

Sunday, January 27th, 2008
The 3rd Sunday After Epiphany

Matthew 4:12-23, Psalm 27
'Fraidy Cats

Fear seems to rule our lives these days. Our political world is ruled by fear. "Vote for me or THEY will destroy X!" seems to be the battle cry of election years. X can be whatever you want it to be – Social Security, Medicaid, welfare, abortion, religion, property rights, water, the American way of life (whatever that is...). And we often chose who we vote for based on that fear. But is that how we are called to live as Christians?

Take, for instance, the lesson we learn in Matthew's Gospel today. After John is killed, the sane thing to do is to run and hide. The sane thing to do is to get out of the spotlight, and hope they forget about you. But Jesus doesn't do that. Depending on your translation of the Bible, it either says he 'withdrew' or he 'returned' to Galilee. I think there should be a difference there. Returning to Galilee makes more sense to me. He goes home.

But not to retire, or to vanish. He goes home to do his work. He goes home to teach, and preach and heal, and call disciples. He goes home to begin getting serious about his public ministry. Not to vanish, not to withdraw, but to begin. And he begins by calling some disciples.

How many of us would consider just listening to the crazy guy walking down the beach and walking away from our careers, our livelihoods and our family businesses? After all, all Jesus is doing is walking on the beach, when he calls out to the first two fishermen, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

And they don't seem to take any time to think about it at all. Matthew doesn't say that they look at Jesus and consider, "Hrmm...if big brother goes with him, then the family business is all mine," or " Hrmm...But I really want to be the owner of Zebedee and Sons Fishing Emporium." I don't think that this happens with today's world. We're too afraid of mortgages and credit cards, and uncertainties and debt, and stability and...

And amazingly enough, this is just what happens with the second set of brothers as well. There is no second guessing, there is no time for deliberation, there is no time for contemplation. There is no family conference. The two brothers just get up and follow Jesus, the beach bum.

How come?

Why would they do this?

What enables them to do something like this?

How come they can and we won't?

I think the answer is found in the 27th Psalm. If God is for us, who can be against us? If the Lord is our strength, where is our fear? Not to say that this line of thinking hasn't gotten us into trouble many times in the past. After all, both sides during the War of Northern Aggression, the late unpleasantness, or as you

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may have heard it called, the Civil War, argues vehemently that God was on their side. Most of the modern conflicts on the face of the globe exist because **both** sides believe that God is on their side and that that gives them ultimate superiority in cause and in effect. Obviously, this has had disastrous effect on the world and on the faith.

So, what should we draw from the Psalmist? Perhaps what we should draw is that we do not need to fear because of who our God is. Christ should be ducking and covering and going into hiding after John is killed, and yet, and yet, what he is doing is exactly what God sent him to do – his public ministry.

Can't we get there as well? We should be following Christ. And in following Christ, we have to remember that no where does God promise us it will be easy, or safe, or eternally fun. But, God continually comes asking us to walk with him – whether on the beach or in the mountains, at work or at home, or even at church. What is it we're so afraid of?

And, by the way, those two brothers, one of them is the rock on which Jesus builds his Church, Peter. The other is Andrew, patron saint of Greece, Russia and Scotland, beloved of Presbyterians, and crucified for his faith. They weren't afraid to say yes to Christ, what about us?