

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Jesus, Amen. The title for today's sermon is "You are called" and it is from the Gospel reading, Matthew chapter 4. Let us pray... Amen.

Today is the Third Sunday after the Epiphany and we continue to see Jesus in action demonstrating He is God in the flesh. Jesus amazes all who see Him in action and hear Him speak. Jesus' actions fulfill the Old Testament prophecies and Jesus' Words have power beyond anything we could ever imagine. His actions are kind and His preaching is simple and direct: "**Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand**"(4:17) and "**Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.**"(4:19)

"**Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"(4:17) These are the first words Jesus proclaims as He begins His ministry, as recorded in both Matthew and Mark's Gospel. **Repent**, turn from your sins and sinful way and return to the Almighty God and His Word. **Repent**, for God Himself is calling you out of the darkness of this world and into the Light of His kingdom. **Repent**, for God is calling you from death and giving you new life in Christ. **Repent**, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand, and this Christ, the Messiah has come into your presence with His Light, His Word, His Healing, and His Salvation.

Then, one of the first things Jesus does is calls His first disciples. Jesus tells Peter and Andrew, "**Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.**"(4:19) Jesus doesn't promise greater profits, a larger house, shorter work week, safer working conditions, or better social standing. Jesus simply proclaims His Word, and as God told Isaiah: "**so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**"(Isaiah 55:11) Jesus calls Peter and Andrew and they follow Jesus. Jesus goes a little further and calls two more fishermen and they too leave everything, including their father, and follow God at His Word.

Then Jesus and His new disciples continue "**throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom**". Jesus demonstrated Who He is by "**healing every disease and every affliction among the people.**"²⁴ **So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.**²⁵ **And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.**"(4:23-25) Jesus healed every known disease, affliction, or possession. Jesus restored to health all who were brought to Him. This resulted in crowds from all over the Israel and the surrounding regions following Jesus.

But you might asks yourself 'how do Jesus' actions in Matthew chapter four (4) affect me today in my life in Churchbridge, or Esterhazy, or Bredenburg, or Langenburg, or anywhere in this great country of Canada?

Well, when Jesus called "**Follow me and I will make you fishers of men**"(4:19) Jesus was not just calling to Peter and Andrew, or even James and John: Jesus was also calling you.

Now you may say Jesus' call was directed to Peter and Andrew, which is true, but it is also true that God has called you. You see, God's Word is not just for those other people, but it is also for each and every one of you. This calling to share God's Word and salvation in Christ **is not** just for pastors or evangelism committees; rather it is for everyone God calls to Himself.

Now you might ask, 'But how can I be sure that God has called me? I mean really, where or when did God ever speak to me? I've never heard God say anything to me let alone call me by name; no grand visions, no heavens parting, and certainly no voice proclaiming anything, not even a simple postcard, email, or text.' While it is true God has not sent you an email, or posted on your Facebook timeline, God has done something much better. God regularly speaks to you through His Word here in church. On top of that, God called you by name, in your hearing, and there He not only named you, but He also marked you with His own name. God called you into Christ at your baptism. As Peter proclaimed on the first Pentecost: **"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."**(Acts 2:38-39)

In addition, in Baptism God also forgave you all your sins, anointed you with the Holy Spirit, and made you His own child. In Baptism, Peter proclaims in his first letter: **"As you come to *Jesus*, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... ⁹ Because you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."**(1 Peter 2:4-5,9)

While the physical act of baptizing only happens once, we continue to live in that new life of grace. Our old self, the one under the power of devil and the one under the eternal condemnation of sin died at the font and God raised you to new life as He continues to do every day as you remember your baptism and God's Word of promise to you there. We can proclaim with Paul; **"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."**(Galatians 2:20)

There in Baptism you were called to repent and were also given the means and the ability to repent through the Holy Spirit working in you. In Baptism, God Himself called you out of the darkness of this world and into the Light of His kingdom. In your Baptism God called you from death and gave you new life in Christ. In your Baptism you were brought into the Kingdom of heaven, and Christ, the Messiah came into your presence with His Light, His Word, His Healing, and His Salvation.

But our Christian life does not end in Baptism! It is not just a stamp on a passport, a magical guarantee, a superstitious splash of water to make sure all our spiritual bases are covered. Baptism is the beginning of a new life. In this new life we need to be fed and watered with heavenly food; we need Living Water and the Bread of Life, otherwise we have no life in us

(John 6). As we feed our physical body, our spirit also desperately needs to be regularly fed otherwise it slowly withers and dies. Fortunately God provides and He generously feeds us through His Word and Sacrament.

Once fed, God also calls you to "**proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**"(1 Peter 2:9) Why, because you are part of God's royal priesthood. Along with Peter and Andrew, you are called to fish within your God given vocation; in all you do in this life. Now I am not talking about grabbing your tackle box, a net, and taking off for the week: rather you are called to a different kind of fishing every day of your life.

You, and everyone baptized into Christ, are called to fish; to proclaim God's Word of salvation in your daily life. Through your words and actions God calls you to reflect the Light of Christ out into the darkness of the world so to encourage the Holy Spirit to take those living in the shadow of death from their spiritual death to bring them into eternal life in Christ.

This is your calling: to allow the Holy Spirit to work through you to call those who have not heard, or who no longer hear, to faith and trust in Christ. This cooperation will not save you, nor will it contribute towards your salvation: Christ has already paid the full price for your salvation through His life, death, and resurrection in your place. What this cooperation does is it could well save your neighbour from eternal condemnation. God has, and continues to equip you with all you need through regularly hearing His Word and receiving His Sacrament.

Going back to the Gospel reading today, this is what Jesus' call did. He called the disciples and they followed Him. Jesus continued to proclaim God's Word. People heard Jesus and they went out and told others about the healing and brought them to Jesus. Jesus proclaimed the Gospel and the result was people were spiritually and physically healed. The physical healing was an outward sign of the internal redemption and salvation. Those who heard and were healed by Jesus went out and told others, shining Christ's Light into the darkness, so other could share in the healing words of the Gospel.

The people shared, not out of compulsion, but rejoicing in the gift they freely received. And really, who wouldn't want to rejoice and share this incredible gift. And really, how many of the people who saw the healing power of Jesus' Word, do you think, did not go and tell everyone they knew about Jesus? How much would they have to hate someone to not share the Good News? People with every disease and ailment were healed. And Scripture records that those who saw and heard Jesus brought everyone who had any condition to Jesus and He healed them of all their infirmities; Jesus restored their life.

You are called to do the same; to shine the Light of Christ, to proclaim the excellencies of Him because He healed you and restored your life. You are not told to share this gift out of compulsion, but rejoicing in the free gift of salvation. Who here wouldn't want to share such good news? You have something even better than those who first heard; you have the who account: Jesus who lived, died, rose, and ascended for you; Jesus who forgives all your sins; Jesus who has delivered you from sin and the devil; Jesus who has given you the gift of eternal life; Jesus who taken you out of darkness and brought you into His eternal Light. There is no

greater gift, no greater treasure. He has done more than heal your physical ailments, He has given your spirit life, life that can never die.

And so in your day to day life here in Churchbridge, Langenburg, Esterhazy, Bredenbury, or anywhere you live, you can rejoice in the salvation Christ has earned for you. You've been given such a phenomenal gift and there is no good reason you cannot share it. Follow the example of those who first heard Jesus. Hear Christ's Word, receive His healing, and be strengthened in your faith and restored, and then go tell everyone what Christ has done and lead them here to share in His Word and restoration.

Because of Jesus' actions for us, and because of what He continues to do, we can follow His first words: "**Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"(4:17) Through hearing God's Law, and with the Holy Spirit working in us, we recognize our sins—our spiritual illness and death. Then, trusting in God's Word and promises we confess and repent of our sins to God. The Holy Spirit leads us to trust in Christ for our salvation as we see and freely receive healing in the words of Absolution, "For sake of Christ, all your sins are forgiven." In recognizing our sins, we know we know we could never save ourselves, but in Christ there is healing, forgiveness and eternal life. This is the gift to share. Here we are called out of darkness and death and brought into the Kingdom of heaven.

You are called to reflect this light of Christ into the darkness of the world around you and to point others to Christ and where He promises to be with His Word and Sacrament: Here in His Church. Here Christ, the Messiah comes into our presence with His Light, His Word, His body and His blood for the forgiveness of all your sins. Here God comes to you to forgive you all your sins, to strengthen your faith and trust in Christ and His salvation for you, to give you new life, and to equip you so you can "**proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**"(1 Peter 2:9)

Christ Light is here. Thanks be to God!

Amen.

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