

Third Sunday after the Epiphany - January 22, 2023 - Isaiah 9:1-4 Matthew 4:12-23  
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In Seminary we were taught, that when preaching, one should avoid giving what our instructor called “**bad dog sermons.**” Bad dog sermons are when the preacher reprimands the parishioners...telling them how bad they are...until they look like scolded golden retrievers.

Some say the popularity of ‘bad dog sermons’ is growing . Thank goodness that’s not the case here at the Dorset Church.

The consensus thinking in one national survey I read is that parishioners think preachers who give bad dog sermons are correct in their judgment about the world... because **judgment** is what preachers know best.

Well, allow me to let you in on a secret: preachers and ministers don’t have any special corner on **the judgment market**, nor should we. Our goal as ministers is to be **accepting**, to seek **understanding** of all persons, to **teach**, and to **heal**, because we are all **God’s beloved children**. Our God is not a judging God, but a force of love, hope, and faithful encouragement, as should be any minister when tending his or her flock.

through the messiness, and painfulness, of things that aren't easily explainable.

I recently read in a morning reflection: "the prophet's job is to deconstruct illusions...and then reconstruct on a new and honest foundation."

Different from the providers of **fake certainty**, who are often consumed with self-interest, prophets strive for **integrity**, which is witnessed in the painful burden they carry on behalf of truth and justice.

The prophets' vocation is to cry out—to God, to any open heart, encouraging it to **turn around**...to turn away from sin...and to turn toward God... which brings me to today's Gospel Scripture reading from Matthew...and the topic and title of my sermon, **Turn Around...and take another look at what God is doing for you.**

Depending on how you hear it, Jesus's words to Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John, there in Capernaum, might sound like a classic 'bad dog' utterance. *"Repent...you bad, bad dogs...shame on you... for the kingdom of heaven has come near".*

different is this from what we experience our own lives, here and now?  
Not much, I think.

Yet, as human beings, we **do tend** to be **certainty seekers**. We want to be presented with **certain things**, so that we can avoid feeling **uncertain**, because uncertainty produces stress, and anxiety, and that's something we try to avoid.

Yet, despite our best efforts to avoid feelings of uncertainty, we frequently fail, and develop dysfunctional ways of coping with our powerlessness over our problems, with corrupted forms of thinking that manifest themselves as **addictions**, in the broadest sense of the word.

As Father Richard Rohr says in his amazing book, ***Breathing Under Water***...a book I hope to one day teach here at the Dorset Church..."for too many centuries the church has concentrated on how to worship Jesus as one united empire instead of [learning how] to follow Jesus in practical ways. "

Learning how to follow Jesus means that we start accepting our **powerlessness**, and grow aware of our need for **certainty**, and stop

As one of my Seminary professors once said, “the reign of God has dawned not only because Jesus spoke it into existence but because he was willing to heal the sick and make **whole** the broken.”

Healing happens when we **unstick** ourselves, and turn in a new direction, so that we might re-assemble the brokenness of our lives into something new.

When we make that **turn in a new direction**...and stop doing the same thing, over and over again...we shed the self-destructive nature of our addiction to the whole spectrum of things that we are powerless over, especially the subtle stuff, that’s not visible on the surface.

This is who we are...humans...God’s beloved children...imperfect in so many ways. We beat ourselves up when we fall short of our expectations...when we could be loving ourselves, our neighbors, and our God.

Yet, we humans also possess so much **promise and hope**, like the promise and hope that was witnessed a week ago at the Dorset Church Supper. I met so many people at the Church Supper, returning home with a heart warmed by **life-giving fellowship and hospitality**.

Prayer of Pastoral Care Jan 22, 2023 Epiphany 3 Yr. A

Psalm 27 says, *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

Let us pray to the Lord, saying, God of light, hear **our prayer**.

Loving God, your light reveals the needs of our world and your salvation offers hope to the lost. We pray for our world and our community.

For your church, we pray that all may live in harmony with one another.

We pray that our pastors and teachers may be wise and gracious ministers of the gospel. God of light, hear **our prayer**.

We pray for the world and for all who suffer the rod of oppression. Break the yoke of violence and free all people from the burden of war and domestic strife.

We pray for a change of heart for Vladimir Putin. And our prayers are with the people of Ukraine. We thank you for the teachers and students who continue to teach and study in the midst of air raid sirens, blackouts, and remote learning.

We pray for the women of Afghanistan and Iran that they may be able to pursue their studies, and be allowed to participate more in their societies. We also pray, particularly, for the many women working in humanitarian aid organizations in Afghanistan. God of light, hear **our prayer**.

We pray for the leaders of the nations, that they may be just and faithful in their duties and serve the good of all creation. We pray for people who are in hunger throughout the world; we especially lift up the starving children in Somalia.

We pray for care of creation on our planet, and for all who are working against further climate change. Be with those who suffer disease of body and mind, that they may know the power of your healing grace.

God of light, hear **our prayer**.

We now lift before you those on this church's immediate needs list. ...

Hear, O Lord, the cries of your people. Be gracious to us, and lead us,

For you are the ground of our being; our salvation.

We pray through Christ, in the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

OFFERING O God, the source of all good things, you have given us what we need. In joyful response we offer our gifts, the fruit of our labors, and the dedication of our hearts for loving service in the name of Christ.

\*DOXOLOGY

\*PRAYER God of our salvation, receive these gifts we offer and bless them for the work of your kingdom, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

