

Matthew 4:12-23

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

'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan,

Galilee of the Gentiles—
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.'
From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

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 lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'

Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 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. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

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.

"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 lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me.'" Then "Jesus saw James, son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. And they followed him."

Some years ago, as part of a Lilly Endowment sponsored grant on vocation, the research team discovered that while most of the graduates of seminaries identified "vocation" and "calling" as important concepts that were at the center of their preaching and teaching, very few of their parishioners actually felt called. Very few

of them, that is, believed that what they did with most of their time mattered to God and the church or made a particular difference in the world.

But we are all called to be of service to bring the values of Jesus into our daily lives. It is not just for clergy.

A characteristic of all the disciples was a tremendous love for Jesus. He was everything to them. Like the disciples, the more we love Jesus, the more we sense his call.

A central theme in following Jesus is to strive to live a grace-filled life. God's grace can be summed up in Psalm 139:7-8:

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; If I make my bed in the depths, you are there”.

This is a message we should write on our bathroom mirror so it's the first thing we see in the morning and the last thing we see at night. “Where can I go from your Spirit...” This is the essence of our spiritual journey, to know deep in our souls that we are accepted by God. But this is difficult for us to keep in the forefront of our lives. At some point we all hear the little voice in our ear that whispers lies of condemnation, rather than the affirmation that we are all beloved sons and daughters of God.

Author and Pastor Richard Rohr states it well. He says: “We're so convinced that we're unworthy, that we're disconnected from God. This anesthetizes us to the Good News of Jesus. God has given us union with the divine. You cannot create your union with God; it is already given to you. As the psalmist proclaimed: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.”

We're all united to God, but we often deny it and doubt it. It seems just too good to be true. But that's why it is called good news.

The ego wants to be self-made, not other-made, which is the main problem we have with grace. We may say that God's grace is for all, but then try to create certain cutoff points.

We project onto God our way of loving, which is determined by the worthiness of a given person: she's pretty; he's nice. But this has little to do with love. It feels like love, and may be the first steps toward it.

It is difficult for us to imagine a love that's not created by the worthiness of the object. And so we try to scrub ourselves up, making ourselves as attractive and worthy as possible.

But you must remember that God does not love you because you are good. God loves you because God is good. There's nothing more to say, and it'll take the rest of your life to internalize this.

Our egos don't know what to make of this. It feels like a loss of power because, as Rohr says: "Darn it, there is nothing I can do now to pull myself up and make myself a step ahead of the rest of you!"

The ego wants to prove that it earns grace—the only problem is, as Paul says in Ephesians 2: 4: "God, who is rich in mercy, out of great love for us, even when we were sinners, made us alive together with Christ."

Mary, the mother of Jesus is our example. She incarnated Jesus by saying to the angel: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be done to me as you have said." Like Mary, all we can do is allow and God does the rest through us.

Grace works in our lives like a magnetic field. When you find yourself desiring to spend time with God in prayer, it's because somehow God's magnetic field has caught hold of you. It's like a homing device, this Spirit within us, who keeps sending out the signal to keep redirecting us toward union.

When you feel the desire to love somebody, or forgive somebody, that too is grace working like a homing device —calling you home to that place of communion and unity.

God's grace always pushes us toward unity. Our selfish tendencies push us toward separation. Grace pushes us toward a unity. Our sinfulness pushes us toward separation. And God's grace pushes us toward unity. These are the two primary forces we find in both our personal lives and in our society.

To walk in the grace of God is to strive to find unity rather than actions that lead toward separation. An old Cherokee chief was teaching his grandson about life:

"A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. "One is evil - he is anger, envy, selfishness, greed, arrogance and lies. "The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, unity, kindness and empathy. "This same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old chief simply replied, "The one you feed."

So like the disciples, we are called to follow Jesus... When we realize that we are loved by God and surrounded by his grace, we can't help but share this good news with others.