

Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 25-26, 2020

Readings: Isaiah 8:23-9:3; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17; Matthew 4:12-23

Preacher: Sheryl Zabel

Today's gospel—Matthew's account of the start of Jesus' public ministry—is so rich. It begins with Jesus' move to Capernaum, in a region once occupied by the Assyrians. He was recalling a famous prophecy of Isaiah, that the people who walked in darkness would see a great light.

Then we hear that Jesus began preaching to the people, calling on them to repent, because the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.

Jesus called two sets of brothers who were fishermen to become his disciples; and Peter, Andrew, James and John followed him without hesitation.

Finally comes a summary of Jesus ministry in Galilee—teaching, preaching and healing.

When we hear or read this portion of Matthew; when we share our thoughts with a class or a prayer group; we often talk about how we were called by God, how we responded, and what we believe we have been called to do. We talk about the signs of the Kingdom or the Reign of God in our world today. And we think about how we might proclaim the presence of God's reign, and not just with words.

But when I first read the gospel last week, I was struck by the prophecy of Isaiah, as cited in Matthew: "...the people who sit in darkness haven seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen."

Although his fellow Israelites still lived in the darkness of Assyrian tyranny, Isaiah spoke as if the light had already come to them. And, in a sense it had, for God was with them. God had not abandoned them.

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was truly the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, and his move to Capernaum was a demonstration of it.

Yet, almost two thousand years after Jesus began preaching, teaching and healing, the darkness still seems to be with us. The fires in Australia, severe poverty in so many countries, refugees hoping for a new life, injustices of every sort, and all of those never-ending wars.

We can see darkness in our personal lives as well. A beloved cousin of mine has just lost two people very close to her. Will she find consolation in the love of her sisters, and in the joy her son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren bring to her?

Jesus, the divine light for all humanity, still shines today. His light shines when we care for one another and use our God-given gifts to serve one another. His light shines when we care about the earth, our home, and all of the life on it. His light shines when there is peace, and each one of us can contribute a small amount at least, to the peace we so desperately need.

For the light that is Jesus *does* shine in the darkness.

Amen.