FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

"GO…TO THE LAND I WILL SHOW YOU"

Scripture Lesson: Mark 1: 14-20

This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, January 4, 2026 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Mark 1: 14-20

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry
14 *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God* 15 *and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."*
Jesus Calls the First Disciples
16 *As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers.* 17 *And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people."* 18 *And immediately they left their nets and followed him.* 19 *As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.* 20 *Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*

Go…to the Land I Will Show You

Leader: The word of the Lord.
People: Thanks be to God.

It will not be long, maybe two or three weeks at most—before we begin to see, shall we say, discarded resolutions. They will show up quietly on Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, or tucked into the corner of a yard sale. Items purchased with the very best of intentions are now being sold with phrases like "barely used" or "practically new." Most of those things were not bought cynically. They were bought with hope, with optimism, with the belief that something could be different. That, I think, is what makes this such a deeply human phenomenon.

Because most of us do not lack the desire for renewal. What we lack is clarity about what truly needs to change and then the courage to follow through when that change comes at a cost. The turning of the calendar gives us permission to imagine a new direction. It gives us language like "New Year," "fresh start," and "clean slate." These are good questions to ask during the season of Epiphany, because Epiphany has never been about total clarity. It is about having just enough light to move. It is about God revealing just enough of His purposes to draw us forward, often before we understand where the road will lead. Epiphany does not hand us answers; instead, it invites us to ask the question: What about our lives needs to be different? And what would it mean to truly follow through?

Now, let me be clear about something from the outset. Getting rid of unnecessary clutter—whether it is a piece of exercise equipment, a subscription we'll never use, or a habit that wastes our time and money—those assessments are not difficult. They may be inconvenient, but they are manageable. The harder work—

the far more demanding work—goes to the motivations behind those decisions, that honest reflection about our lives as they truly are. The hard work is not so much inventorying what is happening around us as it is discerning what is happening within us, and that requires that we become aware of the gap between who we are and who God is calling us to be. I dare say, if we are serious about Christian discipleship and truly desire to be spiritually mature, then that kind of discernment must happen, because faith is not about remaining as we are; it is about becoming the people that God wants us to be. And if we are honest with ourselves, none of us are there! I think it is safe to say that there is no one here this morning who has never experienced failure, disappointment, or regret. I suspect that all of us, at one time or another, have looked at our own potential—or the potential of someone we love—and wondered why it remains unfulfilled. This is our reality, but it is also our reality that a new direction is possible, not because we are strong or disciplined enough, but precisely because God is!

But lest we fall back on that false presumption that total clarity must always accompany our discernment, we need to understand that while renewal and growth are real promises of the gospel, the fullness of that future—the shape of it, the path toward it, the timing of it—is known only to God. Scripture puts it this way: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." That promise is not to be interpreted as a detailed roadmap. It means that God is faithful, that God means what He says when He declares in the Book of Hebrews: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." In that sense, God does not promise us clarity. He promises us His presence!

And that distinction between clarity and presence is at the very heart of Epiphany. Epiphany is not the season when everything becomes obvious. It is the season when just enough light breaks through the darkness that we can see the next few faithful steps we are called to take. Like the star that was seen by the wise men, God's guidance is real, and while it rarely illuminates the whole of our life's journey at once, it does show us where to step next. When God called Abram in Genesis 12, Abram was seventy-five years old. He was settled, and his family and life seemed to make sense, but then God spoke: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." And that's it! God didn't say a word about where exactly Abram was going, didn't explain how the promises would be fulfilled, or talk about the logistical challenges. God simply calls Abram and promises to bless him. Abram has no idea how descendants numbering the stars will come to a childless couple, or how such land will become his, or how long the journey will last. Abram knows none of that, but he recognizes that God does, and it is "reckoned unto him as righteousness."

From a Reformed theological perspective, this is crucial because Abram's obedience does not create the promise; it is actually God's promise that creates the obedience. God's grace always comes first. Centuries later, and in our NT Lesson this morning, the scene has shifted to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Peter, Andrew, James, and John are not searching for spiritual enlightenment—they are working. They're fishing, they're mending their nets. They're doing what they have always done. And just then Jesus walked by, and like Abraham and Sarah before them, they are given no details, no explanation, no contract, no expectations. Jesus simply said: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Not only is there vagueness in terms of what following would entail, but the job description itself had never been posted before—fish for people? The disciples don't know where this will lead, what it will cost, or how their families will react. But Jesus knows all these things, and that is enough. God does not call Abram aimlessly, and God does not call fishermen

impulsively, nor does God call us casually. God's call is always purposeful, and it leads us to a future which may be hidden from us, but it is never unknown to God.

To be certain, the assurance of God's promised future matters not only for individuals but for whole communities and even nations. There are faithful people all around the world today, including the people of Venezuela, who for years have lived with uncertainty, economic hardship, and fear. Still, while they do not know exactly what tomorrow will bring, they have hope, and by God's good grace, hope does not disappoint. The future of God's people is never left to chance. God is not in the business of improvising history. God is in the business of redeeming it. So, if God is faithful and present, and if our journey is meaningful and our future secure, then what keeps us from moving forward? Perhaps it is fear—fear of the future, fear of failure, fear of change, fear of losing control. Fear is natural, but the extent to which we let that fear define us is something over which we have at least some control. Take the wise men, for example. They had every reason to fear Herod, yet they followed the light they had been given, trusting that God's purposes were larger than their own. Such is the nature of the hope that sustains people today, those who live in unpredictable times and conditions. Hope enables us to pray, endure, and believe that fear does not have the last word.

So, if it is not fear of what the future may bring that holds us back, then what is it? Perhaps we are too bound to our past, chained to it. Perhaps we remember our failures too clearly and define ourselves by our worst moments, quietly believing that change is no longer possible. And to that, we must concede that yes, the past happened, and no, the past cannot be changed, but that does not mean that our past is somehow sovereign over us. At some point, we have to stop looking backward and start trusting forward. To be clear, this is not a shallow "pie in the sky, everything will be fine" kind of optimism. We live in a broken world, and we ourselves are frail and fallen. There is pain, loss, and suffering on this side of heaven, but there is also God. And that, dear friends, is the gospel: not that there is no sin, but that there is forgiveness; not that there is no suffering, but that there is healing; not that there is no death, but that death has been overcome.

At the heart of every call—from Haran, to Galilee, to Charleston—there is an invitation to move. Faith is not a passive or theoretical thing. Faith has direction. Perhaps that means committing to Christ's Church not as a member but as a disciple. That's what our new member classes are all about, and we have another one coming up at the end of the month. Perhaps our calling involves responding to a long-felt invitation to mission, and so maybe we sign up to go to Chiapas this summer. Perhaps our call involves changes that extend far beyond these walls: forgiveness that needs to be offered, apologies that need to be made, or relationships that need to be restored. Whatever our future entails, we go with God. Will we make wrong turns? Yup. Will we stumble? Absolutely. Will we sometimes resist? Yes. And yet, in spite of all these things, God is faithful. Even our missteps can be redeemed; even our failures can be woven into God's future, and that future is bright—not because we are capable, but because God is faithful.

So let us not wait. Let us not delay our obedience for the perfect moment. Let us choose God's faithful direction today and let us do so not with a spirit of fear, but in a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. And may we always trust that the One who calls us—the One who has begun a faithful work in us—will be faithful to its completion.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.