

Sunday Sermon: January 26, 2020

The Gospel of the Lord: Matthew 4: 12-23

Sermon Theme: Revealed: The Light of the World

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Light is pretty important to us. One of the things that draws people to Las Vegas is the millions of lights that one sees on the strip. Even if we have lived in a house for a long time, there is security in a night light in the hallway or in the bathroom while we are asleep. When the power goes out, we usually grab some sort of flashlight in order to light our way. Light is pretty important for us because we feel safer in the light

On the other hand, darkness can make us a little scared. When the military wants the element of surprise they wait till night to make the attack. We are more on guard when we drive or walk at night. Without the light we just can't see as much so we might be more frightened at a sound or a movement. And... we all know that you don't want to walk down a dark alley at night because that is where all the crime happens.

The Bible uses the same thoughts and feelings that we have about dark and light as a picture for us. It uses the dark as a picture of danger, sin and death. It uses the light as a picture of hope, forgiveness and eternal. The Bible reveals Jesus as the Light many times. We see that in our sermon text his morning. Jesus is revealed as the light that drives the darkness from our life. We will also see he is the light that we should follow.

The Bible tells us a lot about Jesus preaching and ministry, but it doesn't get into the small details very often. It seems like Matthew is giving us details that we don't really need. Who of us today, really knows the difference between Nazareth and Capernaum and Jerusalem. Many times they are names of cities in the Bible that we read passed without thinking about.

Yet, there is always a reason that God includes what he does. Even what seems like a small detail of Jesus moving from his childhood home of Nazareth to Capernaum, doesn't seem all that important, until we hear the prophecy of Isaiah that was fulfilled. ¹⁵ “**Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—** ¹⁶ **the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.**”

Without getting lost in the history of the Israel, this whole northern region of Galilee which included the cities of Nazareth and Capernaum, which was the ancestral lands of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, was not well-regarded by the people who lived in Judah and Jerusalem.

Nazareth and Capernaum in Galilee were to Judah and Jerusalem what Pahrump is to Las Vegas. Pahrump, Galilee, is not a bad place ... it's just not Las Vegas, it's not Jerusalem, it doesn't measure up. Where did all the important people go for a good time? Where was the action at? Not in Galilee, but in Judah.

It was also not well-regarded because of the history, Isaiah and Matthew call it the Galilee of the Gentiles. Yet, even though the people didn't regard it as special, it would be special because of the prophecy which said the light would be revealed in Galilee and that is where Jesus began his earthly ministry.

If you ask anyone who has even been in an active war zone, they will tell you that the nights can be the longest, hardest times. There seems to be a special kind of danger that comes when night falls. There are more places to hide, more shadows to lurk in, more dangers around every corner. It is at night that the enemy can sneak up on you. Often soldiers need to be on high alert because of what might happen in the darkness of night.

Isaiah tells us that Jesus came into a world of people who were living in spiritual darkness of sin. In this dark world of sin there is a war going on. It is not one where bullets are flying and bombs are being dropped, it is a spiritual war for our souls. The devil does not want us to see the light of Jesus or to know the joy of the light of faith in our life. The devil wants us to remain in the darkness and blindness of sin. The devil knows that the longer we follow him into the darkness of sin and unbelief the harder it will be for us to turn from those sins, repent and believe.

Just like the enemy in a war-zone, the devil waits to attack. His attacks can be any time, but often he is sneaky and will attack us when we are the least prepared.

One drink turns into 3 too many, some innocent conversation with a co-worker turns into a flirtatious affair, some complaints about salary turns into coveting and then stealing, what at first seemed a little lie, turns into a large portion of our life that we are being dishonest about, what seemed like an innocent dabble of fun at the casino, turns into an obsession and an addiction that attacks our lives and controls us.

If the devil were to come directly at us with any of these temptations we would more than likely turn them aside. We know that being drunk is as sin, as is adultery, as is stealing, lying and any other addiction we have that takes over our life. But he doesn't attack us directly, he sneaks up, like an enemy at night, and tempts us to sink into the darkness of sin and guilt with him.

Those same soldiers will tell you how happy they are as the sun rises. The sun chases the darkness away and makes things clear. The danger of the shadows are gone, the threats lurking around the corner can be seen, what was a hiding place in darkness is now clearly seen.

This is the picture that Isaiah prophecies and Matthew quotes. **¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.** To all those, both Jews and Gentiles, who are living and fighting against the darkness of sin, the light has come to chase away the darkness and to bring his light.

Isaiah says the light has dawned. The light brings light to the world and chases away the dark just like the sun chases away the last shades of night. The light brings hope and comfort where once there wasn't any.

As we walk in the darkness of sin, we might try to find a solution for this sin or that. It is really no different than trying to move around at night without a light. How well does that work? Many of us have stubbed toes, bruised shins, or other injuries because we thought we could do it ourselves without a light. The same is true for our sins. We are lost in the darkness, we can't find the door that leads out of the room of death no matter how hard we try to find it.

We need the light. We need Jesus because he not only shows us where the door of heaven is, Jesus is the light because he is the door to heaven. By his perfect life and innocent death he can not only show us where the door he, he can also usher us through because he has taken away every sin that we commit. His gifts of forgiveness and eternal life are so great they can remove the fear and guilt that come from the darkness of sin from our life. The light of Christ can and does have an impact on our life. We can and should live in the joy of the light of the forgiveness and eternal life that Jesus has given to us.

When the power comes back on, what do we do with the light that was so important to us a few minutes before? How do our feelings change when everything is moving along smoothly? So often we set the light aside and forget about it until we need it again.

It is so easy for us to do that with God. It is so easy to be tempted to see Jesus more as a flashlight that is there when we need him, but something to be put in a drawer and forgotten about till later. The devil doesn't want us to walk into the light of forgiveness and eternal life, he wants us to dabble in the darkness of sin and think we can always jump back into the light.

When we look at the second half of our sermon text, we get a pretty good example of what this message of forgiveness and hope should motivate us to do. **¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."**

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

What did the saving message of the light motivate Simon, Andrew, James and John to do when they heard Jesus preach and teach? They followed Jesus.

It wouldn't be very smart if we were in that dark room if we refused to follow the person with the light. It wouldn't be very smart to turn the other way and continue to try to work alone. That's no smarter than having the light of Jesus in our lives and choosing not to follow it.

We see what the light, Jesus, has done for us every Sunday when we hear the Word or celebrate the sacrament. We see what Jesus, our light, has done for us every time we have a private devotion in the Word. We see our sins forgiven, our eternal life won and we see those things given to us freely by our Savior. When we see this light shining brightly before us, we follow that light.

We know what those followers of Jesus became don't we? They became disciples, they became sharers of the light. They reflected the light of Jesus to others.

This is also important for us to understand. Part of walking in the light, following that light, is that we share the light and reflect that light, of hope and comfort to others.

Jesus has come to bring sinners like you and me the light of hope and comfort. Jesus began his ministry in this little place called Galilee, just as the prophecy says. He has chased away the darkness of sin and temptation and replaced it with forgiveness and eternal life. As we walk in the light and follow the light, may it be so important to us that we cling to it and reflect that light to others.