What Does This Mean? 2018 01 21

Mark 1:14-20 Pr. Hitoshi Adachi

May the Grace and Love from Jesus Christ be poured into people’s hearts in this sanctuary.

Due to the call to Kumamoto, Satoko and I are resigning from several positions including Preschool, LCR, and Synod office. One of them is a graceful and forgiving position, “Director of Diaper Changes” that Satoko enjoyed for the last several years…. And one of the realities is that somebody new is promoted to that position right away.

Another reality is that after today’s service, there are people whom we see today, but we might never again see them physically in this world. Today standing at this altar, in Christ, I would like to deliver the Gospel reflecting upon our current situation, our physical departure from LCR.

By the time I attended Luther Seminary in Minnesota 14 years ago, I had been a hardware engineer for a medical device company, for 10 years, using skills I acquired while attending college in the 1980s. However, while the demand for software engineers has increased every year, the demand for hardware engineers decreased. I left that position and was sent to Graduate school to study management and then I was assigned to management positions in the same company.

In the summer of 1997, now over 20 years ago, I was assigned to a managerial position of a subsidiary of that company in California. That was the time, my family and I started attending LCR. While working as an engineer or a manager, I learned that it is important to ask questions, sometimes even dumb questions.

When started seminary classes, I memorized the Small Catechism immediately. To be honest, I cannot completely recite it now, but there is one phrase that I’ll never forget in the catechism. That phrase appeared again and again, which is “What Does This Mean?” While experiencing an unexpected event in life’s journey, I think it is important to reflect on scriptures and our lives and ask ourselves this question, “What Does This Mean?”

Let’s dive into the Gospel text given today. As the forerunner of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist started proclaiming “Repent.” After John was arrested, Jesus’ ministry also started with the word “Repent.” This reminds us the importance of “repentance” in Christianity and we always humbly start every service with confessions.

However, in Jesus’ ministry, before he said “repent” he was adding a few more words, and proclaiming Good News. Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near.” In Greek and in English, the verb was expressed as “present perfect tense” which means that the Kingdom of God has already come near us.

Then the latter half of the text talks about the calling of disciples. In just today’s text, four disciples followed immediately. They were fishermen and they left their nets, employer, and coworkers to catch fish, and followed Jesus who said, “I will make you fish for people.” What does this mean?

In that era, there might be a possibility of making a better net that catches more fish with less labor, the demand for fishermen might decrease. However, I think there were more important thoughts in the back of Jesus’ mind. I believe increasing the number of people who repent and proclaim Gospel was of prime importance. I believe that was God’s plan.

So why is it so important to proclaim the Gospel and calling many disciples? In other words, why is the Gospel so wonderful that it requires many people proclaiming the good news? After Jesus was born and revealed himself to human beings, what does the Gospel mean?

In Jesus’ words, the Gospel is described as “the Kingdom has come near” as I mentioned earlier. And the Gospel is described here and there in the Bible, especially, in the life of Jesus written in the 4 Gospels in the New Testaments. The Gospel echoes in many places in the Bible.

In recent years, when I am asked what my favorite verse is, I answer with a verse from Matthew, it reads, “for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”

In this sentence, the love and grace of the heavenly father is well explained. Father, God, is always pouring God’s mercy and love upon the creatures that God made. And Jesus explained that the presence of God is not far from us but instead very close. The love and mercy is already here in our midst, that is the meaning of God’s kingdom is near. God’s reign by his mercy and love has already happened in this world.

The Gospel text, Mark 1:14-20 was not chosen by me because of my last sermon as a LCR pastor or because today is the announcement of February 11th’s Congregational Meeting to vote a candidate of choice that the church council approved. God gave us this Gospel text. And what does this text mean in the midst of the transitions happening at LCR?

The first disciples that followed Jesus left their nets. However, Jesus was not the one who ordered them to leave their nets. It was probably right to leave the net as hardware to catch fish in the lake of Galilee.

However, a fisherman to catch people, I think they need to keep the concept of net that caught fish that they used while they worked as fishermen. And the net to catch fish was transformed into a totally different type of net in our age to catch more people to become disciples. In other words, we as followers of Jesus are a part of the big net to catch new people.

After today, Satoko and I will not be staff members of this church and preschool anymore, and after training at the churchwide office in Chicago, in early February, and the big move, we will travel to Kumamoto within a couple of months and that city is thousands of miles away.

However, despite the distance Satoko and I are still part of the net, the global church, like you will continue to be. And we continue being brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are forever united, because God’s grace and love is so near each of us no matter the distance or circumstance. Amen.