

Reclaimed

“And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men’” Matthew 4:19.

This week, I had my first opportunity to experience some of the new renovations that have been completed for the ElectricWorks project happening right here behind us. It was astounding to see a building that had been so lifeless for most of my time here in Fort Wayne now beginning to buzz with new life and excitement. To witness firsthand how this property is being reclaimed from the darkness of neglect and disrepair to being filled with the light of purpose and meaning is inspiring. And perhaps what makes this transformation so amazing is the way that much of the integrity of the original building is still being saved and even highlighted despite so many new additions.

Yet even beyond this massive reclaiming project happening in our own backyard, there are so many other things being reclaimed in and around our lives that hit even closer to home. Some of us here might make a hobby out of reclaiming used furniture for new purposes around the home. Others of us salvage parts for machines and cars in order to complete the restoration project sitting out in the garage. Many of you even reclaimed pieces of this church during the renovation, things like old pews and organ pipes, attempting to give those items a new purpose at your residence. And I know for certain that bits and pieces of our school, that have been retired during this current renovation project, have been reclaimed with some vision to reuse those items in different ways in the future. In fact, I imagine Emmanuel’s building manager, Mr. Randy, could show us several other items from the church basement that he would love to see reclaimed and no longer taking up valuable space.

Whether it’s ElectricWorks, our own hobbies, our church basement, or even our own personal storage areas, the action of reclaiming, perhaps we may even like to call it an art at times, has become a part of our daily lives. Even in the simplest of ways too, like reclaiming forgotten water bottles or mugs lost at other church services. (In all seriousness, like the bulletin article says, take a look after the service, yours just might be sitting out on the table in Ebenezer.) So, I think it’s fairly safe to say that not a week goes by, maybe not even a day, that we don’t need to reclaim something in our lives.

This weekend, our familiarity with reclaiming things in our lives, serves as a solid object lesson for what God is revealing to us in our Gospel reading from Matthew. It’s not just materials and possessions that need to be reclaimed in our lives, it’s our hearts, souls, minds and bodies as well. Surrounded by and filled with the darkness of sin and death, our lives desperately need to be reclaimed by the Light of Life. And the words of our Gospel reading point us to the “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God”, Jesus, who has come and reclaimed us.

With the news of John the Baptist’s arrest and eventual death, Jesus began His public ministry in the northern region of Israel. And with these very specific details, Matthew draws his hearers to a very specific prophecy in Isaiah from our first reading this weekend. **“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned”** (Matthew 4:15-16).

Attaching these words from Isaiah to the start of Jesus’ ministry, Matthew reveals to us how astounding Jesus’ work of reclaiming truly was. Jesus was starting with the region of Israel that had been most devastated by war and invasion, trampled over by the enemy army, the first to be cutoff from the kingdom of Israel and the last to have hope of being released from the northern invader’s rule. This region of Israel epitomized what it meant and looked like to be dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death. Yet, despite all this darkness, despite being severely detached from the temple worship in Jerusalem and inundated with Gentile foreigners, this was where Jesus chose to begin revealing His light.

And unlike the way the darkness swept over this region, through the violence of sword and spear, without care or compassion for the people in its path, Jesus' ministry of light reclaimed this same region person by person through the power of His Word and His healing touch. **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand ... Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”** (*Matthew 4:17, 19*). Teaching and proclaiming the Gospel, healing every disease and affliction, in this manner, the people dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death began to see the great light of Jesus. Through peaceful, personal but still very powerful means, Jesus was reclaiming a region overrun by darkness and filling it with the light of His purpose.

Yet reclaiming this one region from darkness wasn't all Jesus came to do, no, this was just the start. He worked His way down to Jerusalem until finally lifted up on a cross He finished His work of light so that the whole world might be freed from the darkness of sin and death. Then rising from the darkness of the tomb, Jesus revealed once and for all time that His light of life had completely conquered the darkness of sin and death. And now until He returns, Jesus continues to reclaim this world from darkness, person by person, by reflecting His light through His Church.

You and I are included in Jesus' world reclaiming project. And our inclusion in this work begins and remains founded upon the truth that we need to be reclaimed by Jesus first. Even today, His Words, powerfully reveal the darkness that lurks in our own hearts and actions. Through our own sinful choices and decisions, our lives have been invaded by darkness. As an almighty army of one we trample down and break relationships that are in our path, we cutoff our desires from God's plan and purpose and we are continually plagued by sin's impact on our bodies through pain, sickness and death. We are dwelling in darkness, even the shadow of death. We need to be shown the light that dispels the darkness that surrounds and fills us.

By God's mercy and grace, into our humbled and broken lives, into our repentant hearts, the light of Christ comes. Washed by water and God's Word, we have received Christ who is the light of the world. Jesus has reclaimed us as His own pulling us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Day after day, night after night, moment by moment, as darkness continues to try and rule our lives and we stumble and fall, we return to Jesus, God's gift of light, for forgiveness and again and again He reclaims us as His own.

And as ones continually being reclaimed by God, we share the work He is doing in our lives. We focus on His light at work in us. We rejoice as He works through us to reclaim broken and devastated relationships. We celebrate spaces where His work of reclaiming might be proclaimed boldly as in our Lutheran churches and schools. We pray that these spaces remain beacons of light in the face of alluring darkness. We encourage and give thanks for our brothers and sisters in Christ, for each other, as we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, seek to reflect Jesus' light to those in our homes, workplaces, schools and beyond. Together, we suffer and endure the trials and tribulations of this dark world knowing that the light of Jesus that has been given to us and all believers won't be overcome.

Reclaimed people of God, have courage, the final result of Jesus' reclaiming work will be far more inspiring than even what we're witnessing at ElectricWorks. Even though God's work may seem so small-scaled to us, person by person, the Lord is eternally reclaiming His own throughout the world. Again, this weekend, here in this place, Jesus has shone you His great light. He has reclaimed you as His own. And reclaimed by Jesus and filled with His light, our response is as simple as the children's song goes: "This little light of mine, / I'm gonna let it shine. / This little light of mine, / I'm gonna let it shine. / This little light of mine, / I'm gonna let it shine, / let it shine, let it shine, let it shine." Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan