

Sunday, January 25, 2026

Epiphany 3A

Matthew 4:12-25

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

My friends,

Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee.
 The heavens open with His Baptism.
 John the Baptist proclaimed Him
the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
 Jesus calls His first disciples.
 And He explodes into Galilee like the dawn rising,
 driving back the shadow of death.

*"And [Jesus] 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." (Matthew 4:23)*

Talk about a beginning!

*"So His fame spread throughout all Syria...
 And great crowds followed Him from Galilee
 and the Decapolis,
 and from Jerusalem and Judea,
 and from beyond the Jordan." (Matthew 4:24–25)*
 This is something people want to get caught up in!

And the end, too, will be glorious!

*"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven
 with a cry of command,
 with the voice of an archangel,
 and with the sound of the trumpet of God.
 And the dead in Christ will rise first.
 Then we who are alive, who are left,
 will be caught up together with them in the clouds
 to meet the Lord in the air,
 and so we will always be with the Lord."*

(1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)

But what about the middle?

The middle isn't always as glamorous.
 The middle isn't always easy.
 Slowly, people began to question Jesus.
 People got confused and wandered away.
 They abandoned Jesus.
 Others turned against Him.
 They plotted.
 They betrayed.
 Finally, Jesus is all alone on the cross.
 He's dead and buried in the ground.
 It **looked** like the fantastic start didn't pan out.

We live in the middle.

Jesus began with a preview of creation restored in Galilee.
 His death and resurrection purchased and secured the restoration of creation.
 Jesus will return, and everything will finally be restored.

But in the meantime, we are in the middle.

How do we live in the middle?

1.

My friends,

The kingdom of heaven is both **now** and **not yet**.

Hebrews tells us this.

Jesus is crowned with glory and honour.
 All things are under His feet.
 But, "*At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Him.*"
 But we do see Jesus.
 The One who was made low.
 The One who suffered death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:7-9)

In His first coming,
 Christ defeated every foe.
 Sin.
 Death.
 The devil.
 Jesus has all authority.
 And He is here **now** to forgive.
 He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And yet, we do not see the victory in full.
 Death still hurts.
 Sickness still strikes.
 Suffering still lingers.
 One day, Christ will return in glory.
 On that day, all of it will be trampled under His feet.

For now, we live in the middle.
 Sometimes the kingdom feels more "not yet" than "now."

So what do we do?

Here is a **wrong** answer.
 A wrong answer is to live in **guilt**.

When life collapses,
 people assume God is punishing them.
 They think they must have done something wrong.
 God must be angry.

I tell you, that is not true.

Yes, we have all sinned.
 Yes, we all deserve judgment.
 But that judgment has already fallen.
 It fell on Jesus.

*"He was pierced for our transgressions.
 He was crushed for our iniquities.
 The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him,
 and by His wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)*

Jesus is the Lamb of God.
 Your sins are gone.
 God is not against you.
 He loves you.

Nothing can separate you
 from the love of God
 in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

You will not live in guilt; instead, embrace
 You will live in forgiveness.
 You will know the peace
 and relief
 that come from living in God's loving forgiveness.

You are a beloved and redeemed Child of God.

2.

My friends,
 How do we live in the middle?

Sometimes, we have big dreams.
 We get these incredible starts.
 The sky is the limit.
 Possibilities are endless.
 Opportunities abound.

But then things flatten out.
 Fizzle out.
 They begin to fade.
 Every year, things are just "less and less."

What do we do?
 I've got another **wrong** answer for you.
Apathy.
 Just stop caring.
 Meh. What's the point?

We no longer live in a society that values virtue for virtue's sake.

We value what sells.

We don't value what is good and right in and of itself.

Like love.

So we just coast along.

Listless.

Why bother?

Why try?

One of the most beloved and quoted books
of the Old Testament is Isaiah.

Isaiah was sent to serve a people who

"Keep on listening, but do not perceive;

Keep on looking, but do not understand." (Isaiah 6:9)

Isaiah asks,

"Who has believed our message?" (Isaiah 53:1)

Every day, fewer and fewer people believed what Isaiah said.

But did He give up preaching?

No.

He kept pointing to Jesus.

And then Jesus came,

"so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled."

(Matthew 4:14)

And now, all the Church hears Isaiah

and believes the message God gave him.

And by His preaching,

Jesus is revealed.

So we too, go forward.

We continue to love God by loving our neighbour.

We keep on going, even when we don't understand.

We follow Jesus through good times and bad times.

We walk as children of light

through times that are exciting and boring.

We follow Jesus even when it is difficult.

In Luke Chapter five, Peter had fished all night and caught nothing.

Jesus tells Him to cast his net once more.

"And Simon answered,

'Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!

But at your word I will let down the nets.'

And when they had done this,

they enclosed a large number of fish,

and their nets were breaking." (Luke 5:5–6)

What if Simon gave up and no longer cared?

What if he had turned from Jesus

and gone searching for a lake with more fish?

Jesus calls us and says,

"Follow me,

and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19)

So,

"let us not grow weary of doing good,

for in due season we will reap,

if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9)

3.

My friends,

How do we live in the middle?

I've got one more wrong answer before we get to the right answer.

The final wrong answer is **despair**.

When we choose despair,

we are mistaking the middle for the end.

Everything could have started out well.

You were completely successful.

You think, this is what I can do, this is who I am.

And then it crashes.

And you're like, well, now what?

Is this how it ends?

Is there no hope coming?
That's despair.
When we think our story only has a bad end.

But your story doesn't have a bad end.
This isn't the end.
And you know what?
Even if you were in a pine box,
being slowly lowered into the ground—
even **that** would not be the end.

The grave was **not** the end for Jesus.
So why would it be the end for **you**?
*"For if [by baptism]
we have been united with [Jesus]
in a death like His,
we shall **certainly** be united with Him
in a resurrection like His."* (Romans 6:5)

Jesus promises us:
*"I have told you these things,
so that in me you may have peace.
In this world you will have trouble.
But take heart!
I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

Right now, you might not be able to see that.
But it is true.
Jesus has overcome.
And because all things are under His feet,
*"We know that in all things
God works for the good of those who love Him,
who have been called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28)

God has called you for His purpose.
His purpose is to conform you to the image of His Son.
His purpose is to justify you in His Son.
His purpose is to glorify you in His Son.

Your story isn't over.
 It is being folded into His story.
 And Christ's story is the cross and resurrection.
*"To us who are being saved
 [the word of the cross] is the power of God."* (1 Corinthians 1:18)

4.

So, my friends?
 How do we live in the middle?
 The right answer is **hope**.
 We live in **hope**.

The big beginning is a picture of the future.
 The sick,
 those afflicted with diseases and pains,
 those oppressed by demons,
 those having seizures, and paralytics
 – will all be healed by Jesus.

*"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,
 and death shall be no more,
 neither shall there be mourning,
 nor crying, nor pain anymore,
 for the former things have passed away."* (Revelation 21:4)

And in the meantime,
 The Jesus who has already handled all the big things is with us.
 God is still working for us.
 God is still working with us.
 God is still working in us.
 God is still working through us.

God is for you.

And if God is for you, what can be against you?

*"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?"* (Psalm 27:1)

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)

By His wounds, we are healed.

He is with you now,
in mercy and grace.

He is with you tomorrow,
in love and kindness.

He is your hope and light in the present darkness.

*"I believe
that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living!"*

*Wait for the Lord;
be strong,
and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!"* (Psalm 27:13–14)

If you feel stuck in the middle of the "not yet,"

cling to His unbreakable promises.

Speak them back to Him in prayer.

Live *"in hope of eternal life,
which God,*

who never lies,

promised before the ages began" (Titus 1:2)

Wait for the Lord;

be strong,

and let your heart take courage;

wait for the Lord!"

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father,

*who loved us and gave us eternal comfort
and good hope through grace,*

comfort your hearts

and establish them

in every good work and word." Amen

(2 Thessalonians 2:16–17)