

Matthew 4.12-23; Isaiah 9.1-4; 1 Cor. 1.10-18.
8:00 a.m. & 10:00 am at St. Andrew's Totteridge
3rd Sunday of Epiphany: 26th January 2014.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer (Ps 19:14)

Welcome everyone, to Epiphany 3, where we get to learn a little bit more about what the coming of Jesus really means. We've heard about the Christmas incarnation of God on earth; we've heard about the revelation to the three kings, the Gentiles, the non-Jews – that's like you and me – and we've heard about the Baptism of Christ, the revelation to John of who Jesus really was; and we've heard about the Lamb of God and the calling of the disciples.

Forgive me, but whenever I hear about the disciples, I can't help but think about people who, more often than not, get things wrong. But then, how often do we suffer a set-back, get a little dismayed, maybe give up altogether, or at least modify our ambitions to more realistic and achievable levels?

Or how often do we witness this in other people, on the news, amongst sports men and women or celebrities. I reckon this happens to us all quite a bit, but perhaps it depends on how important our ambition is, what lies behind its motivation; how much it is for our own benefit or for the benefit of others.

When I was a younger man I became stepfather to an active and bumptious eleven year old. Someone whom I love and care about enormously and whom I'm still very good friends with. But back in those early days of our relationship, when I was still trying to establish my father-hood credentials and be a supportive adult, I suppose I was probably trying too hard. Joby, for that is his name, loved ballgames, and I would do my best to keep up with his prowess at anything involving a spherical object.

He would regularly thrash me at football, at pool, or at snooker, and I was often forced to swallow my pride. But then one day, when he was maybe 14 or 15, we were staying near a golf course and I thought, right, here's my chance. You see, my grandfather had been Secretary of Wentworth Golf Club, and as a young man I'd had many holiday lessons from the pro of that course, but this was some time ago now.

'Expectations are premature resentments.' they say. To cut a long story short, my ambitions did not achieve my expectations. After 18 holes of repeated humiliation I gave up golf and have never really picked up a golf club since. It is a sad and sorry story of the total abandonment of ambition, or more kindly perhaps, the accumulation of wisdom.

So where's the connection with gospel our reading today? Well, it's a bit of a stretch perhaps, but I'd been reading the passage from Mt. 4 that we heard just now, and I was held at the beginning, where it says, 'Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee.' 'He *withdrew* to Galilee.' And I tried to think about times when I'd been dismayed by events and felt like I wanted to withdraw – ending up not just doing that, but actually giving-up completely. Maybe that day on the golf course was one of them.

I gave up, but what if Jesus done the same? Had not only withdrawn, but had given up completely? What if he'd found the news of John's arrest too painful to contemplate; not just for John, but as bad portent for his own hopes and ambitions. What if this sign of the likelihood of failure had proved too much, and that he, like this prospective golfer, had just laid down his aspirations & given everything up?

Given up the need to go through all that controversy, the humiliation, mockery, the torture, the suffering and the pain. Not just his own, but all that his friends and family would have to endure too. What then would have been the outcome? Well, we wouldn't all be sitting here today for one.

We believe that Jesus was not just fully human, but also fully divine - an exceptional God-Man, but his humanity made him vulnerable like all of us. Perhaps the thought of John, his bravery in speaking out against the powers of the day, and now his languishing in prison helped to spur Jesus on. But still we hear about his need to withdraw; to sort things out in his own mind, to allow the heat and dust of John's arrest to die down a little.

Jesus had exceptional motivation, the wellbeing of all his fellow human beings, both past, present and future. Perhaps he was in constant communication with his Father, in ways that we can't imagine - but his mission must have demanded a level of faith beyond our comprehension.

And we mustn't forget that Matthew will tell us at the end of his gospel of how Jesus' humanity and vulnerability breaks through even his own steely levels of resolve: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' So perhaps this is a story not so much about power, about achievement, about winning – it's more about

the laying aside of power, of pride, of needing to prove yourself – perhaps we shouldn't be too hard on those disciples.

Whatever his reasons, back by the lake near Capernaum, it isn't long before Jesus carries on. He takes up John's clarion call: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' He gathers his disciples, even though he knows they will abandon him – even though he knows that some of them will also succumb to agonising ends. And he begins to proclaim throughout Galilee, teaching, proclaiming and curing among the people.

Not only does he continue his mission, he sees it through to an astonishing outcome, snatching all our lives quite literally from the jaws of spiritual and physical death. A triumph that is in no way a conclusion – but rather a new beginning for all of us. Thank goodness he didn't choose to lay down his clubs, and praise be to God our Father in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Matthew 4.12-23 - Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ¹⁵'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶the 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.' ¹⁷From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

Jesus Calls the First Disciples¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'
²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As 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. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

23 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.

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Isaiah 9.1-4 - The Righteous Reign of the Coming King

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. ³ You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. ⁴ For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

1 Cor. 1.10-18 - Divisions in the Church

10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹²What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ.'
¹³Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. ¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

