



# *The Westminster Pulpit*

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## **“You’re Not Alone” Sermon on Matthew 4:12-23**

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Before we read our text, let’s catch up with some of what has transpired in the Gospel of Matthew. We discovered in Matthew’s Christmas pageant that there was almost no character called “Joseph.” Because Joseph, who was in his right mind, thought his fiancée, Mary, was out of her mind... “found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.” Really? Well, okay. A child out of wedlock. Joseph’s plan was to dismiss her quietly. But then a dream changed the plan.

Then there was the arrival of wise men from the east who traveled “field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.” They created such a stir with their quest for the new king that all of Jerusalem was in turmoil. A turmoil that went straight to the head of King Herod, which ultimately led to the slaughter of the innocents.

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus on the run. Refugees.

I wonder if, during that time of walking miles upon miles in the wilderness, during that time of trying to make a life in Egypt, during that time when it was clear that Egypt was not home and was never going to be home, during that wilderness walk back to Nazareth to start again, I wonder as I wander if that boy, Jesus, having lived the fear, the sadness, the brokenness of it all, wondered if bad news rules the world. I wonder if it was then that he started to feel the call, believe the call, accept the call. Emmanuel. God with us.

Enough is enough! God with us! And into the waters of the Jordan and the heavens ripped open. “This is my son, my beloved in whom I am well pleased.” The Gospel of Matthew may be asking us “if we have had enough of the insanity, are we ready to join Jesus?”

Matthew 4:12-23

<sup>12</sup> Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup> so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

<sup>15</sup> “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,

on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles—

<sup>16</sup> the people who sat in darkness

have seen a great light,  
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
light has dawned.”

<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

<sup>18</sup> As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. <sup>19</sup> And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” <sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup> As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. <sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

The pregnant Mary wondered how she was going to manage any of it, all of it. But then Joseph stopped by with some good news, “Mary, I had a dream. You are not going to be alone.”

The child was born. King Herod was out for blood. But the wisest people under the light of a star, on bended knee, delivered the gift of good news, “We’re with you in this. You’re not alone.”

My hope is that when that refugee family was on the move - the Mom, the Dad, and the little boy named Jesus - there was someone there for them who had some good news. “Come! Here’s a place to stay while you get your feet on the ground. Come, you’re not alone.”

Isn’t that the joy of salvation? Knowing you’re not alone? There is some holy other looking out for you. As Ruth said to Naomi, “Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.” “The holy is what is other! And when the other says, “You’re not going to be alone!” Salvation! That is salvation!

I have to think that when Jesus walked by the sea of Galilee and saw Peter and Andrew there casting a net and searching to snag something to make a living, he decided to say, dared to say, had the courage to say, “Follow me.” I have to think that when they dropped everything and followed him, Jesus must have felt, well, what do you think?

Because it takes a little courage to send an invitation. “Will you come to my birthday party?” Courage. “Will you go to the dance with me?” Courage! “Could you help me move on Saturday? Bring your truck?” Courage.

It takes courage and hope. Hope! Hope that the answer will be, “Yes!” You have to risk it. It could very well be “No!” That’s why I have never extended the invitation to any of you to join me in riding your bicycle across Iowa. I find no need to take part in the study of rejection. Oh, you’d be nice! Some of you. Some of you would say, “No” right away. But some of you would say things like, “Interesting, where do you stay?” In a tent. How long a ride is it? Nearly 500 miles. “Well, at least it’s flat.” “Iowa isn’t flat!” There’s lots of hills, and then there are 20,000 other people you’re riding with, some of them are dressed in pig costumes, others just wearing speedos.” You’d be nice and listen to me, but the answer will come, “No.” I don’t have the courage to keep asking. I don’t have the courage to invite. I couldn’t do it.

Jesus was either courageous or crazy. Maybe he had no option. He could not and would not do his journey alone. Couldn't do it.

"Follow me and I will make you fish for people." How long a trip is that? Where are we going to be staying? At least, the road to the cross is flat, isn't it? No... They just dropped everything and followed him. They didn't know him from Adam, which reminds me of the Garden. And God created from the dust of the ground an earthling or as it is translated into Hebrew, "Adam." God looked at Adam and knew that there was going to have to be another. God knew that Adam needed someone to tell him, "You're driving too fast." Someone to say, "Can we just stop and ask for directions?" Someone to say, "Come here! Let me hold you"

When God created the world, God called the sun and the moon, "Good!" God called the trees and the seas, "Good!" God called the birds and the bees, "Good!" But when God looked at Adam, he said, "It's not good. It's not good for this one to be alone."

What is good? You're not alone!

Just ask the momma who is unpacking boxes. The stress of the move. There, looking out the kitchen window, she sees her daughter get off the bus. The door opens, "Well, how did it go?" "It was school. But Momma, I made some new friends." That's all Momma needed to hear. The good news. My little girl – she's not alone.

Oh, just ask the one who is trying to be free of addiction. She stands up in the group and says, "My name is Julie and I'm an alcoholic." "Hello, Julie. You're not alone." There's salvation.

Those cold days of Christmas, do you remember how cold it was? I have to admit I was a bit melancholy, thinking about Christmas without my mom and dad. I bundled up to take the dog for a walk in the morning darkness, and there in my coat pocket, I found a cross, a smooth cross that fit perfectly into my hand, given to me by the church. Maybe you received one, too. It's a cross that says, "You're not alone." I'm not alone.

This is why we need not fear or even think about the demise of the Church. We just need to remember what we have. And what we have is light that shines in the darkness. What we have is what the world is hungry for. What we have is, well, if you need someone to talk to, you're not alone. I'm here. "If you have a problem, let me know." "If I can help you get your kids..." "If you need a friend..." "If you need a prayer..." "If you need a breath of fresh air, a spirit..." You're not alone.

And so, whether it was courage or craziness, Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." And this Jesus, who was aware even as a child how mean the world can be, this Jesus who was a refugee, this Jesus whose friend the baptizer, John, was just sent to prison, this Jesus who knew what he was getting himself into, this Jesus, when he saw those two in the boat drop everything and jump out of that boat, not knowing him from Adam... But knowing something had to change.

This Jesus, if he was truly human, had to look away from the stunning beauty of it, the amazing wonder of it, the light of it. If he was truly human, he had to brush away the holy tears of it – that there are people on this earth who say something has to change. People who say to the almighty, "You are not alone." Emmanuel. God with us! We're not alone!