

Epiphany 3A (1/26/2020)

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm 27:1, 4-9

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

**Matthew 4:12-23**

*Discipleship takes place in between promise and fulfillment. Jesus' call to follow involves a great deal of sacrifice and no guarantees. Yet, he "summons with irresistible authority," inviting us to join him in pursuit of God's kingdom come on Earth as in heaven. The hope of this new reality, the abundant life that God dreams for us and for the world, is worth the uncertainty of discipleship in the in-between.*

This is a peculiar time in the church year. The time after Epiphany stands apart from the beloved seasons that come before and after. We're no longer in Advent and Christmas, when we anticipate and celebrate Jesus' birth and epiphany. And we've yet to enter Lent and Holy Week, when we prepare for and bear witness to his passion and resurrection. In the several weeks between the blue and purple and white of these holy times, we find ourselves surrounded by the green of Ordinary Time. And, it's no coincidence that this is the time of year, the time that hangs between Epiphany and Lent, that we hear the story of Jesus calling his first disciples away from their ordinary lives and into the unknown.<sup>1</sup>

**Discipleship takes place between promise and fulfillment.** In his birth and baptism, Jesus shines as a light to people dwelling in a land of shadows and emerges as God's Beloved Child with whom God is well pleased. In his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus fulfills his role as God's Chosen

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<sup>1</sup> See David Toole, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 1, 286.

Servant who pours himself out in love even unto death, yet who overcomes death and opens to us the way of everlasting life. The call to follow him occurs in between these decisive events. From the perspective of the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee in our Gospel from Matthew today, the story is begun, but it has yet to be finished. They are strangely compelled by Jesus' call, drawn away from what they know to something new, yet they have no idea what it will mean. **Discipleship means living in the in-between.**

And, this is as true for us as it was for them. We don't have to pretend we don't know the end of the story to know that we, too, experience the uncertainty of following Jesus. **Even as we cling to the promise of resurrection, we are surrounded by signs that death in its many forms is really all there is.** Injustice and hostility and loss and carelessness rear their ugly heads too often to be ignored, chipping away at God's vision for abundant life in human community, a life where the poor and the peacemakers and the mourners and the merciful are supposed to be blessed.<sup>2</sup> So, why leave the security of your little boat to follow Jesus when the way might lead nowhere? **Why exchange the security you know for the kingdom of God when you suspect it's nothing more than a delusion?**

**Jesus' call to follow involves a great deal of sacrifice and no guarantees.** Disciples are certainly not spared the pain of human life; in fact, Jesus insists that they'll carry crosses of their own. So, what persuades Simon,

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:3-12.

Andrew, James, and John to drop everything and walk with this mysterious Rabbi wherever he leads? And, what persuades us to come back week after week to renew our commitment to follow Jesus out the doors of the church and to all the places life leads?<sup>3</sup> **The sensible thing to do is to ignore the call, stay in the boat, and carry on with our lives, doubtful that God's dream for the world will ever be realized.**

Last year, I joined an intrepid band of disciples in an effort to support the ministry of World Vision. The project was to raise funds for global water justice in conjunction with our participation in the Seattle Rock 'n' Roll Half-Marathon. Now, I enjoy running, but 13.1 miles through the streets of Seattle is no leisurely jaunt. To make things worse, the race is infamous for an extended stretch up Queen Anne Hill just past the ten-mile mark. I tried not to think about it in advance, but there was no ignoring how grueling the hill would be once I started up. My pace immediately slowed, my legs burned, and my breathing became labored.

About halfway up, I made the mistake of raising my head to see how far I'd come and how far I still had to go. I couldn't see the base of the hill, but neither could I see the summit. A feeling of dread crept in. *Why did I sign up for this anyway?* I thought to myself, *the sensible thing would have been to stay home.* All I knew in that moment was the physical and mental struggle, and my only support was a halfhearted sense of solidarity with the other runners as

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<sup>3</sup> Lorraine Brugh and Gordon Lathrop, *The Sunday Assembly*, 228.

well as the occasional cheer from a saint standing along the route. It was an experience of dwelling in the in-between.

Dear church, discipleship takes place between promise and fulfillment. **We are all called to run with perseverance the race that is set before us<sup>4</sup> in spite of our inability to see the finish; we are called to life in the in-between. We heed the call because Jesus “summons with irresistible authority”;<sup>5</sup> how can we refuse the invitation to join him in pursuit of God’s kingdom come on Earth as in heaven? It’s a risky proposition, no doubt. But, the hope of this new reality, the abundant life that God dreams for us and for the world, is worth the uncertainty of discipleship in the in-between.**

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<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 12:1.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Hare, as cited by Troy A. Miller, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 1, 289.