



Sunday Sermon  
January 25, 2026  
The Rt. Rev. James R. Mathes

### Epiphany III

Matthew 4: 12-23

*Come Holy Spirit: Touch our minds and think with them, touch our lips and speak with them and touch our hearts and set them on fire with love for you. **AMEN.***

This has been a hard sermon for me to write - hard because I find myself angry, in despair, and heartbroken about my native land. I am a student of the history of the United States. I can bore you with stories and trivia, of presidents especially. I know when they have shown their deepest flaws and when they have risen to greatness. What we are reading about and seeing in the United States is not normal. It goes beyond Greenland and Venezuela. It can't be explained away by billionaire greed. And it is not encapsulated in the senseless deaths of Renee Good and Alex Jeffery and brutality of ICE thugs.

It was not long ago that great strides were being made in combating racism, sexism and homophobia in the United States. I watched Obama take the oath of office, and I thought Dr. King was right, the arc of history does bend towards justice. But now I grieve because I fear that like a spent rocket that arc of history is falling back to a new dark time.

Coming here only a couple of months ago, I didn't realize how much Canada was intertwined with the United States and how much this catastrophe is affecting you. I have felt your enquiries as offers of care and concern for your neighbors - thank you. But I also know that you wonder what all of this means for you. And so, at the risk of sounding like a pessimist, I must tell you that I am not sure the United States is going to right itself. Like the Prime Minister, I don't think nostalgia is a strategy.

Indeed, I have come to realize that our glossy American story of ourselves as exceptional, masked the ugly truth that a significant portion of our population is unrepentantly racist, sexist, homophobic and deeply afraid of the one that is different from them—especially if those who are different succeed.

Led by a man with a keen sense of how to marshal resentment, fear, and anger, with oligarchic wealth as wind in his sails and social media that would make Goebbels envious, a new hegemon is now in place. We have seen this movie before. This is evil.

As people of faith, we promise in our baptism to resist evil - our own evil as we sin, as well as the evil in the world. We have reached a moment in history when as people of faith we must act. It may seem at first glance that there is not much we can do. But there is plenty we can do. And the hint to our path can be found in today's gospel.

Jesus began his ministry in a world not too different from our own. Dictators, tyrants, and narcissistic leaders have been wreaking havoc for millennia. What is different in that time, indeed for all time including in this time and place, was and is Jesus. We must begin by remembering who he is. This God among us - the Word made flesh. He comes to announce a new way of life, which is both at the beginning in Eden and our destination, a heavenly banquet of which our Eucharist is a mere foretaste.

This Jesus announces a new kingdom of heaven. And it begins not with a battle but inner work, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near."

To repent is always an invitation to self-examination. And yet, it is not about wallowing in sin and self-recrimination. Rather it is looking at how we can joyfully change and align our lives with God's deep goodness and radical love. Jesus is calling us to be revolutionaries, but we are first to overthrow our former lives. Repentance is about being made new. This new life is not simply to be more like the principalities and powers we oppose and beat them at their own game. No, our call is different. Our sign is the cross, not the sword. Our heart is filled with love, not venom. Rather than violence against violence, hate against hate, Jesus shows us a different path. He tells stories like the one of the forgiving father of a prodigal son or the good Samaritan or a woman at a well who is offered living water. Through these stories, we can see how we are to live and be as citizens of that kingdom of heaven. This is our calling.

Just as Jesus came to Peter and Andrew along sea, he comes to us along our sea with an invitation to be different. Follow me, he says: "Follow me and I will teach you to fish for people." And permit me to take liberties: The autocrats of the world could say the same thing. Follow me and I will teach you to be fishers of people. But because their hearts are hardened, they think of killing, cleaning, and consuming those people. That is their storyline.

Jesus is more of a catch and release kind of guy. He invites us to join him in a joyful and playful vocation of capturing the hearts of those whom we encounter with the deep love God for all humanity and for all of creation. And captured by such love, we don't try to hold on or control others. Perish the thought! Rather, our hearts, hands, our very table is open in a posture of freedom as servants of a giving love.

Now this may seem so little in the face of so much evil. You might say, we are here on the Sunshine coast not Minneapolis. You might even protest that like Abraham and Sarah some of us are a bit advanced in years. All true. But notice that Jesus never goes out of his way to call a disciple, heal the blind or feed the multitude. He has plenty to work with right in front of him; so do we. Be loved; be love.

There is mystical Judaism that captures how we might lean into and love into this vocation once given to Andrew and Peter and now to us. The teaching is known as tikkun olam, "the mending of the world." Jesus calls us to participate in that mending. The thread of that mending is hesed, loving kindness.<sup>(1)</sup> We grow in hesed as we pray our sacred conversation with God, as we welcome the stranger, care for those on the margin, love Mother Earth. Mending the world leads us to risk letting the pain of the world make its way into our heart. And as we weep, we resolve to mend the world. With each act of kindness and mercy at a time, we stitch what is torn with love that heals and mends.

A story imagines the moment when Jesus returned to heaven, greeted by the archangel Gabriel. Even in heaven Jesus bore the marks of the crucifixion. Gabriel said, "Master, you

must have suffered horribly! Do people know and appreciate how you love them and what you did for them?" Jesus replied, "Oh, no; not yet. Right now, only a few people in Palestine know." Gabriel was perplexed. "Then what have you done to let everyone know about your love?" Jesus answered, "I have asked Peter, Andrew, Mary, Martha, James and John, Chloe and Dorcas, and a few others to tell about me. Those who are told will tell others, and yet more still, until the last person in the farthest corner of the earth will have heard the story of how my eternal love can change them."

Gabriel frowned and looked rather skeptical. "Yes, but what if Peter and the others grow weary? What if the people who have come after them forget? Surely you have made other plans?" Said Jesus, "Gabriel, I haven't many any other plans. No, they will be my body now."  
(2)

Beloved, Jesus has called us to be that mystical body in this time and place. We are called to mend the world, one simple act of loving kindness at a time. And the kingdom of heaven comes just a bit nearer. As Craig Loya, the Bishop of Minnesota posted last night, "The only way hatred can be effectively resisted is doubling down on love. The only way darkness can be defeated is by light. The only way the forces of death can be overcome is by embracing, every moment of every day, God's unstoppable life." Yes!

And so let us follow Jesus. With him, in him, and through him, love is unstoppable. For nothing can trump the love of God in Jesus Christ that is within us. Love, be love, be light, be kind. Mend the world.

- (1) Mirabai Starr, *Wild Mercy: Living the Fierce and Tender Wisdom of the Women Mystics* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2019), pp. 138-39.
- (2) Adapted from a version for which source is lost.