

Matthew 4:17-22

Third Sunday After the Epiphany (Series A)

Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 9:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-25

Don't Delay - Act Now

January 25, 2026

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." While walking 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 fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

When you read through the Gospel of Mark, there is a word that will catch your attention very quickly, and that is the word, "immediately". In the first chapter alone, we see Mark use that word 9 times! He will use it a total of 41 times in his Gospel, although it is only used 10 times in the rest of the New Testament, including in our text today. Perhaps Mark truly understood the urgency in the mission and ministry of Jesus. To a world lost in sin, there is a need for the immediacy of the Gospel message. We know that many would doubt this, but people are dying in sin. They need the saving grace and forgiveness that only Jesus can bring. There is no time to waste.

In so many ways, we are contradictory people. We are living in an age where people want everything in an instant. We have instant oatmeal, instant mashed potatoes, and, of course, instant coffee. We don't mail letters too often anymore, because that is what is now referred to as "snail mail". Instead we can text on our computers and cell phones, so that we can let our cousin in Winnipeg know right away about the great deal we got on kitty litter at the supermarket. Our televisions have an instant-on feature, and you can get instant cash at a bank machine—provided, of course, that you have cash in your account. And if you don't have cash, don't worry. Some companies will offer you instant credit.

Yet we are also people who tend to procrastinate. In spite of that old adage which says: "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today," we tend to live by the philosophy: "Don't do today what you can put off until tomorrow." All of us have been guilty of that at times, haven't we? In those things that we deem to be of lesser importance or meaning in our lives, we are often slow to act or to react to whatever the situation may be. Sometimes, even in the most critical of circumstances, we react as if we have all the time in the world.

Advertisers recognize this tendency of human nature. That is why ads will often scream at us, "Don't delay - act now!" Advertisers like to remind us that special offers are for a limited time only, and if you don't want to miss out, you better hurry and act right away. Or, to put it in more colloquial terms, "You snooze, you lose."

There are many things that we can put off and which are of very little consequence in our lives. But there is one thing of which the Bible tells us "Don't delay—act now!" The one thing that cannot be put off, the one thing that cannot wait is our salvation. As Jesus reminds us in our text today, *the kingdom of heaven is at hand* and we definitely don't want to miss out on all the blessings that the coming of His kingdom brings to us. But Jesus would also have us remember how important it is that we act now, without delay, for the sake of those who do not yet know His forgiving love. As we respond to His gracious invitation, and follow Him in the faith the Spirit works in our hearts through the Word and Sacraments, we want to act now, to call others to share in His grace and truth.

It's hard to miss the urgency in our Saviour's words. He is right up front with what we need to hear: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" There is an urgency to those words, which call for a response right now. There is no time to delay, for we don't know exactly when that day we know as judgement day will come. Nor do we know when our last hour shall come. We dare not ignore the fact that what lies ahead truly is a matter of life and death—eternal life and eternal death. That is why we cannot afford to delay. We must act now!

Most of us are here today because we already understand the need for our salvation. We come to God's house with

repentant hearts. We come to hear that good news of God's grace and mercy for us in Jesus Christ. We come to be assured of the love of God which has taken away our sin through His Son's death on the cross; that love which gives us life as His people. It is that good news of God's love in Christ that helps us get through the cares and worries of life. It is that good news that gives us the peace that passes understanding. We have heard the Lord's call and we have responded to His Word in the faith the Spirit works through the Word and Sacraments.

In our text, we see an immediate response of faith in Peter and Andrew, and in James and John. When Jesus said: **"Follow me"** He was not simply inviting them to be His students. He was calling them to enjoy the new life He gives to all who believe in Him. He was inviting them to experience now the full blessings of the forgiveness that He will bring to them through His death on the cross. He was inviting them to the freedom and hope that are ours in His resurrection. But He was also inviting them to work with Him in proclaiming God's good news of salvation through the Messiah. Jesus said to Simon Peter and to Andrew, **"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."**, and we are told: **Immediately they left their nets and followed him.** Then, when Jesus sees James and John, He calls them, and again we see that response: **Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.** There was no delay or hesitation in any of these men. Peter and Andrew leave their careers behind. James and John leave a good family business—and their father, too. Why would they do this? Wouldn't they want to take some time to at least think it over? Wouldn't they like to check out a few things, like what it meant to follow Jesus? Shouldn't they at least take the time to put their affairs in order? What can be so important that they act so impetuously?

We know from the gospel of John that these men had already heard Jesus' words of life and peace. They had heard Jesus speak of sin and grace, of forgiveness and salvation. They had spent time with Him and their hearts were drawn to Him. But we cannot be in the presence of the holy, sinless son of God without seeing the ugliness of our sin—and these men saw their sinfulness, too. Thankfully, in Christ, they found forgiveness greater than their sin. They found hope in His message of the kingdom. Now, when Jesus calls them, they do what all God's faithful people have done from generation to generation. They don't delay. They act **now**.

This immediate response of Peter, Andrew, James and John comes not *for the sake of* their salvation, but *because of* their salvation. Isaiah prophesied of the day when **The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.** (Isaiah 9:2 - ESV) Now, as that light shines so brightly for them in Christ, they find the hope of the ages, the One who could take away their empty future and turn it into life and joy. They found the One who could forgive sins. And they saw the urgency, the need for others to hear and believe this good news, too.

We need to see the urgency of the gospel of Jesus Christ for a sinful world, because the world itself does not see how important it is to act now. When God sent Jonah to Ninevah to preach: **"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"** (Jonah 3:4 - ESV), what would have happened if those people had waited, thinking, as so many people do today, 'Oh, we don't have to worry. Things are going on just as they always have. Peter tells us: **"scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."**" (2 Peter 3:3-4, ESV) So many decide they will delay; that they will wait to see what happens and when things start to go wrong they will deal with it then. Sadly, the penalty for procrastination is extremely high. There are many in our day and age who are not concerned about their sin and its consequences. Either they are so indifferent to God that they just don't care or they are sure that they will always have the time to set things right with God when they really need to. God is never taken by surprise, but there have been more than a few people over the centuries who thought they had all the time in the world, only to be surprised to find themselves in hell.

That is exactly why Jesus says to us: don't delay—act now! There is an urgency in the Lord's message: **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** For each and every one of us it is important that we do not delay in our response to the Lord's call. But we also need to remember that, day by day, people are dying without the assurance of forgiveness and life in Christ. As the Lord called those first disciples, so He calls us, too! Do you know the song, "This Little Gospel Light of Mine"? We teach it to children in Sunday School and VBS. How wonderful that we know: "This little Gospel light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!" We need to let that light shine for the world NOW! There is nothing more important, nothing more urgent than the work of the gospel. We need to believe and hold on to that good news

of the Saviour who died to take away our sins and who rose again to give us life. But God grant that we never lose sight of the urgency of sharing His wonderful good news with others. There is no time to delay. As one hymn writer says: *“Let none hear you idly saying, ‘there is nothing I can do’, while the multitudes are dying and the Master calls for you.”* (LSB 826, st. 4) The Saviour calls us to follow Him, and He leads us to eternal life. May He also help us to lead others to the glory of that life we have in Him. Amen.