

3rd Sunday OT – Mt 4:12-23

Jesus' Baptism and Temptation are over; it is time for his mission to begin. He goes not to the Holy City of Jerusalem but to Galilee, the land of Herod Antipas, the ruler who had just arrested John the Baptist. This remote province seems a strange place for the Messiah to reveal himself. Matthew saw this, as so much else in the life of Jesus, as a fulfilment of ancient prophecy. Light has come into a land of darkness.

Jesus begins his preaching as the Baptist had begun his, with a message of repentance and the nearness of the Kingdom. His activity in Galilee is summarized as teaching, proclaiming, and healing. He proclaims what God has done and teaches what the human response must be. He heals to show that the time of the Messiah has come. He is bringing the good news of salvation. As we learn what he teaches and witness what he does, we learn what he means by the Kingdom.

Jesus' first action is to call disciples. He picks them out from among the people at their business thronging the shore of the lake of Galilee. He summons two sets of brothers working in their fishing boats. They respond immediately, leaving behind them their father and their livelihood and go after him. The only reward he has suggested is that they will be fishers of men.

From now on, Jesus will never be alone in his ministry; we must always see him accompanied by disciples. His ministry is a school for discipleship. The ready obedience of the brothers encourages all subsequent disciples to do the same. This first exercise of the authority of Jesus prepares us for the Sermon on the mount when he speaks with the authority of God himself. These four disciples are the beginnings of the Church which will one day consist of "all the nations." Their career shows the way to this Church.

Sounds wonderful, sounds almost too good to be true. Let's jump ahead to our second reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians almost 25 years later! There is division in the community, which a disciple called Chloe reported to Paul. She was a gentile businesswoman. Paul had been the first to bring the gospel to Corinth, but others had come since, and *lack of Christian maturity* in the community caused factions. They were fascinated by details of the message rather than its foundation, the cross. **Apollos** may have been too *philosophical*, or too heady. Originally, he was from Alexandria and he preached in Corinth in Paul's absence, but was with Paul in Ephesus when this letter was written.

Cephas or Rock, Paul's name for Peter, may have introduced attitudes for which Paul rebuked him in Antioch. Peter was referenced to legitimize a more *law-observant form* of Christianity than what Paul found palatable, and probably led to their split. **Paul** plays down his role of baptizer; his priority was to preach Christ and him crucified, probably because Paul's first and last philosophical attempt with the Good News in Athens was almost a complete failure. He will not try that approach again.

There was a fourth group mentioned who named themselves followers of "**Christ**", which is the most mysterious of the factions. These **Ultra-spirituals** may have repudiated the mediation of church or kerygma and given their allegiance to Christ directly. The Good News or Kerygma was passed on by the apostles through other apostles that followed them when the first apostles died off. These apostle, which would soon be called Bishops, which means Overseers, is what today we call the **Apostolic Succession**.

Let's jump to today's church. Nothing's changed. This is the direction the church is heading for today when *ultra-conservatives* emphasize *the Law or the Ritual over the Heart or Pastoral* church. How did we ever make it through the centuries fighting and bickering over the Laws, the Rituals, the Sacraments, Philosophy, Theology, the Trinity, and so forth. One parishioner wrote, "There is much division in our world today – both politically and within Churches, Catholic and others. Who is right? Who is best? What does it mean to be united? Must we all agree"?

And yet Jesus simply asked us to follow him. Did he mean in dogma, maybe in theology, or in philosophy, liturgically? How about **pastorally** as our present pope? Not one piece of writing of Jesus exists today, simply because he never wrote anything down except that time when he wrote in the dirt at the feet of those who brought a woman caught in adultery. In the end, I believe Jesus wants us to follow him by how he loved, or at least how he treated others, like the woman. I sometimes believe that the cross mentioned may really be the community. Only a loving heart can commit to such a path. Yet that is the path Jesus took.

I always looks good in the beginning, but in the end only a handful of people remain committed.