

Worship for January 22, 2023

Prelude

\*Call to Worship

Mark 1:15

The time is fulfilled

**and the kingdom of God is at hand;**

repent, and believe the good news.

\*Hymn 611 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

Prayer of Confession

**Loving God,**

**through your Son you have called us to repent of our sin,**

**to believe the good news,**

**and to celebrate the coming of your kingdom.**

**Like Christ's first apostles,**

**may we hear his call to discipleship,**

**and, forsaking old ways,**

**proclaim the gospel of new life to a broken world;**

**through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior,**

**who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,**

**one God, now and forever. Amen.**

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me as I Am

Assurance of Pardon

Whenever a people humble themselves,

turn from their evil ways,

and put their hope and trust in divine mercy,

God sees and forgives their sin,

and enfolds them in the strength and love of Christ.

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel.

Your sins are forgiven. Be at peace. Amen.

First Reading Isaiah 9:1-4

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Matthew 4:12-23

The Morning Message

Epiphany 3  
Isaiah 9:1-4  
Matthew 4:12-23  
Come and Follow

Does the name H. W. Brands mean anything to you? Me either, until yesterday.

H. W. Brands is a professor of history at the University of Texas at Austin. When I sat down with my first cup of tea yesterday morning, he was speaking before an audience at the Gerald Ford Library in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was carried by C-Span.

His subject was Watergate...appropriate for the Ford Library, right? But, he led into the presentation with a story about call, which is the theme we've been exploring in the lectionary for a few weeks. Jesus is putting his team together. He is calling his disciples, the people who will become his closest companions, the ones with whom he would share his most important objectives. The ones who would witness his agony first hand.

In 1972, Brands was 19 and a freshman in college. Today he teaches a freshman history class at 10am on Mondays and Wednesdays. Many times it is the very first college class, in the very first week of a most-important time of his students' lives. He always asks what brought them to college and asks about their hopes and expectations.

Brands says, all these many years and a head full of gray hair later, his 21<sup>st</sup> century students have some of the same concerns he and his classmates had in 1972. He voted in his first Presidential election in 1972. Many of his students will do the same while in college. While that serves as a milestone in his own life, another factor was even more important.

Because... what was on the minds of every male student, and the minds of his parents in 1972?

The draft. Selective Service. Deferment would end while Brands was in college. Conscription was still in place via the lottery.

Brands says while walking across campus in warmer weather, you could often hear shouts of relief or cries of dismay coming from the open dormitory windows as young men opened that envelope from Selective Service.

We can imagine then, the conversations with parents and girlfriends, employers, and others that would flow from this welcome or un-welcome call to leave everything behind in order to answer the call to serve in the armed forces of this nation.

Bishop Kevin Strickland says it has always struck him that the disciples whom Jesus called left their homes and families and livelihoods and followed without question. At least, we don't hear much about hesitation or attempts by those left behind to change their minds.

In none of the gospels does a family member or co-worker text the new recruit with a "Have you lost your mind?" That's what my brother texted to me when he heard we had acquired a puppy. He may have sent that message in texting shorthand though.

But, the gospels tell us that Jesus simply says, "Follow me." Apparently he didn't worry about qualifications or pedigrees, he simply called and dealt with the benefits and consequences.

Indeed, they were sometimes hard to teach, like our new puppy. Sometimes they tried to change his mind about his plans. They squabbled about who was the greatest. One of them betrayed him. And they all fell asleep when Jesus was in his deepest moments of agony at the end of his life.

Jesus didn't make it easy for them. He settled in the land near the "Galilee of the Gentiles." He chose to be with people who weren't just like him, and to live among people who were ostracized and alienated. Maybe some of the disciples resisted being thrown into this messy situation. Maybe they needed sensitivity training. But there was no time for that. They would learn by doing. OJT. On the job training. We can imagine they would suffer some failures along the way.

One of the most formative events in the life of Jesus were those forty days in the wilderness, in need of food and water, he wrestled with the devil. He emerged from the wilderness sure of who he was and what he was called to do...to proclaim that the good news of the Kingdom of God had arrived.

He came from the wilderness ready to teach in the synagogues. He came ready to lay hands on the sick, restore families, confront heresies, correct injustices, and establish God's priorities for life in the beloved community.

The Greek word "to follow" literally means "to come behind." When Jesus says, "Follow me," he is saying, "Come behind me." The command is to re-order one's life so that in everything we look to Jesus for our example.

When we were kids and played Simon Says or Follow the Leader, or Red Light-Green Light, we tried to make one another to do something silly or daring so that players are eliminated when they fail to meet a challenge.

But, that isn't the way Jesus plays the game. When he says, "Follow me," he is not interested in eliminating people. His purpose is to add people, to sweep more people into this realm of God and make them heirs of the abundance of good news.

The first class I took in seminary was New Testament Studies. I was excited but not sure I was cut out for graduate school. I was thirty-something and had been out of the classroom for a long time. I had three kids at home. One each in preschool, elementary, and middle school, with lots of needs. I wasn't at all sure I was up to the tasks this course of study would take. It was expensive and we certainly weren't wealthy.

When I took my seat that first day, I noticed that the room was filled with all ages of students. So, I relaxed a bit. And when the professor, who was also the seminary president, began the class, he didn't pass out a syllabus, at least not right way. The first thing he did was to teach us a song. Actually, two songs. The one I remember most goes like this:

You, you are my wholeness.\*

You are my completeness.

My soul, my thirsty soul, can rest in the depths of your love.

In you I find forgiveness.

In you, I find release.

It's a wonder you take all the blunders I make  
and so graciously offer me peace.

In you I find true friendship.

Yes, your love is so free of demand.

Though I must hurt you so,  
you keep letting me go  
to discover the person I am.

Like a Father, you long to protect me.

yet I know I must learn on my own.

Well, I've made my own choice to follow your voice  
guiding me back to my home.

You, you are my wholeness.

You are my completeness.

My soul, my thirsty soul, can rest in the depths of your love.

The professor spoke with a thick German accent. It was one of the things that endeared him to the seminary community. As the days unfolded, we learned more of his life story. It included

themes of oppression and sadness, of fear and brokenness, of courage in the face of danger, of the cold hard truth that where you are born and to whom you are born are a matter of life and death in many places of the world. His citizenship was very important to him, his citizenship in the U.S. and citizenship in God's realm.

He had chosen to follow Jesus. Jesus understood abundance and scarcity, hunger and thirst. Jesus knew about oppression and freedom. Jesus understood bigotry and discrimination and rejection. Jesus knew about health and wellness and being separated from family and loved ones, sometimes forever. Jesus knew that, though it may be hard to achieve, life on this earth can be a reflection of the kingdom of heaven.

And that was his purpose. To open the hearts and minds of students and church folk to the greatest story ever told that they might claim it as he had, as their life's purpose. For all the challenges he had faced, he set them aside to follow Jesus, in whom he found wholeness, freedom, and peace.

You, you are my wholeness.

You are my completeness.

My soul, my thirsty soul can rest in the depths of your love.

\*Ray Salmond and Mike Mulder

\*Affirmation of Faith Apostles' Creed p. 35

\*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

\*Hymn 606 Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

\*Hymn 175 Seek Ye First

\*Blessing

Go now, follow where Christ calls you  
and proclaim the message God gives you.

Wait in hope for God.

Avoid becoming bound up in the business of the world,

but live in readiness for the Kingdom.  
And may God be your haven and your glory;  
may Christ Jesus give you courage for his mission;  
and may the Spirit enfold you in love. Amen.

\*Postlude