

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

David Beckmann

RCL: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18;
Matthew 4:12-23 LM: Isaiah 8:23-9:3; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14;
1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17; Matthew 4:12-23 or 4:12-17

The passage from Isaiah starts with the anguish of Israel's northern tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali. Assyria had conquered them, but Isaiah promises great liberation to this oppressed people. Light will come to people who walk in darkness. God "will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations" (v. 1).

Most of Jesus' ministry was in this same area, then the province of Galilee, and Matthew sees this as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophetic promise. Galilee included many Gentiles, and Jerusalem's priestly class took a dim view of the beliefs and practices of many Galilean Jews. But Jesus began his preaching and healing among this "people who walked in darkness" (v. 2).

Jesus then calls fishermen to be his first disciples. Fishermen are poor. But Jesus chooses those who have little. God chooses them—and us— though we are unlikely saints. God often starts at the margins. People on the margins of society and people who have little are sometimes more open to the Spirit than people who have much.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that God's decisive revelation was Christ's suffering and death on the cross. Jesus became a helpless outcast. It makes no sense for us to be proud or stand-offish when we have been baptized into the way of the cross. We expect to find God Almighty amidst indignity and suffering.

A woman I know named Patricia Edwards is an example of an unlikely person God has asked to make a difference. Poor and a single mom on welfare, Patricia didn't seem like the kind of person who had much to offer. Her minimum wage and temporary jobs weren't even enough to make ends meet and put food on the table for her four growing boys. But with assistance from her state's welfare program, Patricia began to take classes at a local community college to gain the education she needed to secure long-term, stable employment. In the midst of her study, Patricia also became involved in programs to help other poor families get the education needed for gainful employment. Her work helped change laws in her state so that more adults on welfare could go to school and, with a college degree, escape poverty for good.

Patricia's story illustrates that even people whom society often deems unworthy of praise (fishermen, tax collectors, poor people, mothers who receive welfare) can be agents of God's justice and love.

Do we know people with special needs who are also especially active in God's service? Have times of trouble made us more open to God and ready to help others? How is God calling us to give up some of our comfort and status to follow Christ?

Do we know families who sometimes struggle to put food on the table? How do they experience God? If we don't know such families, are we missing out on important aspects of what God is doing in our own community?

Children's Time [LH]

Before the worship service, think of someone in your own life who has made an impact on you or others but who was not someone of power and prestige. Perhaps it is someone who struggled against odds or overcame

personal or societal barriers to change lives. Share the story with the children to encourage them to be open to how unexpectedly we may be blessed by those whose “credentials” are often undervalued.

Musical Suggestions [LH]

We'll Walk No Longer in the Darkness—BP 199

Take Up Your Cross, the Savior Said—PH 393

In Christ There Is No East or West—UMH 548

Jesus Calls Us—UMH 398