

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Fishing with Jesus

Matthew 4:12-23

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Analysis by Brad Haugen

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

*15"Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the
Gentiles –*

*16the 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."*

17From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

18As 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 fishermen. 19And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21As 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. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

23Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues

and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.



Lorenzo Veneziano, Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew. 1370 (Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Lorenzo Veneziano, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

Jesus calls each one of us personally to follow him. We, who once thought we'd been forsaken at the foot of the cross, are made alive. Christ, crucified and risen, raises us to a new life—one sustained by the nearness of his kingdom and the calling to follow him.

DIAGNOSIS: Unable to Change

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Backwaters

“Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee” (Matt. 4:12). Galilee was a backwater region; it was hardly considered a center of culture, power, and influence. Herod Antipas, who had John the baptizer arrested, did not live in as backwater a region as the rest of the people of Galilee. Herod Antipas was granted limited sovereignty by the Roman Empire and used his power to arrest John—because he could. And because Herod’s family didn’t like John throwing shade at them by drawing attention to Herod’s own unlawful marriage to his brother’s wife.

Although we ourselves long to have the power, control, and influence that Rome exercised (or even Herod, to a lesser extent), we instead find ourselves in the “backwaters” with Jesus: in Galilee. Or wherever we lead our lives—away from the places of power, control, and influence we wish we had. ...

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Withdrawn

“Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali...” (Matt. 4:12-13). Jesus withdrew to Galilee. John was arrested, and Jesus withdrew.

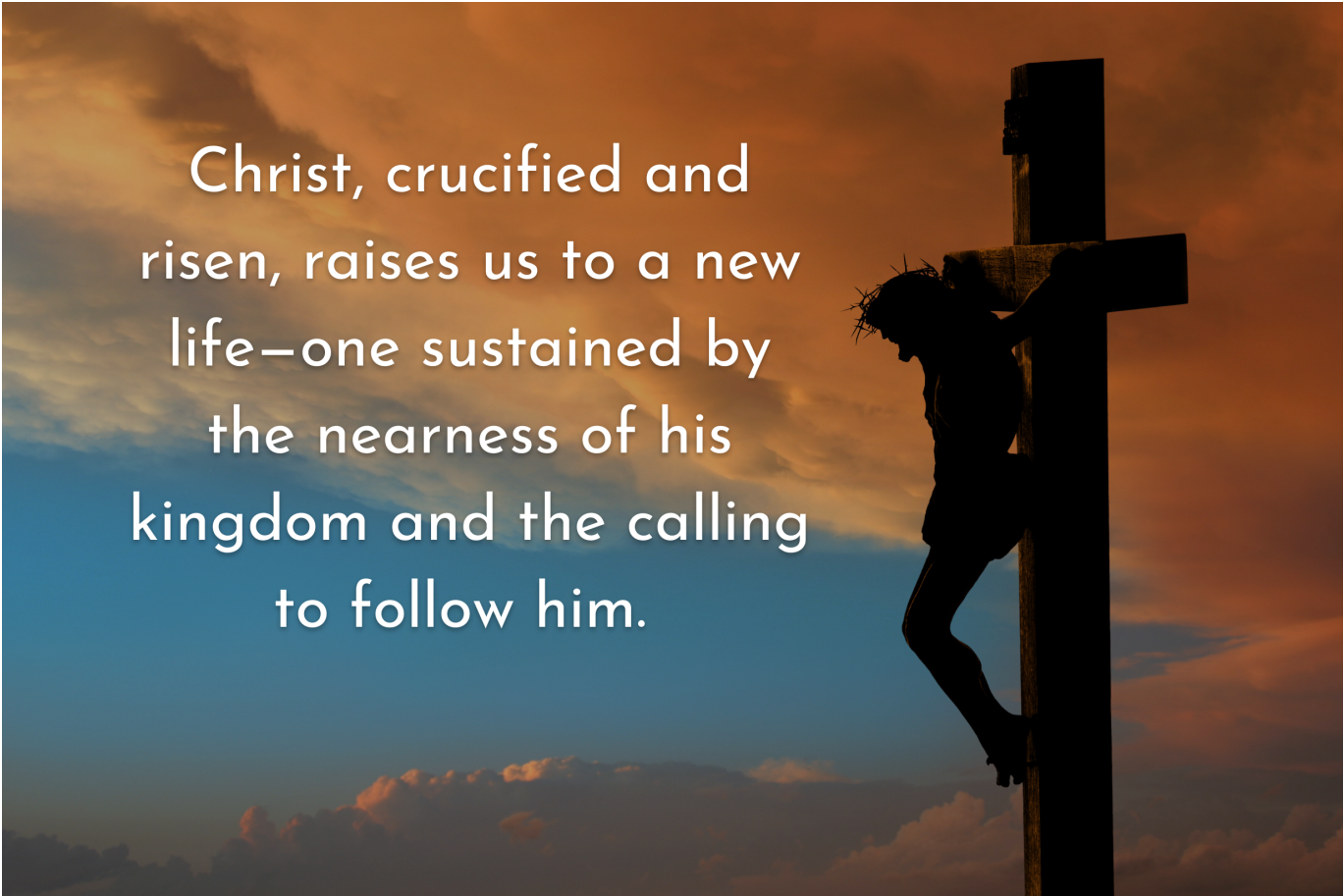
When we confront our own human limitations, we may withdraw as well. When we are unable to right a wrong or heal the pain that we have caused ourselves and other people, we withdraw. The home we make for ourselves becomes an escape from the problem or problems we would rather not face. We try to accept what we cannot change about ourselves—about other people, about the world—and change what we can, seeking the wisdom to know the

difference. But in doing so, we only end up more and more overwhelmed by the painful/hurtful circumstances, problems, and situations that we are unable to change. We're in the backwaters, after all.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Left to Die

John's arrest and eventual beheading foreshadows Jesus' own arrest and death by crucifixion. Prior to his crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem, Jesus is arrested. Then upon the cross—worse than withdrawing to Galilee—Jesus is left to die, forsaken by God.

Jesus doesn't give us the power, control, and influence we ultimately want, so that we can change ourselves, others, and the world. Instead, while on the cross, he abandons us to those unfulfilled dreams and desires. We are left to die, with much that we hoped was possible unfulfilled. Jesus not only withdraws to the backwaters of Galilee; he leaves our misdirected hopes forsaken at the foot of the cross.



Christ, crucified and
risen, raises us to a new
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to follow him.

The Calling (from Canva)

PROGNOSIS: Changing with Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Made to Live

Jesus, however, was exactly where God intended him to be, in the backwaters of Galilee. The fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy had come (see Isa. 9:1-4 and Matt. 4:15-16). "...the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light had dawned" (Matt. 4:16). Jesus' death by crucifixion, it turns out, is followed by resurrection. The kingdom of heaven that Jesus announces, even in the backwaters of Galilee, has come near.

In the resurrected Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is near and reaches us too—whoever we are, wherever we are, however far

away. Not only that, but Jesus calls each one of us personally to follow him. We, who once thought we'd been forsaken at the foot of the cross, are made alive. Christ, crucified and risen, raises us to a new life—one sustained by the nearness of his kingdom and the calling to follow him.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Called and Caught

Jesus “said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him” (Matt. 4:19-20). Rather than withdraw from the call to follow Jesus, Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John immediately left their nets, their boat, and even their father (in the case of James and John) to follow him. Jesus’ promise (“fishing for people”) and call (“follow me”) caught hold of these fishermen. They were transformed by a relationship with Christ who had caught them and wouldn’t let them go.

Through his promise to repurpose our lives, and his call to follow, Jesus likewise catches hold of us. When we want to withdraw from the circumstances we can’t change, or the problems we can’t solve, we discover—to our surprise and delight—that Jesus has ahold of us. We trust that he is with us in the backwaters. (Here in these backwaters, where we often doubt that we matter or can make a difference, is where Jesus caught hold of us in the first place, after all.)

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Open Waters

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people” (Matt. 4:23). Jesus has made a way for his backwater followers to join him on the open waters. Because he has promised to call and lead his followers, from the backwaters to the open waters, followers now

encounter every sort of person whom Jesus wants aboard his boat.

Because Jesus calls, leads, and promises to be with us, we begin to realize that our backwaters are really part of our Lord's open waters. We look outward toward the people whom Jesus is calling to himself; and rather than despair in our own inabilities, we find hope in what Christ will do for the sake of others and find courage to take part.