

Matthew 4:12-25

We don't have much use for either cockroaches or moths. Both are unwanted...especially in our homes. We may wonder why God preserved them along with Noah in the ark. Although one may speculate that both roaches and moths found their way on board unbeknownst to Noah. The difference between a roach and a moth is interesting with regard to light. A moth flies toward the light. But when the light is turned on in a kitchen that has cockroaches, immediately the roaches scurry away into their dark hiding places. I use this analogy to introduce our text for today even though the subject matter is not the most pleasant because, as vile as this seems, you and I need to recognize the people of our text, as well as ourselves, as either roaches or moths.

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus that when He went to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, the region around the Sea of Galilee, the people dwelling in darkness there will *"have seen a great light."* Reading through our text, we see quite a number of moths. As the Light went around teaching, and proclaiming the Gospel, and healing every sort of disease and affliction, great crowds of people, like thousands of moths, were attracted to the Light and began to follow Him.

On the other hand, our text also tells us that Jesus came to Galilee after leaving Nazareth. The words, *"leaving Nazareth,"* are not placed here in Matthew 4 as a geographical reference point. He left Nazareth because the people there, like cockroaches, wanted no part of the Light. They took offense at His teaching. They were unwilling to believe in, and follow Him. Nazareth was a city of roaches, but Galilee was filled with moths.

Now I am not going to ask you to consider which of the two you resemble more. The truth is that we are born as roaches, but in baptism we are resurrected as moths. We are born from Adam and Eve who fled the light and hid in darkness as God came looking for them. Yet on the day you were baptized, you became like those living in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, as the great Light, Jesus Christ, dawned upon you. And now as a baptized child of God, you love the Light of Christ and follow Him in your life.

But there isn't a person here today who follows Jesus perfectly. Even the men He called in Galilee did not follow Him perfectly. Simon and Andrew, James and John were not model disciples. There is no such creature. They all seemed to be willing followers when Jesus said to them, *"Follow Me."* But as we keep reading, we see them stumble and fall away time after time. These men were moths, for they came to the Light and followed the Light. But their Old Adam--the roach--still lived within them. For they all fled from the Light in the darkness of Gethsemane, scurrying away into their hiding places. Peter fled from the Light as he denied Jesus three times, hiding from the truth that he knew and loved Jesus. All four of them hid like roaches on the great day of Easter. They hid in darkness behind locked doors.

Like these disciples, I am preaching today to men, women, and children who are moths. The Light is here in this House of God, for His Word of Truth is proclaimed here. The same words Jesus spoke in Galilee are spoken here, and you, like moths, have come to the Light. You do not scurry away when the Light of Christ is dawning here in church, hiding behind excuses. You are attracted to the Light. You come to be in the Light--to hear His words, to receive His body and blood in the Sacrament. You are children of Light.

And yet you know that the Old Adam--the roach--still lives in your hearts. We may sit in the pew like moths, but when our sin is exposed, when the Law hits a nerve, we immediately, like roaches, tune

out the preacher and hide behind our flimsy excuses. We even, like the people of Nazareth, become offended at the Light. We do not like hearing how we are not good enough for God. The roach in us despises the Light and sees no need for coming to the Sacrament of the Altar. It sees no need for confession and absolution. It sees no need for worship, for receiving the gifts of God. Truly we would all run and flee when Christ Jesus is preached if it was only up to us, for we are roaches by nature who hate the Light. But God has made you His moths.

The people of Galilee did not rise up and follow Jesus because they were better than the people of Nazareth. God was being merciful to them. He was bringing them to Jesus. That is why you and I are here today. It's why you are baptized. It's why you come to the Lord's Supper. It's why you hear His words and take them to heart. God is merciful to you.

And His mercy is clearly seen in how Jesus lived and died for you. He did not run and hide like a roach when the soldiers came to arrest Him. He did not give excuses to Pilate; He spoke the truth. He who is the great Light did not fear the darkness of death, but He allowed them to snuff out His light on a cross so that you would not know the darkness of hell. Jesus entered the darkness for you. He entered the lair of the roaches. He came into our hiding places, not to shame us, but to shine upon us with His grace.

And so you do not need to run away from the preaching of God's Word. You do not need to shy away when the Sacrament is on the altar. You do not need to make excuses for staying away from the study of the Word of God. Your place is in the Light. God has called you in baptism to be people of Light. He forgives you for your dark deeds. He forgives you for your sins done in darkness. But you are in darkness no more. Your place is with Christ. And as a moth of God, you do not flee the Light. You come toward it. You follow Jesus. You want His words in your life. You hunger for His Sacrament.

It is roaches who stay away from the Light. It is roaches who live in darkness. It is roaches who make excuses for staying away when the light of God's Word is heard, read, and studied. And the roach--the Old Adam--in all of us, will try to control us day after day. Next Sunday it will want to hide away and not come to the Light. Every day this week it will not want God's Word to be read and heard in our homes. The roach that lives in all of us cannot live in the Light, and so it wants to keep us in darkness.

But your God is merciful. He came to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali to shine upon those living in darkness there. And He is here for you now. He is your Light. He has called you out of the darkness. He has forgiven your sins. He has made you His moths. Amen.