

Rev. Daniel J. Fahs
Hudson UMC
Epiphany 03A - 2026 - Mt 4 - Follow Me
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Prayer for Enlightenment

O Lord, we pray, that you speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips, and in the thoughts we form.
Speak, Lord, for your servants listen. Amen.

This is the Third Sunday of Epiphany in the church year. It is also known as the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time. The Sundays following Epiphany and the Sundays following Pentecost are sometimes called Ordinary Time Sundays.

Ordinary here is not meant to convey ordinary as it is routine or mundane...rather, ordinary here is related to *ordinal* and meant to convey numbers and counting. But this week I have been thinking about ordinary time as in routine or mundane.

Ordinary time in the church is *ordinary* because of what it is NOT.

This is NOT Advent or Christmas or Lent or Easter.

This is NOT a time where we are preparing to celebrate the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Ordinary time is because of what it is...ORDINARY!

The season of Ordinary Time makes up the most of our Sundays...either 33 or 34 weeks depending on the dates of Easter and Epiphany.

Ordinary time is the time during which we are called to follow Jesus...something like Peter and Andrew in this morning's reading from Matthew.

Ordinary time is the time when we follow Jesus...not because of the star announcing his birth...not because of the excitement of a promised trip to Jerusalem.

No, ordinary time is time is when we follow Jesus simply because we have heard his call to FOLLOW ME.

It is no accident that today, after Christmas, after Epiphany, yet before Lent and before Easter that Jesus tells us to follow him.

In the coming weeks we will hear Jesus preach in the Sermon on the Mount.

It was one of these ordinary days for Peter and Andrew...

They were just doing what they had always done...gotten up early – very early – to fish. They were putting out their nets into the sea.

Jesus walked along the beach and saw them at work. FOLLOW ME said Jesus...and they DID!

As the three of them walked further down the shoreline, Jesus saw 2-other brothers, James and John. They too were having an ordinary day; they were mending their nets after a day of fishing. Jesus called them as well...they too left immediately and followed him.

Peter, Andrew, James and John were living their days...their ordinary days. Most likely they were fishing to fulfill their contract with Rome...a contract that established quotas for the number of fish they must supply. They were working to support themselves and their families.

I have heard many sermons about these first disciples and how they “dropped their nets.” These sermons are meant to be motivators, usually with a message that goes something like drop whatever you are doing, that is “drop your net,” and follow Jesus. That is a good message...that is a GREAT message...but I am not sure that is the message of this story.

During the time of Jesus, Jewish boys and girls went through an extensive religious training. They started learning and memorizing the Torah – that is OT – at age 6. By the time they reached 10-12 years-old, they had memorized the Torah...that’s right the first 5-books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers Deuteronomy. They knew it forward and backward.

Remember the Advent story where Mary goes to visit Elizabeth after she learns that she is pregnant? Let me read you a few verses from Luke of that first meeting:

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country,
⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry,

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.
⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Lk 1:39-47)”

Mary continues with her song of praise for nearly 10-verses. We call her song the *Magnificat* because *Magnificat* is Latin for *magnify*...*Magnificat* is also the first word of May’s Song in Latin.

But here’s the point. Mary is probably 12-13-years old as this was the customary age of betrothal at the time. Mary’s song is beautiful and poetic. How many girls this age do you know that speak like this? I know very few...VERY few.

But Mary knew her OT...in fact she had memorized huge chunks of it. And she had heard and recited much of the rest of it.

Mary’s song of praise, her *Magnificat*, is a paraphrase of 1st Samuel chapter 2, where Hannah gives thanks to God for the birth of Samuel.

How did Mary know 1st Samuel 2?

She had studied it from an early age.

When Mary finds herself in a similar position as her OT ancestor Hannah, she bases her praise on Hannah's song.

Just like Mary, Peter, Andrew, James & John knew the OT. They had it memorized at least the first 5-books...maybe more.

Despite completing their religious training they were deemed not smart enough to be rabbis. They were sent away from the synagogue by their local rabbi who said, go home...go to work...be good and faithful Jews.

So Peter, Andrew, James & John do what the rabbi said.
They went to work, they provided for their family.
They knew that they were not good enough to be a rabbi, but they could be fishermen.
They were in ordinary time.

Until one day, along comes Jesus.
Jesus, rabbi Jesus, says to these fishermen FOLLOW ME.
Jesus is saying more than just to come after him...he is saying that they (fishermen!) have what it takes to be a disciple when they have been told over and over and over again that they do not!

We too have heard FOLLOW ME.
In the ordinariness of our lives, we are surprised to hear that we too can become disciples.
Too often we have been told we are not smart enough or too old or too young or too broken.
To which Jesus says FOLLOW ME.

But it is hard...hard work to hear FOLLOW ME in our ordinary days.
So what does sustain us in these ordinary times?

We understand Jesus to be God incarnate, which is a fancy way of saying that Jesus was a human being...AND God.

If I'm honest with you, sometimes I wonder about this.
Then I look at the stories about Jesus...
Would so many people have turned their lives inside-out – literally dropped their nets! – for someone who was just a really good teacher or an entertaining speaker?
Would the religious leaders and political leaders have been so determined to execute Jesus because he was a great organizer...or just another wannabe Messiah?

I don't think so.
As we follow Jesus walking throughout Galilee, we see everything about him radiating the fullness of God.
He was real.
When Jesus said the Kingdom was near, people believed because they could see it unfolding around them too...with every step they took.

Simon Peter could sense and see this...so could his brother Andrew.

When Jesus turned to them and said FOLLOW ME, they dropped their nets because they too had seen a glimpse of the Kingdom...and Jesus said that they could be part of this Kingdom.

Jesus taught with wisdom in the synagogues and proclaimed God's good news on the streets.
He touched people...he brought people to wholeness.
With every step, every move, the Kingdom unfolded in Jesus' presence.

Wherever Jesus stepped, there was the light and power of God.

Isaiah writes:

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who live in a land of deep darkness –
on them light has shined (Is 9:2).

Isaiah's prophecy was being lived into being through Jesus. People sitting in darkness looked up when Jesus came near. They could not deny the God-power shining out of him.

"That is LIGHT!" they said.

So much light that even death on the cross could not extinguish it.

That
Much
Light!

Wealthy women followed it.

Uneducated men followed it.

Lepers and the deaf...

Lonely children and abandoned elders...

Centurions & Samaritans...

Tax collectors & holy people...

Not just in Jesus' time, but in the countless generations since.

People of every nation, race and tongue have followed it

And when they did...when we do...something happens.

We step in Jesus's footsteps...we are baptized into his life, his death, and his resurrection.

We become salt and light in the world...just like Jesus.

We raise up in the face of death...just like Jesus.

Not because we are so smart and wonderful, but because God is good...because God loves us all.

What sustains us as we walk through our ordinary days?

We keep walking and listening and falling in love with God – again and again.

We keep sharing the bread and the cup.

We keep healing what is broken and proclaiming God's dream for the world.

We keep hearing and proclaiming Jesus as he says FOLLOW ME.

When we do this, fear does not stand a chance.

The refrain from Psalm 27 has echoed in my head all week...WHOM SHALL I FEAR?

Or as Paul writes in Romans

³⁸ [For] I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm 8:38-39).

Whom shall I fear?

Nothing.

No one.

We just keep putting one foot in front of the other and following Jesus.

If ever we needed the salt and light that Jesus offers, we need it now.

I hear the yearning among us in the church...among my friends...from my neighbors...even from perfect strangers.

People who want nothing to do with church are seeking a truth that cannot be spun and a light that cannot be quenched.

Jesus' call of FOLLOW ME has not changed in 2000-years.

Jesus does not wait for us to apply to him in hopes of learning from him, as many young Jewish men did in the time of Jesus.

Rabbi Jesus says to us...FOLLOW ME.

He seeks followers who do not qualify for such a relationship...do not qualify except for a willingness to lay down their nets, walk away from their boats to follow him.

He looks for those of us who will say, "Jesus says FOLLOW ME...and that is enough."

What a call!

What a mission!

What a Savior!

Thanks be to God!

Amen.