

January 22, 2023
Sunday Sermon - Tammy Shackelford
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Good morning!

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

This poem titled "The Work of Christmas" by author, philosopher,

theologian and civil rights leader Howard Thurman calls us to ministry. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus but do we ever stop to think what this really means for our lives? Behold, a baby is born and the Kingdom of Heaven has come just a little bit closer. It's the season of Epiphany, the season where God is manifest in his son and its time for The Work of Christmas to begin.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus begins the work of Christmas. Jesus hears that John is in prison and he knows that now its really time to get to work.

As foretold by the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus leaves his hometown of Nazareth and heads for Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. This is a savvy move for someone called to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near as Nazareth is a small farming village on a ridge above a fertile valley tucked away in the hills while Capernaum is much more accessible, down the hillside and along the edge of the Sea of Galilee. As a port city, it would have had many more people coming and going to and from the city. Jesus' message would reach many more people here.

The journey to Capernaum was about 43 miles long. It probably took Jesus 3-4 days to make the trip. As he walked, I wonder if he thought about how he would start his ministry or recruit people to help him spread the message that he was born to bring the world?

Apparently he had time to think about what he was going to say because we read that from the time Jesus entered the city he began preaching,,
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Imagine hearing a stranger proclaim, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*” I don’t know about you, but I would probably lower my head and walk a little more quickly around this stranger. And yet -

“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 sea—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.”

IMMEDIATELY they left their nets! There is not a lot that I would agree to do IMMEDIATELY - especially follow a stranger to do something that would change my life as radically as Jesus is suggesting to these brothers.

But this happens not once, but TWICE -

“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.”

This time the brothers IMMEDIATELY *left their father* to follow the stranger.

As you know, different translations of scripture often differ slightly - so I read other versions looking for words other than IMMEDIATELY. While the words were different, the message is clear. The brothers did not hesitate to follow Jesus.

Right away

Straightaway

Without question

At once

While I wish that I could say that I have always followed Jesus without question, right away, straightaway, immediately, I know that I would not be telling the truth. Sometimes, when I think I know exactly what it is that God wants me to do, I linger because it seems too hard, demands too much or just takes me out of my comfort zone. Sometimes I think that God couldn't possibly be calling me because there are other people much more gifted at the task at hand than I am.

This can be especially true in church ministry. Like, I know Jesus is calling me to welcome the new person at church, yet I linger thinking that surely someone who has been at St. David's for a lot longer than I have will welcome them.

"Follow me," Jesus calls. Yet I linger.

Often it is easier to wish that something was different, or want something to happen, but assume that someone else is better equipped to do it than you. Perhaps your longing for something different, new or better is Jesus calling to you. "Follow me,"

I have had the opportunity to explore the topic of spiritual gifts as part of my lay ministry and I LOVE helping people discern their gifts. We all have them and they are given to us to serve others. Some have the gift of hospitality, while others have gifts like leadership, healing, giving, teaching, mercy and Jesus' gift, evangelism. With our rector away, it will be more important than

ever for us all to use our gifts to ensure that the ministry of St. David's, the church on the corner wherever you are, thrives in her absence.

Last week Elizabeth ended her sermon with the questions, "What are you looking for when you come to church? And if you can't find it here, instead of looking for it somewhere else, how can you help it show up?"

"Follow me," Jesus calls, "It's time for the work of Christmas to begin."

Together, let's answer this call IMMEDIATELY, RIGHT AWAY, WITHOUT QUESTION. Where are you being called to ministry at St. David's? Finding the lost, healing the broken, feeding the hungry, bringing peace to the nations, or making music in the heart?

Next time someone calls you to serve on a committee, or even run for vestry, remember Jesus' call, "Follow me."

It's time for the work of Christmas to begin. Amen.