

Third Sunday after Epiphany
Sanctity of Human Life Sunday

Text: Matthew 4:12-25

Theme: "Life Attraction"

Attraction—many different things can attract. Last week we saw how shiny things can catch our eye. I have some shiny things here—a whole box of them, galvanized roofing nails. Do they catch your eye—maybe. Do you find them attractive, not so likely. But they certainly are attractive to these magnets, maybe better to say they are attracted by the magnets.

Now magnets are quite attractive, but not to everything. They certainly are for ferrous metals, iron being the biggie. I think nickel is also attracted. But aluminum is not. This magnetism just has no appeal, or at least no pull, for the aluminum. We can refer to individuals as magnets if they have a way of drawing in people. This drawing in could be for good things or bad things. Jesus was certainly a people magnet. As we see in our text for today He was attracting huge crowds.

Yes, there are many attractions in life. And there is life itself. Is not life attractive? You would think so, would you not, but that's not always the case, at least not the assessment made by some. Yet, there is an attractiveness of life in Christ that is there no matter what may be going on in life.

Yes, Jesus did attract the crowds. We see that today. He was attracting them not in some random place, but the place that God had in

mind as spoken of in the prophets. It was up north, “the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, and beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.” It was away from the center of Jerusalem. Yes, it was as God has said through Isaiah as we read in Isaiah 9.

In Galilee He begins to proclaim, but not in Nazareth. He leaves Nazareth behind and goes down to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. There were not too many people passing through Nazareth, but they’re were many people passing through Capernaum. It was on a major road. The right magnet could attract many in this place.

Jesus will begin His work in earnest here. The Light was dawning. For those in darkness suddenly there was light. Those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death, on them a light had dawned. Or maybe a better way to put it, “He has caused to dawn a great light on them.” The Light came shining light first of all on their darkness.

His was a message of repentance. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (vs 17) It was initially the same message as John. Jesus wanted to call out of darkness into His marvelous light. One of the first things He does is all followers to help with the calling. He enlists fishers of fish to help with the fishing of men. Walking along the lake He sees and calls Simon and Andrew. Going a little farther He calls James and John to fall in behind. They do; leaving behind, actually in the boat, their father, Zebedee. He’s left holding the nets. These two sets of brothers drop what they are doing and follow Jesus. It would never be the same for them or for us.

They go throughout Galilee and Jesus teaches in the synagogues. He calls out, proclaims, the Gospel. ‘The Kingdom is near, right in front of you!’ He surely is a magnet. He does attract like this magnet attracts the nails, but greatly multiplied. It’s not just crowds, it’s “great crowds.” (vs 25) Matthew tells us where all these folks are coming from. It is from Galilee and Decapolis, from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan (vs 25). His fame was also going out throughout Syria (vs 24). Unless you have a map in your head you may not appreciate how large an area this is. It is the whole area that had at one time been part of the kingdom of David and Solomon in its greatness.

And what was the draw, why such a magnet? Certainly there had been a lot of anticipation. It had been a long night, long in waiting for the dawning. They hoped this Son of David, Prophet like Moses, blessed seed of Abraham, would be worth the wait. John had them primed and ready. His baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins was readying them for the coming, greater One. And then as we saw a couple of weeks ago, suddenly He was there in the Jordan being baptized. The heavens open, the Father speaks and the Holy Spirit comes down as a dove on Jesus. John will be proclaiming of Him, “behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” But John’s proclaiming and pointing days soon come to an end. He is arrested (vs 12).

Yes, the people were in high anticipation. Here He is. Listen to His words and just look what He can do! He proclaims the Gospel and heals. Every disease and ailment is subject to His command and touch. Sickness,

oppression from demons, infirmity, epilepsy, all give way to health and wholeness before Him. The people come out in droves. He heals all. Who wouldn't come?

Some, probably many, even most, come in false or confused hope. They are putting temporary relief over eternal transformation (still a problem, you know). We will see this illustrated in those who will go out into the wilderness seeking Him out after they had eaten to their full the day before from the power of His hand. They hoped that under him it would be like that day after day and better. Their granaries and vats would be full, enemies would be at bay, and their bodies would be healthy to enjoy many a day of peace and contentment in the shade of their trees. The hope of a Messiah who would deliver all that was the draw for many.

Jesus was the Messianic Magnet. What draws, attracts people today? It just may be living life to death. Jesus says that whoever would save his life will lose it. (Matthew 16:25) He warns us to guard against covetousness as one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions (Luke 21:15). How do you live life to death? It is when the created things of this life which includes needful things, good things, and desired things replace the Creator. This is living life to ultimate death, the death of the weeping and gnashing of teeth where the tears never stop and the grinding never ceases.

This is all a here below outlook, even a gravity attraction. Everything that has mass has gravity, the bigger and closer, the greater. This is the attraction of being drawn together in corruption, hanging out together and

just making it as good as you can. There really is some gravity to this gravity attraction, the gravity of missing out of the life with the Creator, the gravity of the ultimate death just mentioned.

Life here below apart from trust in the Creator can become very unattractive, more of a drag and a burden. It can come to a point where death seems better, either your own or someone who is dragging you down, be that the unborn or the elderly—detach, toss, and throw away. That has happened a lot, around one million abortions in the US a year, over 50 million since 1973. To help put that in perspective, the total population of the 50 largest cities in the US (cities proper, not the metropolitan areas) is less than 14 million.

Death is seen as the answer. So it was with Jesus. The judgment would be made that His was a life to be discarded, tossed, thrown to the garbage heap. Total we see great crowds. A time would come when those crowds would diminish as it became clear that He had not come to bring the final kingdom on earth as it was. His kingdom was not of this world. Those who were hoping for a heaven on earth Messiah and were severely disappointed could have been among those in the crowd raising their voices in cries of, “crucify!”

He would be crucified because the assessment of Jesus would go beyond disappointment. They were almost like these aluminum nails here by the magnet. There was not an attraction to be closer to Him, no away with Him. There were those who felt threatened, those in position of power who felt threatened: elders, teachers of the law, chief priests, and

the High Priest. He would be despised and rejected, crucified dead and buried. He had to go so they could continue on their same paths. So was their hope and so was their plan.

But we know there is more. There is the attraction of life. Think about it. Life is a wonderful thing. Do you know that not a single one of us chose life (that is, our own). It is a gift. We are much more than the product of conception, formed in the womb by the Creator, fearfully and wonderfully made! We do find joy and contentment in the creation around us—in the food we eat, what we drink, what we wear, the homes we live in, and most of all from the people around us. What a gift! Life is attractive.

The life that comes in Christ is even more attractive. This life too is gift, not a choice on our part. We have been reborn in Him. We were in the shadow of death, even dead in our sin. The gift of new life, rebirth, is in our risen and living Lord Jesus. He has fulfilled all righteousness for us. There is no spot, blemish, or flaw in Him. He lives the perfect life and then dies. It was necessary. It was the way spoken of by the prophets, the way laid out by God for Him to take all the punishment for our filth in our place. Now we are clothed in Him, connected to Him, our risen and reigning Lord by the work of the Spirit in the new birth of baptism.

Yes, there is much beauty, much joy, much attraction to the life of this world. But it's flawed, severely, even fatally so. There is death and decay because of sin. In one sense this world is a womb that gives birth to death. But we have the good news, the good news of eternal transformation in Christ.

“Here We Stand.” So we see our bulletin insert. It is simply replacing the “I” used by Martin Luther with the “We.” You may have heard already this is the 500th anniversary, 2017, of the Reformation, the big day will be October 31. On that day in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg—really rocked his world. He would stand before the Holy Roman Emperor in 1521 and utter those “Here I stand” words. He would not back down from the Gospel truth. He knew the Gospel is the power of salvation for everyone who believes. Notice it is “is.”

Here we stand. We stand for life as those given life and as those reborn to new life. The insert describes what we stand for, who we stand for and even how (in what manner) we stand. We stand for light in the darkness. We are such light to those who may find themselves in rather dark places with the attractiveness of our care and life. I read the one point (of twelve), “Here we stand to celebrate the blessings of abundant and everlasting life.” This is an eternity of abundance and life that starts now through faith in Christ. It’s a good deal, a great deal! It is from death to life, from darkness to life, from confusion to direction, from no people to God’s people. In Christ we are changed from those who could care less about the needs of others, and were careless about life, to those who understand the preciousness of life and extend care. Connected to Christ, His attractiveness extends through us. It is a life attraction. For His sake. Amen