

The Third Sunday of Epiphany/January 29, 2014

Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23;

Rev. Joel M. Krueger

"The Call to Adventure"

Every year during this season of Epiphany, the season of light, we hear the story of the call of the disciples. This year we hear Matthew's version. It is the author's aim to point out, to tell his Jewish-Christian audience, right from the beginning, who and what this Jesus is. And as Matthew likes to do, more than any of the other gospel writers, he turns to scripture, *Jewish* scripture, *their* scripture which they know very well, to identify Jesus as the anointed one, the Messiah, God's beloved Son, whom they have been waiting for.

Here he quotes Isaiah: *"Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned."* (Matt. 4:15-16). He chooses a passage from Isaiah that speaks of light, light that shines in the darkness, a darkness which has long possessed a people and a land. And he says that this light, *this* light that shines for *all* nations, is Jesus!

Now the author of the gospel of John may have known and read Matthew's gospel before he wrote his, or perhaps was influenced by the same scriptures and teachings within the early church, for John says something very similar. *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of humanity. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."* (John 1:1-5).

Matthew and John both proclaim Jesus as the light that shines in the darkness of the world and it was to this light, the light that radiated in and through Jesus, that his first followers - and really all of us ever since - were drawn.

In our Wednesday House Church meeting this past week, Kate, I think it was, said something about the "charisma" that Jesus possessed. That people were drawn to him. The gospels tell us over and over again that wherever Jesus went, people crowded to see him, to hear him, to touch him and be touched by him. There was indeed something special about him.

So, when Jesus went to Capernaum, and walked along the beaches of the Sea of Galilee, and came upon these brothers, Simon and Andrew, and then James and John, something about him must have caught their attention. His words were a call to change. *"Repent! For the kingdom of God has come near!"* He was offering something, something new, something different, something exciting, that must have spoken to their guts, their hearts. And when he said to them, *"Follow me and I will make you fishers of humanity!"* To those young men, sitting in their father's boats, mending nets, how could that not have sounded like a call to *adventure!* And an *adventure* is what they got!

Joseph Campbell, mythologist, writer and lecturer, told about archetypal stories that were found in all different kinds of cultures the world around, stories that shared great similarities. One of those he referred to as the *"Monomyth"* or the *"Hero's journey."* He had 17 stages that described this archetypal hero's story and the first told about the hero's departure from his home, what Campbell termed *"The Call to Adventure."* (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1949). Some of the classic heroes who fit this archetype include Gautama Buddha, Moses and Christ as well as others from classic Greek mythology, think of Jason and the Argonauts, Odysseus, and others, as well as heroes of myth and legend throughout history.

Think of all the classic hero stories of our own time. Star Trek with Captain James T. Kirk and his crew aboard the starship *Enterprise*. The *Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, starring a small person named Bilbo Baggins and the cadre of wizards, elves, fairies, dwarf kings and warriors he teams up with to fight the evil powers that threaten the world as they know it. Of course there is *Star Wars* with Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Princess Leia, Obi-Wan Kenobi, C-3PO, R2-D2, Chewbacca and that ancient, wise little Jedi Yoda, as they battle the dark side of the Force led by Darth Vader. And they are not all about male heroes. We have 16 year-old Katniss Everdeen who strives to save herself and her community in *The Hunger Games*, and then there are the more whimsical, less masculine, stories like *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. Every culture has its hero stories, stories of adventure and so many of them include not just the hero but the band of faithful, committed, courageous followers or partners.

But my favorites are perhaps American Westerns. Many of you should remember the television series *Bonanza*. Remember how it starts? (*Sing Bonanza theme song music*). I can just picture old Ben Cartwright, the father, riding up on his horse, his elder son Adam coming up along his right side, then son Hoss on his left, followed by the youngest son, the heart-throb of women and girls and not a few guys too, Little Joe! They were a family, united and ready to take on any adventure that came their way.

Then there is the classic western movie, *The Magnificent Seven*. A rag-tag group of gunfighters hired by a small Mexican village, besought by banditos. Some of the gunfighters are old, they're has-beens, drifters, out-laws, they are the worst bunch of misfits you could put together. They don't even know each other but they come together to protect this little village and give them hope. It's not the greatest movie, but the music, the theme song really calls you. It does something to me.

(Here, I stoop down behind the pulpit, take off my robe, and put on a bandana and cowboy hat. As Gary plays the theme song I slowly rise from behind the pulpit and act like a cowboy on horseback, then return to pulpit).

Do you feel that? Doesn't that get you deep inside? Those high soaring musical themes seem to lift you, take you right to that big-sky country, and makes you feel tall, strong, ready to take on any adventure as long as you are with your partners. Because together you know you can overcome anything! There's a call there that's engaging, inspiring, it pulls you right in.

This is what I think Matthew had in mind. The call of Jesus to those first followers was a call to *adventure*. It was a call that pulled them from the inside. I wonder sometimes if we, the Church of today, are really hearing the call of Christ. It almost seems like we would rather just sit in our father's boats and mend the nets, than get up and out and risk our lives in some adventure where Jesus is calling us to go!

As we here at First Church begin this new year of 2014, will we answer God's call to adventure? Perhaps it will be a call to *new* and more *effective* ways for assisting the poor and hungry in our midst. Perhaps it will be a call to reach out and find needs and people within our community that have never known the *love and compassion* of God. Perhaps it will be a call not only to raise funds to send animals to some family or village someplace far away but to *actually go there!* Perhaps it will be a call to *really* look at these old buildings that we have and continue to upgrade them into the *21st century* and find ways to use them *more* with greater focus on the *ministry* that we as a church should be about. Perhaps it will be a call to join with other churches, *locally* but also *nationally* to organize a celebration of Peace-making in the world. Will we, the people of First Church be open to the *adventurous* call of the Spirit of God?

We are a people called! And as the song we are about to sing proclaims, "*We are called to act with justice, to love tenderly, to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.*" Those words, reference to the passage from Micah, that same passage we included in our *Welcoming Statement* that we adopted 4 years ago, are powerful and life transforming words that indeed call us to adventure. Adventure with the God who leads us with the light that shines in the darkness. A light that cannot be overcome! We are called to live in that light and we are called together! Amen.