

A friend of mine in England told me that there was a pub five minutes down the road from his house. It took him five minutes to walk there. He did say though that after an evening in the pub, it would sometimes take him 25 minutes to walk back. The difference, he said, was staggering. Beer is not the only thing that can make us walk slowly. So does darkness. How long would it take to walk from the front door of the church to the altar with the lights on? 10, 12 seconds. Imagine it was the middle of the night. The lights were off. Might take us a minute or two. We'd be stumbling, tripping up the steps, not quite sure where we're going. It would take a lot longer. So, I want to draw a contrast this morning between walking in the dark and walking in the light.

It's a contrast made by the Prophet Isaiah from who we heard this morning who wrote this, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." And that prophecy is fulfilled in the gospel reading. It's fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, the light of the world. In the gospels, we see how the disciples in the company of Jesus, the light of the world, don't shuffle or stumble. They stride out in faith. And the gospel reading from Matthew is presented to us as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, that those who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Because Matthew makes that link. So, he talks of Nazareth where Jesus made his home. That's the land of Zebulun mentioned by Isaiah and Capernaum, which is the unofficial HQ of Jesus' ministry is Naphtali, the other place mentioned by Isaiah, the prophet. Making that link that this prophecy about the coming of the light has been fulfilled in Jesus.

We see it too in John's Gospel, in a reading that we heard over the Christmas period where it says, "In Jesus Christ was life, the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." And Jesus himself, what does he say? "I am the light of the world," he says. "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." The disciples whom Jesus calls by the sea of Galilee were not called to walk in darkness. They were called out of darkness to walk in the light of life.

And look how Jesus calls them. Of course, if he was English, he'd have asked in a very different way. The English version of this gospel would have Jesus walking up to Peter and Andrew and saying, "Sorry to bother you. Would you have any interest in tagging along with me? No problem if not, just I don't want to inconvenience you, but if you have the time."

No, he doesn't ask that because Jesus wasn't English. Shock, horror! If you've learned one thing in the sermon today, you can go home and say, "Oh yes, we learned that Jesus wasn't English." Of course he wasn't. You can tell by how he asked the disciples to follow him. He commands them. "Follow me," Jesus says. And how do they respond? Do they ask for time to think about it? No. Do they even stop to clean their nets? No. Immediately, we're told, they left their nets and followed him. They don't shuffle begrudgingly behind Jesus. They stride out in faith. They are walking in and walking with the light.

So, what's different about walking in the light? Well, first, there's a purposefulness about the way that the disciples walked. It says immediately they left their nets. They knew where they were going. Well, they knew who they were going with. They knew they had a purpose. Jesus called them to fish for people. And that's a phrase that's been interpreted in many different ways over the years. And it's important for us to understand, given the fact that we are followers of Jesus, we are the people who still hear that call, "Follow me." We're called to respond.

So how do we see ourselves fishing for people? Well, here's a story which might go some way to giving an answer to that question. It's a story about a family with two kids aged about 11 and seven who go down to Carlsbad Caverns. And as happens on the tour, when it gets to the deepest place in the caves, the tour guide turns the lights off just to show what real darkness feels like. And when they did this, the little girl was scared, started crying out. And her brother put his arm around her and said, "Well, don't worry. There's somebody here who knows how to turn on the lights."

The call for us as followers of Jesus is to let people know that the light has come, that we are not abandoned in the dark, and the world can feel a dark place. Death and darkness do not have the final word. We know someone who has turned on the lights, and we're called to witness to that fact to let others know that the light of the world has come.

The disciples stride out confidently after Jesus because they trust him. They don't walk fearfully. And trust is the opposite of fear. Just see how the Psalm that we said together, or we heard the choir sing. Psalm 27 begins like this, "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom then shall I fear?" The disciples trusted Jesus and there was no fear in their walk.

Walking in the light also makes us aware of others. Darkness is lonely and isolating. We can feel all alone in the dark, but as people of light, we know we walk in company with others. Peter and Andrew were very soon walking with James and John. And very quickly, this new alternative community was building around Jesus, which now stretches all over the world. And what an undramatic beginning to such a movement. It all starts with four ordinary fishermen responding to Jesus' call. And those called to follow Jesus and walk with him are still not required to be special or particularly holy. Those who follow Jesus have always been ordinary people. What they have in common is a response to his call and a response which involves putting our faith and trust in Him.

This season of Epiphany reminds us that the light of the world has come, a light that has shown for 2,000 years. It's no less bright, and it offers the same power that was offered to Jesus' first followers. The light beckons us to walk without fear into the world, building God's alternative kingdom filled with all God's people. So let's be a people who look to walk in the light and aren't content to shuffle along in the darkness.

And on this day of our annual meeting, when we think about church life and reflect on our life here at St. James, it occurred to me that we are not shuffling along at the moment. We've had a good

year. There are signs of health and growth. People continue to join our community. The finances are healthy, and we're walking together with a purpose. Last week was our outreach Sunday, and it was great to meet so many of the partners with whom we work and serve. We're called to worship and grow in faith together. So, I'm full of hope. Let's continue to stride out confidently in faith to walk in the light, God's beautiful light. Amen.