

January 23, 2011  
Epiphany 3A

Matt 4:12-23

*The people sitting in darkness; The world sits in darkness*

As I was driving this week, I heard a story on the radio about  
a condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder ... or SAD  
it's condition where cold, being indoors and a lack of daylight  
combine to throw some people into an incredible depression.  
It's especially common in far north,  
where the days are extremely short this time of year.  
So, the story was talking about how cold weather, short days,  
the worry about paying off Christmas bills -- all of this combine  
to make these couple of weeks in January  
the unhappiest time of the year.

And so, we choose this time of year to hold our annual congregational meeting.

Anyway. It's true that these cold, short days can affect us  
and the people around us and our relationships with each other.

So when we hear the Word from scripture,  
that talks about the world sitting in darkness,  
we can imagine how wholly oppressive that darkness is.

I wonder by what other names we call darkness —  
War, Hunger and Poverty, Disease and Disasters and Death,  
Racism, Hatred and all types of Fear,  
Greed and all kinds of unchecked desires ...  
What else rolls over us and our neighbors like a dark cloud  
until we sit, isolated and alone in dark?

These things aren't new in the world.

In fact, sometimes we don't even notice that it's dark.

"It's just the way of the world."

"It's just people being people."

"It's just business."

Where profit-related values and bottom-line thinking  
sometimes eclipse

human dignity and virtues like loyalty,  
dedication and hard work.

It's just business ... nothing personal.

Now, go and find another place to work.

or

"It's just politics."

Just a little name-calling, finger-pointing and fear-mongering  
that's the way the game is played;  
what matters at the end of the day is that your team wins, right?  
— and people suffer ... in the darkness.

It's just politics ... nothing personal."

"It's just this ... or that ... and it's never anything personal,  
but the light goes out of real people's lives.

It's nothing personal. But we have to turn out the lights.

Where are our dark places?

Where are the dark places we travel through each day  
and we don't even notice anymore?

### *See a great light*

God made a promise to this world.

He spoke that promise through the prophets —

"He promised that the people sitting in darkness would see a great light"

It's God's first word of creation — "Let there be light!" And there was light

The darkness was banished.

The darkness can't exist in the light.

And so it's God's first word of the new creation, of our redemption —

"Let there be light!"

"And there was light!"

And Jesus happened.

Jesus walked into the land of darkness

as the light of God's presence and he said

turn around, open your eyes — here is the light.

Okay ... He didn't say it exactly that way.

He did it like this.

He walked along the shore and he saw two brothers fishing,  
and he said — "Follow me."

And he walked along a little farther and he saw two more brothers  
they were working with their father,  
untangling and mending their nets so they could fish  
And he said to them: "Follow me."

And God's light — the light God promised, now was shining in their lives.

Lighting their world.

Changing everything.

Have you ever tried to guess what something is in the dark?

Only to be surprised by what it really was when the light finally shines.

God's light changes everything.

It changed these two sets of brothers ... It changes us too.

*The gift is a call*

But wait.

How is it that Jesus is the light that shines in the dark place?

How can Jesus drive out all this darkness —

Our War, Our Hunger and Poverty, Our Diseases and Disasters and Our Death,  
Our Racism and Prejudices, Our Hatreds and all types of our Fear,  
Our Greed and all kinds of unchecked desires ...

And Whatever else rolls over us and our neighbors like a dark cloud,  
and says: "It's nothing personal."

How can Jesus shine so brightly as to eradicate all this darkness?

God does it ... With a Word.

God's Word, God's promise.

It's the Word of God incarnate, Jesus Christ  
coming into our life and saying:

You are mine. I am your God. You are my child.

A Word of God that walks into our daily lives —

at home, on the job, wherever  
and says: "Follow me."

The first word of creation and the first word of redemption  
that says for you and: "Let there be light!"

And you emerged from the dark waters of baptism  
and received the light of the Holy Spirit.

"Let there be light." And there was light.

"Let there be light." And Jesus happened.

"Let there be light." And you were born again of water & the word.

You see, God's great promise. God's great gift

is a call. ... a call to walk in the light of God

a call to a new life in Jesus Christ

a call to follow Jesus ... and oh, yes — It's personal.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, but he is your light, too.

The light that casts out our darkness and lights us up to shine in this world.

That is what we are being made to be together in Christ Jesus —

A light that shines before others,

so that the world may see our good works and glorify God.

We are — by the grace and gift of God,

by Christ living through us —

the light of the world,

the light that drives out darkness.

And that is why for us a budget can never be simply business  
And why our congregational meetings can never be  
    simply concerned with policy and politics;  
        administration, efficiency or even effectiveness;  
but these are always, for us, about how we can  
    live and work in ways that powerfully reflect the light of Christ Jesus.

When tragedy strikes — we often respond by lighting a candle.  
If just one candle is lit in the darkness -- there is light.  
We can see. There is hope ...  
    hope that from this one light, this first light  
        all our candles can ignite  
And one-by-one each face is set aglow.  
Shining, beautifully, hopefully, in the darkness.

That's a picture, dim as it may be of what God is doing to us  
    and with us when Jesus calls us to follow him,  
        learn from him, be part of his mission.

God has attacked the darkness of this world through Jesus,  
    through his cross and resurrection  
And one-by-one God is making all things new,  
    including us — making us to shine with the glory  
        of the crucified and risen Jesus  
        who stands among us today  
and invites into God's kingdom with a word  
    that changes everything:

    "Follow me." Jesus says.  
    And there is light.  
        Amen.