



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York**

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**[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)**

**Sunday, January 27, 2008**  
*The Third Sunday after the Epiphany*

*Festal Eucharist*  
*at 11am*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector  
on  
Saint Matthew 4:12-23  
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*MY FELLOW FOUNDLINGS*

“...for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned...”

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, [Jesus] 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.” St. Matthew 4:12-23

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

You cannot give what you do not have. You cannot have what you do not receive. Let's begin with love, without which as human beings we are dead. This is as basic a truth about us as our need for air, food and drink. Little babies will die if they are left alone, which is why foundling institutions make sure to have people who will hold the little orphans. Even though the infants are orphans, they are blessed, as our Lord said children are, by virtue of being little, helpless and utterly trusting. They are radically, innocently receptive. The adults at the hospital hold the babies, and the babies receive love like milk. They will be in a position, soon, to give what they have received. A foundling hospital is a true image for one of the tasks the Church of Christ is called to do.

Our Lord is God, that is Love Almighty, incarnate, and he invited the fishermen Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and his brother John, to follow him. He invited them to receive the love of God, to enter the kingdom of God. Follow me, he said to those fishermen, and I will make you fishers of men. Follow me, and I will make it your life's work to give what you have received.

These words were uttered in what Saint Matthew reminds his readers are “the region of darkness and the shadow of death.” Seven hundred years before Christ, the dreaded Assyrian conquerors of the Middle East had crushed and peeled off the northern Kingdom of Israel, leaving southern Judah isolated and vulnerable. The northern Israelites (the ten lost tribes) were either killed, dispersed, or mixed with the poor dregs of other peoples into a group later known as the Samaritans. The region was called the Galilee in Jesus' day and still is. Jesus had withdrawn from southern Judea to the Galilee when he heard that John the Baptist had been arrested. Peter and Andrew and James and John, it appears from Saint John's own Gospel, had been followers in some way of John the Baptist and after his arrest

perhaps had withdrawn home also, to Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee and returned to their livelihoods as fishermen.

So the light of the Gospel first shined in what was regarded as the darkest, saddest spot in ancient Israel. We should not romanticize an imaginary poverty of these first disciples of Jesus. They were not by their standards poor. It takes discipline and resourcefulness to survive as fishermen. These men owned boats and nets and were in gainful partnership. Fishermen, down to the present day, have a hard life; but it is a purposeful and prosperous life for those who survive in it. In Capernaum, the archaeologists have unearthed homes and a synagogue from the time of Jesus. I have seen it for myself. They evidence prosperity. The synagogue, right across the street from what may well be the site of Saint Peter's home where Jesus stayed in Capernaum, was stone and about the size of a suburban Episcopal Church. The point is, those first disciples, who were invited to leave their livelihoods to follow Jesus and become fishers of men, had something significant to leave behind. They had a lot to lose but took a risk which they thought worth taking.

Jesus must have made a tremendous impact on them. If we add the witness of the Gospel of John to today's in Saint Matthew, we know that the four of them, Peter and Andrew and James and John, had spent time in the presence of Jesus in Judea before they all withdrew to Galilee where he began his own public ministry and called them. The impact must have been in the combination of his teaching about the kingdom of God and his personal embodiment of it. Just as a person will leave everything for the sake of love, they left everything to follow Jesus.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is The Good News. I remember in my own life when this first dawned on me as a young man. I thought, this is the best news there is; it is so good, I have to share it. But it is a gift from God even to be able to recognize, to hear, this news. It is like the capacity to receive love. I believe we all have it, in our inmost depths, this God-given capacity to receive love, like those little foundling children in orphanages, no matter how hurt or battered we may be by life. Jesus came for all of us. Look at some of the poor souls in Saint Matthew's Gospel – people maimed by physical, mental and spiritual illness, burdened by the guilt of sin, possessed by devils and unclean spirits, crushed by poverty and oppression, shunned as outcasts. Surely we have nothing on these souls in the Gospels for authentic suffering, genuine as our own suffering is. We like them can receive love. The Church is here to embody and to extend the Good News of the love of God through Jesus Christ. You can see, touch and taste it in the Sacrament of Holy Communion in which we are participants today. As participants, we are members of Christ's Body, the Body which incarnates and extends love (as a foundling hospital does).

The Church by definition is a place that overflows with gratitude, with love and thanks returned to God who is pre-eminently generous, merciful Love. This Good News is so good, it demands to be shared. People who receive love, love in return. They love God, and they are enabled to turn right and left and love those around them.

Psalm 107 is a very ancient, pre-Christian refrain of thanks for what the Lord God of Israel has done, and regularly does, for his people. He delivers us from our self-inflicted sufferings arising from our own foolishness. He delivers prisoners from captivity. He delivers the sick and discouraged and restores them to health and hope. He keeps the sailors from being tempest tossed and brings to the haven where they would be. "O," cries the Psalmist repeatedly, "O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness; and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men." How much more can this be said for those who are called and who hear and who follow Christ!

Let us love one another, and many others, out of gratitude for what we have received. That is how we become fishers of men. Peter and Andrew and James and John left their nets for an adventure from which they never returned. They left Galilee for parts unknown. They left earth for heaven. On first impression, Saint Thomas may not seem much like the Capernaum shore of the Sea of Galilee. But exactly the same call of Jesus is made here as there. The same love is here as there. And although, when we heed it, we head for places, literal and spiritual, that are unknown, the destination is the same – heaven, that is to say, the safe harbor which is the very heart of the God who is Love Almighty.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.