

Good Morning! Let us pray... *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ our Lord. May the words of my mouth & the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight...rock & redeemer of us all. Amen*

“The Light in Our Midst!” Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23 (Ps 27)

Last week we focused on John’s gospel and the transition from John the Baptist to Jesus ... John calling people repent -to change their hearts & lives and pointed to Jesus, the Lamb of God...the Light in our midst.

This week we get a similar story of transition yet it is different in detail. John the Baptist is removed from active ministry and Jesus begins active ministry... again The Light in our midst.

While there are several points that could be made in this text... my focus is in the invitation and the response. My focus is on the call and the action. My focus is on the word & phrase ‘repent... change your hearts and lives for the kingdom of heaven is near!’ (v17).

Repent is an interesting word for focused study. The CEB Bible Dictionary (319) lists ‘repentance’ in the context of both Testaments of the bible. In First/OT repentance is more a reference to action than to feelings (like contrition; heart-fully sorry). As a verb, it is ‘to turn or return’. Thus, in the biblical usage, it is a turning/returning to God. In other words, a radical change in a person’s way of life was involved.

There is a subtle, yet significant shift in the gospels. In the NT repentance is a complete re-orientation of one’s whole being to God’s will, including a priority in turning to God in trust and obedience. This is what we see in Jesus’ life and ministry as presented in the baptism stories. Jesus insisted on being baptized by John so that he would be the Light in our midst.

Today, we hear of Jesus’ light beaming into ordinary lives announcing ‘God is here!’ right now...in your midst. Come and follow the light and you will see new things...and you will do new things...like fish for people.

The fascination I have is in the response... IMMEDIATELY they dropped their nets and followed. Not once, but twice!

I reconnected recently with a long-time friend. She was one of the kids in the Girl Scout Troop that I served when I was in high school. She was one in the group of scouts who went to the summer camp where I worked as staff. In time, she,

herself, served on summer camp staff. She became a teacher, a scout mom. She is a life-long Methodist.

She asked me, what was it that caused the shift in your career?

The short answer is...I was drawn to Methodism because of the Open Table...where all were welcome to receive the bread & cup as signs of God love and grace. Eventually, I responded to an invitation to Walk to Emmaus. On that weekend I heard the call I had been running from...I listened to the testimony of people who renewed their relationship with Jesus. Essentially, I stopped and paid attention to the voice saying, Come, follow me, and I will teach you to fish for people.'

I'd love to say I dropped my nets and followed... but that didn't happen. But I continued to hear from God... to see the Light in the midst of my life. And when I felt there was no way...God made a way. You see, in getting to know Jesus, I began to trust God. In responding to the call to come see, come follow, I became more obedient to God's will and God's way.

What I want you to know is that God never gave up on calling me to this life and ministry as an ordained pastor. AND, God is not done with me ...God is still calling me to new things in ministry.

The truth is, God has been calling the people of Saint James, too, for 227+ years of ministry. And, God is still calling this faith community to new things so that we continue the mission of fishing for people...so that as transformed people we keep on transforming lives and the world.

Here are just a few of the new things we are called to...

- Providing an alternative worship experience that incorporates all ages in food, fellowship and a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that looks different than Sunday morning worship;
- a bible study after Fellowship time to focus on our journey from head to heart...knowing who we are as people called Methodists;
- a small group to focus on tea and artistic expression through painting, drawing and color
- in addition to loving and serving in the ways we have been.

To repent is to change... to shift from self-orientation to an orientation to something larger. We are called...every one of us, as people of faith and as a faith community. Let us discern...What is the new thing struggling to be born? What is about to sprout? What thing are we called to surrender so that there is room for something more? Friends, the Light is in our midst...

Let us join together in the prayer of response to the Word (printed in the Worship Guide...)

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

**Radiant Light, shine into our hearts that we might dwell in darkness no longer. Summoning Word, guide our footsteps in the ways of life, that our lives might reflect your Light. Draw us from the shadow of death into the dawning of your glory, through the light we find in Christ Jesus.
Amen.**

May it be so. So be it. Amen.