

## Sermon for the Third Sunday after Epiphany

**Date:** January 25, 2026

**Location:** Zion – Colby, WI

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 9:1–4

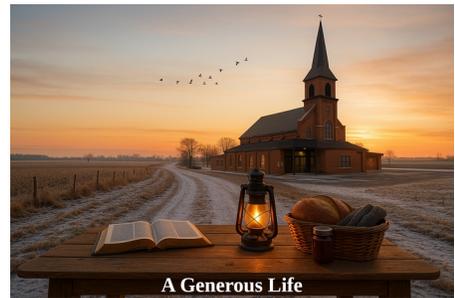
**Epistle Reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:10–18

**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 4:12–25

**Sermon Series:** A Generous Life

**Sermon Title:** Open Hands, Open Hearts

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 4:12–25



**Introit:** Psalm 22:27-31; Psalm 22:22

### Hymns:

LSB 839 – O Christ, Our True and Only Light

LSB 849 – Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness

LSB 784 – Take My Life and Let It Be

LSB 644 – The Church's One Foundation

### Distribution:

LSB 735 – Have No Fear, Little Flock

LSB 805 – Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow

LSB 790 – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

LSB 828 – We Are Called to Stand Together

Zion  
PO Box 438  
301 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> St.  
Colby, WI 54421  
715-223-2166

Pastor James Groleau  
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net  
Phone: 320-336-8149

 ZionColby.org

 316-Sermons by Phone:  
715-316-4098

*(No Internet or Smart Phone needed)*



**Text: Matthew 4:12–25**

When [*Jesus*] heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“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.”

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

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Grace to you and peace in Jesus' name. Amen.

## Opening – Picking Up the Thread



Last week we stood at the water's edge and watched Jesus call some fishermen. We heard Him say, "Follow Me."<sup>1</sup> We watched as nets fall from calloused hands. Those nets weren't evil. They fed families. They paid bills. They kept life moving. Yet when Jesus called, those good things could no longer be first things.

Today we walk a little farther down the road. The shoreline fades behind us. The light grows stronger. The call God gives becomes clearer. When Jesus comes, He doesn't simply bring light to our darkness. He comes to free us, so we can trust Him and live generously. That is where this series is leading us, learning what it means to trust God enough to open our hands and let Him show us what He can do.

## Darkness Feels Familiar

Isaiah speaks to people who know darkness all too well. Not poetic gloom. Real darkness. Isaiah says they were walking in it.<sup>2</sup> Walking means movement. Life kept going. January mornings can teach us how darkness becomes familiar. Coffee on. Boots and coats ready. The car warms up while the sky is still dark. You move through it because you've learned how. The long Summer days with early morning light have been gone long enough that we've almost forgotten them.



Spiritual darkness works the same way. We get used to it. We live in it not realizing what it is doing to us. The fear becomes familiar, then teaches us to hold tighter. Scarcity thinking convinces us what we have must be saved because it will save us. We keep walking this road because loosening our grip feels risky, especially when it comes to our resources that provide life's comforts.



Deep down, the concern sounds like: "*What if I give, and God doesn't show up?*" So where does light begin for people who have learned to live this way?

## The Light Arrives and Calls

Matthew tells us Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled when Jesus begins His ministry.<sup>3</sup> Here light does not arrive as an idea or a philosophy. Light arrives as a person.

Jesus walks the roads and the shores. He meets people where they are: rich, poor, at church everyday, or at church every year. He speaks ordinary words with extraordinary authority. "Follow Me."

- 1 Matthew 4:19
- 2 Isaiah 9:1-2
- 3 Matthew 4:16

Jesus comes as Light for our dark and hands for our concerns. His call exposes truth and re-prioritizes priorities. Fishermen leave nets. Tax collectors leave ledgers. People step off the wide dark roads onto a new narrower path, but one that leads to a much better end.

The call into the light costs something, but it never leaves us empty. God never asks His people to step forward to find Him. He steps toward us first. Jesus carries every failure committed in the dark to the cross, and shows us the darkness does not overcome Him.<sup>4</sup>

He gives us freedom and those freed hands are the beginning of a generous life, a life that dares to trust God rather than what we can store, save, or secure ourselves.

## What We Release Becomes Provision

Paul reminds the Church [**1 Corinthians 1:18**] the message of the cross looks foolish to the world. Darkness calls generosity naïve. Light reveals generosity as trust and faith. A generous life grows when Christ becomes the treasure. Clinging to control tightens anxiety. Trust opens our hands.



When we trust Jesus with our lives, we begin to trust Him with our time, our abilities, and even our money. Our future no longer rests in what we hold, but in Who holds us. That kind of trust can feel risky at first. Faith is hope in what is unseen.<sup>5</sup> Trust acts before it sees results. Trust opens hands and waits to see what God will do next. That is how God teaches His people to rely on Him.

## Walking in the Light Together

Light draws people together. Darkness divides, especially when it becomes comfortable. Walking in the light binds forgiven people together. Jesus doesn't free us one by one and send us off alone. He forms a people who trust Him together. God does not only shape individual trust. He forms a people who learn together what it means to rely on Him. The Church shines when forgiven people live forgiven lives and carry that light into the world.

As Luther teaches, we are called to fear, love, and trust God above all things.<sup>6</sup> That trust is not abstract; it shows itself in real choices with real resources. Light builds trust and reshapes how we imagine the future.

## Called Forward



Jesus keeps coming. He keeps pressing light into dark places. He keeps freeing hands, and inviting deeper trust. Next week the road bends again. The teaching deepens. The question sharpens. Jesus keeps coming and He invites His people to trust Him in a very concrete way.

What happens when Jesus comes close enough to confront the heart, loosen what we are still holding, and invites us to trust Him enough to open our hands?

Come and see. Amen.

- 4 John 1:5
- 5 Hebrews 11:1
- 6 Luther's Small Catechism – First Commandment



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