

### **Lectionary 3 B 2018**

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

January 21, 2018

[Mark 1:14-20](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

The season between Christmas and Ash Wednesday is called Epiphany by our churches. During Epiphany, we read gospel stories of the early ministry of Jesus. In Galilee. Where he first preached and taught, where he first healed and did miracles, and where he called and gathered his first followers. One of our great epiphany hymns is called “Songs of Thankfulness and Praise.” It uses the word *manifest* ten times.

*Manifest in making whole...*

*Manifest in valiant fight...*

*Manifest in gracious will...*

*Anthems be to thee addressed.*

*God in flesh made manifest.*

Manifest means to show. To shine forth. In Epiphany, God is on display in Jesus. That’s why the wise men– the *Magi*– come to honor him. Because they see the activity of God in the baby born underneath the holy and magnificent star. *God in flesh made manifest.*

If you only understand one thing about Jesus of Nazareth, understand this. He came from Galilee, a remote, relatively poor district. And there people thought he was great. Some kind of messiah. Based on the things he did and the things he said. And then he left Galilee, and went to Jerusalem. Which was the center of power– religious power, political power, cultural power. And he was executed by the Roman Empire as a traitor. Everyone has to agree to those basic facts. Even a complete skeptic, a total anti-Christian atheist, has to agree to those basic facts. Whoever he was, whatever else his followers or the Church might have made up, whatever else a skeptic might scoff at it’s certainly true that there was popular enthusiasm for him in Galilee. And death for him in Jerusalem. And Epiphany is about that initial enthusiasm in Galilee. Because people saw, or thought they saw, the activity of God in this man. *God in flesh made manifest.*

So one of the emblematic events of the season of Epiphany, the season of Jesus in Galilee, is the calling of his disciples. And today’s story, the story of Jesus recruiting four fishermen. At the very beginning. And this story captivates Christians, and captivates the church. For many, many reasons.

For example, there is the lowliness of the men. Simon– the very first named follower of Jesus– who will become Peter, who will have a storied career and will die as a leader and martyr far, far,

far from Galilee, in the capital city of the empire, Rome. The Protestant leader John Calvin marveled that these first four— Peter and Andrew, James and John— were men who worked with their hands. “Mechanics” is what John Calvin called them. They were fishermen, but he called them “mechanics.” Working guys. This is part of how God works, going back to Moses or even further. He uses unexpected people. Can we see the activity of God here? Is this Jesus who excited so many people in Galilee— do *I* see the activity of God in him now? Even a common person like me. A mechanic, a hotel housekeeper, a single Dad. So that’s one thing that captivates the church, and perhaps captivated the people of Galilee. That all of a sudden ordinary, run-of-the-mill people were being caught up in the world-transforming activity of God because of Jesus.

An additional captivating aspect of the story is the rapidity with which these four men drop what they are doing and follow Jesus. We don’t know why. We just get told that they do. And that captures the church’s imagination. Were these men just really *decisive*? They saw a good thing, and they knew it immediately, and they went with it? There are hundreds of thousands of sermons in the history of the church telling us that we should be decisive. That we should hear the message of Jesus in today’s gospel— *the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news*— And do just what the four did. Not hesitate, not question, not look back. But obey and follow. Hundreds of thousands of sermons have found that to be the lesson here. Over the centuries.

But the suddenness with which they follow may also be due to some intrinsic quality of Jesus. What makes him so compelling? Did he just project authority and confidence? That’s the *charismatic* Jesus. The Jesus whom some Christians imagine was just so amazing that people believed him and followed him just intrinsically because of his charismatic personality.

A Spanish priest imagined it this way:

*Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes.  
Kindly smiling.  
You’ve called out my name.  
On the sand I have abandoned my small boat.  
Now with you, I will seek other seas.*

What Father Cesáreo Gabaráin imagined with his words was that Jesus knows us intimately.

He must have captivated Peter and Andrew by looking deeply into their eyes. The story doesn’t say that, but the magic of the story is that it forces us to figure out WHY Peter and Andrew, James and John, would so quickly follow. He looked in their eyes. He smiled. He called them by name. And that was it. They were known, and they felt it. And they followed. The activity of God in this man Jesus. *God in flesh made manifest.*

Father Cesáreo Gabaráin died of cancer when he was 55. He must have been in his late thirties when he wrote the hymn *You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore. Tu has venido a la orilla.* It was the seventies. For young Catholic priests like Father Cesáreo it was the exciting time after the second Vatican Council. When the windows and doors of the church were opened and a

fresh wind stirred up the Catholic church like it hadn't been stirred up in centuries. The activity of God.

So he wrote this hymn in Spain, in the seventies. It made its way to Puerto Rico. (That island nation that we have heard so much about lately, and whose people, our fellow American citizens, should remain in our prayers.) And wouldn't you know it? There was a Lutheran pastor in Puerto Rico. They're like pigeons, aren't they. They're everywhere, making a mess of things. Ubiquitous Lutheran pastors. He and his wife picked up the hymn there, using it in a Lutheran parish in Puerto Rico. And then translated it, and brought it to St. Olaf college. Because pigeons migrate to St. Olaf. And in that famous Lutheran college, with its illustrious music program— not as good as the program at Gustavus Adolphus, our music director Eric Holtan will insist— but from there, in the late eighties it spread among Lutherans like us.

The song is successful for many reasons. It's a huge hit, not only in the Spanish-speaking world, but in 80 languages. But it invites us into to imagine ourselves in that moment. That time period in Galilee. That season of Epiphany. When somehow we see the activity of God at work. In Jesus, through Jesus, with Jesus. And we, though humble and ordinary, like Peter and Andrew, James and John, can leave behind what needs leaving behind and go forward into the adventure of being what Jesus called *fishers of people*. Or as the song says, to leave the small boat and to seek other seas.

God in flesh made manifest. Somehow in those early days in Galilee, people grew enthusiastic about Jesus. They knew, somehow, that whatever he was up to, it was indeed good news for their lives, and that in Jesus— *God in flesh made manifest*— their own lives could be transformed and renewed. May this captivating story from the early days in Galilee help us also to know the presence of God for real in our own lives in Jesus, through Jesus, with Jesus. Amen.