Isaiah 9: 1-4; Psalm 27:1-11; I Corinthians 1: 10-18; Matthew 4: 12-23

Once a married couple decided to celebrate their wedding anniversary along with their family and friends. They made a colourful invitation card and sent them to some of their close friends. One of their friends telephoned this couple to know, why they have written in the invitation card, “We are on the seventh floor, apartment 7.D. Just touch the button with your elbow.”

This friend asked, “why should I use my elbow to press the button?”

The husband replied, “Since all my friends are not coming empty handed, we thought that using elbow to press the calling bell button would be more convenient.”

The married couple in this story expected that their friends must not come empty handed. But todays reading passages give us an invitation to follow Jesus with empty hands.

The Old Testament passage for today explains a magnificent deliverance that God intended to give his chosen people. They were invited to receive liberation from the life of darkness.

God assured them that when they accept his call the yoke of their burden will be removed. The bar across their shoulders will be removed, and they will be delivered from the rod of their oppressor. Isaiah gave this hope by reminding them their ancestors’ deliverance from the hands of Midian. In the day of Midian refers to the deliverance that was accomplished by Gideon against the Midianites (Judges 7, 8). It was accomplished not by human strength, but by the power of God.

In 9: 1, we see Isaiah mentions a “former period” of deep darkness in the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, in Galilee. The Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III, conquered the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali and deported the citizens of those lands to Assyria in 732 BC. These geographical designations all refer to a territory directly west of the Sea of Chinnereth, later to be named the Sea of Galilee. Once they were walking in darkness, and now a light from the Most High is going to shine upon them. Isaiah gives them a great futuristic hope of Light which offers a strong promise that God will not forsake them.

Today’s Gospel passage says that Jesus Christ begins his ministry in Galilee, and calls fishermen into his ministry to give light to the world. He also invites us to receive the light from the Most High, and sends us to the world with a divine purpose. Jesus Christ calls us “Follow me, I will make you fish for people.” Are we ready to fish for people and mend the net?

While Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he called two brothers, Peter and Andrew who were fishing, and also two other brothers James and John, who were mending their nets. Matthew doesn’t give us personality profiles of these four people. The only available information is that James and John were with their father Zebedee at the time. They were ordinary men – fisher men – doing their work.

Andrew and Simon left their nets at once and followed Jesus. James and John immediately left their boat and their father and followed him. For them, nets and boats were the tools of their trade, the tools they used to work. Nets and boats represent their work, their daily routine, their habits, the things they are good at, the things that make them successful in what they do. They used it to generate income and maintain financial security. It provided them a sense of identity.

It had enormous value in their daily life such as monetary value, social value, as well as emotional value. When Jesus called them, their nets and boats didn’t hold them back, didn’t make them hesitant to follow him, and didn’t distract from Jesus’ call. Another big sacrifice is that they left their father and family. Leaving their nets, boats and family was a major sacrifice for the sake of Jesus Christ. They did not stand for their attachments, their habits, possessions, ideas and ideals, loyalties, positions, and programmes. When we are called, get up, leave what we are doing, and follow Jesus. Jesus Christ calls us to join in his kingdom to be transformed in his image. He calls us to take what we have and who we are and put it to new use; fishermen becoming fishers of men.

I want to emphasise their special skill in mending nets. It is important for fishermen to get more fish into their nets. A net with holes cannot keep maximum fish. A fisherman never likes missing fish from the holes of his nets. Therefore, he will make sure that his fishing net is properly mended. What is the significance of mending the nets in today’s context, where nations are divided in the name of creed, class, race and culture; and where churches are divided in the name of denominations?

In today’s epistle reading we see that St Paul reminded the Churches in Corinth that they were called to do ministry in the church with a definite purpose, that is proclamation of the Gospel. It must be achieved without division among them. He reminds them that the power of the cross of Christ might not be emptied. Mending the net requires, leaving our ego, our selfish approach, our possessions, ideas and ideals, loyalties and positions; because we belong to God.

We see everywhere that divisions are widening largely. Jesus calls us today to mend the net in order to heal the divisions. Let us respond to His call sincerely and mend the network of relationship to build up unity and peace. We need to understand that Christianity is not merely a religion, but a spirituality of love and unusual kindness.

Jesus calls us to himself, to join him in his mission to the world, to give a message that humankind is one, irrespective of class, colour, caste, creed, and gender. As we celebrate the “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,” Jesus is asking us to keep up the necessary maintenance to sustain unity and peace.

Now I would like to invite you to spend few moments in silence.

The call to Jesus is very personal.

Jesus is coming to our midst. He is seeing us and speaking to us.

What is he saying to you?

What are the things that you are called to leave behind as you follow him?

Are you willing to let these things go in order to follow him?

**Amen.**