



The Journey Begins

Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23

Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (January 22, 2023)

Nelly Chiboi grew up in an impoverished village in Kenya. Her mom ensured that despite their poverty Nelly received an education. Nelly worked hard in school and received a full scholarship to attend college. She graduated from the ELCA's Augustana College in 2012.

Before attending school, Nellie hadn't used computers, but in order to receive a math major she needed to take a required computer science class. In this class she fell in love with computer science and changed her major. Following graduation, she began work in the software industry. She noticed that when companies upgrade, they'd often throw away their old computers, which still have a lot of use in them. This was the moment her life changed. Nelly was shocked by the waste and decided to do something about it.

Nelly started refurbishing those computers and bringing them back to her home village. The work expanded and she began TechLit Africa, now supporting 10 schools, but with a goal to support 100. TechLit Africa is bringing computers to rural villages so children can begin to learn technology at an early age. Kids receive training and classes so they can work in the global technology market.

Nelly used her education to educate others. God works in mysterious ways to bring about good and beauty and calls each of us to be part of that project: a new heaven and a new earth; a new humanity.

In today's gospel, we see a continuation of last week's invitation by Jesus to "Come and see." And to have a relationship with him for the sake of the world. Peter and Andrew, James and John are the first ones of a long chain of people that through the centuries have followed Jesus and still do today through you and me and the generations that will come after us.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John could not fathom what God would do through them when they left their boats. We ourselves have no idea how our life of discipleship has touched other people. Most likely, we will never know how our kind and encouraging words have impacted other people. We may never know how our generosity, hospitality, and simplicity have made the world a better place. We will probably never know how the kindness, grace, and forgiveness we have extended to others have changed their lives. Just like the first disciples, we have responded to the call, we have agreed to follow Jesus, we employed our talents and resources to bring a glimpse of Light and hope into the world.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John, along with all the disciples of all times and places including us are people of the world called to follow Jesus in a journey of transfiguration. "The Church is

nothing other than the world in the course of transfiguration.”¹ We are not perfected yet. The process of transfiguration has started and with our humility, obedience, and faithfulness we progress on the journey.

But if along the way we lose touch with Jesus’ call and our vocation, we may stall, we may become complacent and comfortable, we may backslide, we may not be recognized as disciples of his no matter how hard we claim to be Christians.

Even if we progress steadily on the journey, we cannot claim to have got “it” and have arrived; we cannot assume any judgmental posture of superiority. The Church is not a place of arrival, it’s not the final destination, but a training ground where we witness the great mercy of God and get renewed, forgiven, and healed. God is still working on us, and we are still in the process of being transfigured. If we kept that in mind, no one would accuse Christians of being hypocrites.

We are summoned into the Light. We are not the Light. We get to be polished by the presence and work of the Spirit for the purpose of reflecting the Light. Any attempt at claiming to be the Light or withhold the Light will cast us back into our darkness. But once we receive the Light and let it shine on and in us, we become part of this great movement called the Church, always ready to be reformed.

Responding to the call is the first step to being transfigured in Love. Repentance and obedience are the next steps. We follow where the Good Shepherd leads. Not totally transformed yet for that will happen in the resurrection of the dead but experiencing forgiveness over again in a faithful and cleansing repetition of surrendering. And in the process, we heal others.

That’s what following Jesus does. It leads us to unexpected places, doing unexpected things. Jesus heals our pain and uses our weaknesses with God’s grace so we can be there for others, with others.

Where do you think God is calling you in Jesus? Where is Jesus waiting for you? what is the company Jesus is keeping? Are you willing to be seen in that company?

May you receive grace to rediscover your vocation and respond to Jesus’ call again. May you not feel too proud to embrace the ones Jesus embraces. And may you continue to be part of the throng of saints constantly being renewed by the healing presence of the Lord. Amen.

¹ Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p. 95.