantee that the Church is always about fishing for men. God calls you to bridge the gap for people without Jesus Christ. My vicarage supervisor of sacred memory, Rev. Lionel Skamser who was the pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, Riverside, once put it simply for me: "if the church is not growing, she's dying." And quite frankly I cannot begin to tell you how excited I am about what you are going to consider at today's voter's assembly meeting relating to our congregation sharing the light of Jesus Christ:

1. The recommendation to call Rev. Dr. Steven P. Mueller to be our Assistant Pastor so that we may do more as a congregation to share the light of Christ. I pray that you call Dr. Mueller. In our short history as a restart congregation, *we have never had more prospective members than we do at this very moment in time...I have been blown away at how many people are asking to receive the Word of Christ presented to them and how many people are welcoming me as your pastor into their lives to study Christ's Word...it has been amazing!* But the bottom line is that we need more resources so as to reach more with the Gospel and I cannot think of a better partner in ministry than Dr. Mueller.
2. We are asking you to support -- through a missions pledge -- a new organization called "Southern California Campus Ministry Initiative" in which we will partner with Rev. Mark Jasa to spread the Gospel on local college and university campuses.
3. We are asking you to support -- also through a missions pledge -- our international missions as we will support directly either Rev. Jacob Gaugert who is preparing to spread the Gospel in Togo, West Africa or James Cerdenola who may be stepping down as president of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines in order to become a full-time missionary in the Philippines.
4. *And* there is a line-item which is for evangelism/outreach for our own congregation (as well as a line item for stewardship)...these do not represent a lot of money, but *enough* money to do things like:
 - a. A new program for 2014 called "Circle of Friends" to be a congregation focused on sharing the Gospel with those in our close- friends-family-co-workers-and-other-neighbor- relationship-circles. The program begins in the most non-intimidating fashion: the first thing we do is pledge to **pray** for those close to us who either do not have the comfort and the confidence that their sins are forgiven in Jesus **or** who *do* know Christ but do not have a church home. Let me tell you the simple fact of the matter: you never have to worry about what to say or how to say it when you have with a sincere heart of faith prayed over the people you love...when you do God has a way of taking care of the rest. That is how it works. When you commit to pray for someone, the love of Christ overflows in your service and witness to them. Too often we try to step into witnessing without praying for the people we witness to.

- b. Secondly, we have been talking long enough about new efforts to form more Bible Studies so as to create additional bridges for touching more people with the Gospel. 2014 will be the year for us to start new opportunities for more people to receive the light of Christ through the ministry at Saint Paul's Lutheran Church of Irvine!

In my humble opinion, 2014 also needs to be the year that we prayerfully consider starting a second service in 2015, perhaps coinciding with our moving into our own facility. We must give these things to the Lord and these things are important because we must be about doing all we can to reach more people with the saving/constantly-forgiving Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I know as surely as the sun rose this morning that this is not an easy call: to be a disciple in this world today. But I would like to share with you that the reason that the call seems much more difficult than it has to be is because we either forget or forego being equipped under this "second heading". All of you surely know someone or perhaps even several people without Jesus Christ. What are you called to do? Don't leave anything out! First of all, whoever these people are please put them down on a prayer list. Before you even begin to consider how you might witness, put first things first, pray for them specifically. Secondly, serve them; love them. Do not risk giving anyone the wrong impression that people are just objects for you to serve yourself and your need to feel pious or religious...no! These people are rather precious because Christ gave Himself for them...they are loved by God...so serve their needs, help them, let them see how important they are to God and how important they are to you.

And then, finally, when you have given them your heart in prayer and your hands in service, go one step further: witness. It may be a very simple witness like a loving invitation to come to church, but keep this mind: you might be the only Christian in their lives making the difference for eternal life. Understand this though: your witness doesn't have to be sophisticated; it doesn't even have to quote Scripture...just tell them: God loves you through His Son Jesus! I once shared the Gospel with a little girl at St. John Lutheran Church, Covina as I made the rounds visiting all of our Pre-School through 8th grade classrooms. Well this little girl heard about Jesus' love and she went home *every single* day, day-after-day, week-after-week, telling her mom and dad that Jesus loved them, wanting to pray before meals, and asking (begging) her parents to take her to church to be baptized...the parents were overcome by the witness of their little daughter. They came to church and that little girl was not the only one baptized in that family! "From the lips of babes!" Just tell people that God relates...God understands because He came into our world and became one of us to bring the light of

salvation, and hope, and love and forgiveness...that's Jesus. We are loved by God on account of Jesus. That's the message, and any of us here today can tell it!

And think about it: this world is clearly, openly, rampantly, daringly, disgustingly telling you and your neighbors and your children about the worldviews of hedonism, materialism, atheism...hopelessness...the world is shouting at the top of its lungs to believe in vengeance, in hatred, in the occult, in living for self, in blatant immorality...why should we stand idly by and say: "go ahead world lead us all astray!" Enough is enough...I have seen consciences saved, marriages saved, friendships saved, hope restored, healing given, and most importantly the forgiveness of sins when the Gospel – the Good News of God's love for us in Christ – was shared. It's free, it's powerful, it's effective, it's life-changing...so let's share it!

This is not about a guilt trip. It's simple: if you know you've fallen short of your call to share, then confess your sin and know that God gladly forgives you in Christ this day. Then He lifts you up and says, "My child, you have nothing to worry about, because as you are my forgiven child, Jesus my Son will also be your strength to pray, to serve, and to witness." Jesus who bore all of your sin is also your new life who will give you the love for others and the words for others! God's plan is simple and profound: Jesus is the light of the world and He shines on you...Christ's light shines on you and through your eyes of faith fills your whole life with His light and when Christ's light is in you, it shines forth...this you are called to share. Through His blood and righteousness for you, Christ is also your light for your own constant forgiveness, and He is your light for witnessing to others that His light might also be shown upon them!