

**The Third Sunday after Epiphany**  
**January 22-23, 2011**  
**Matthew 4:12-25**

*“Answering the Call”*

Recently I was at a dinner party and in the course of conversation with those who were seated around the table, we started talking about how our use of the telephone has changed. The time was when if the phone rang in our home, we immediately picked it up to answer it. Telemarketers and caller ID have changed this dramatically. We're not so quick to answer the phone anymore, especially if it's a number we don't recognize. And if it's a 1-800 number, forget it! That's a dead giveaway for some telemarketer eager to sell us replacement windows or siding. Caller ID enables us to screen our calls, and avoid not only those pesky telemarketers, but anyone else that we really don't want to talk to. One person at this dinner party said, "If I don't recognize the name or number that comes up on caller ID, I don't answer the call." Of course, our cell phones automatically show us the number of the person calling. What about email or texting? Spam filters weed out a lot of unwanted junk that comes through email, some of which can be computer viruses. If you get a text from someone you don't know, then just hit the delete button. Bottom line: we can ignore the call if we want to. I'm thinking of all this in light of today's Gospel lesson where Jesus calls Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him. No cell phones or electronic devices here; no caller ID or spam filters – not so easy to screen out the caller here. It's Jesus making an in-person connection with people, calling them to leave their old life behind and embark upon a new life. I suppose that these fishermen could have just ignored Jesus instead of answering the call. But they didn't. God willing, neither will we. The message of this day is entitled "Answering the Call." May the Lord's rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus' sake.

There's a direct connection between today's Old Testament lesson (Isaiah 9:1-4) and the Gospel lesson. You probably noticed that words of the one are found in the other. Isaiah's prophecy deals with those two tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali – two of the twelve tribes of Israel – whose borders made up the northern boundary of Israel. And because they were way up north, they were the first to feel the wrath of the conquering Assyrian army that swept down from the north. The whole northern kingdom of Israel, including the capital city of Samaria, was destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. But, Isaiah reminds, **“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined”** (Isaiah 9:2). In the midst of gloom and contempt, a light shines brightly – brighter even than the torches, clay jars, and trumpets that Gideon and his little band of 300 men used to defeat the mighty Midianite army (Judges 6:35-7:25). Through Isaiah, the Lord God promises deliverance, light, and joy to his people – Zebulun, Naphtali, Galilee of the nations.

Enter Jesus, who lived in this very region – a region that was despised by the religious leaders in Jerusalem because of its strong Gentile population. Enter Jesus, **“the true light, which enlightens everyone, [who] was coming into the world”** (John 1:9). Jesus promises that whoever follows him **“will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life”** (John 8:12). What did Peter, Andrew, James, and John do when Jesus' call came to them? **“Immediately they left their nets and followed him... Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him”** (Matthew 4:20, 22). Not later on after they had time to think it over; not at some point down the road when they had all their loose ends

...tied up; not deferring and postponing until there was a better time, but *immediately*. That really makes me think: would I do that? Could I do that? Would I just leave everything behind to follow Jesus? I'd like to think I would, but I've got my doubts. He left everything for me and for you – all his heavenly glory and power. He left it all behind to answer the Father's call to come and be Light for our darkness, to give himself up to death – even death on a cross. He did this for us and for all the world, to take our sins upon himself and give us his life and light. Sounds like that's something we ought to pay attention to; that's a call worth answering.

The sad truth is that millions and millions of people around the world live in complete and utter darkness. Oh, they live under the same sun as we do. They turn on their lights just like we do. But they do not have the light of life. They do not have Jesus the Light of the world. How can they answer the call if the call never comes? My friends, that's where we come in. We have been given the tremendous privilege of hearing that good news about Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us through God's Word and the Sacraments, we have received that gift of life and salvation through faith in Jesus who came **“proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people”** (Matthew 4:23). Now, what will we do?

Last weekend, representatives from Wheat Ridge Ministries were here and presented the first check of a \$20,000 grant for *Project San Mateo*, to help us in Hispanic ministry efforts as we seek to address human care needs. The good folks at Wheat Ridge answered our call, and now it's time for us to answer Jesus' call to follow him so that he might make us fishers of men, fishers of women, fishers of youth, fishers of children. Jesus invites us to follow him. We don't always know where he may lead us. We don't know what or who we'll encounter along the way. We only know that the One who loves us and gave his very life for us is out ahead of us leading the way, and he promises to be with us always, even to the end of the world (Matthew 28:20).

My friends, Jesus is calling. Time to answer that call. Amen.