

Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

When Jesus receives the news that John the Baptist has been arrested, he leaves the district and goes to Galilee to continue his ministry. Matthew reminds us of the prophecy of Isaiah that is being fulfilled with these events taking place. Straight away Jesus begins to preach, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near.” As Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee, he sees two fishermen at work, the brothers Simon and Andrew. He speaks simply and plainly to them, giving them the invitation, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” A little further along the beach, Jesus comes across two more brothers, James and John, also fishermen. They and their father are in their boat, mending their nets. Jesus offers the same call and they too follow immediately. Jesus then sets off journeying throughout Galilee teaching, preaching and healing the sick.

The teaching of “repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near” began with John the Baptist and has become known during the time of his ministry. During that same time Jesus has been preparing for his ministry. Now that Jesus’ ministry is gaining recognition and momentum, John fades into the background as he is arrested. Jesus begins proclaiming the same message and his ministry comes to the fore.

COCU 11A Readings

(2020 commentary from Church of Scotland Starters for Sunday)

Psalm 27: 1, 4-9

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

**For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.**

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

The Psalms are replete with topics of prayer and meditation, which have sustained people of faith for millennia. Psalm 27 covers themes of feeling hemmed in, being under assault and fear of abandonment; of trust and hope of relief. The implications for mental and emotional, as well as spiritual health are perhaps obvious, as are the physical concerns that likely elicited the initial inspiration. The selected verses open with expressions of confidence. There is an echo of the assurance of Psalm 23:5, desiring to live in God’s house. This may rerepresent a place of worship, God’s tangible presence, or heaven itself. The yearning of the final verse could be seen to speak strongly to an abiding need for atonement and redemption. Alternatively, perhaps the confidence of young faith is giving way to seasons of doubt and separation anxiety. This might not be a full-on ‘dark night of the soul’, but it certainly exhibits an occasion for the wrong kind of fear. Not the fear and awe that are due to our powerful God, but the fear and dread of circumstance and oppression where we might question the level of support we receive from others and especially God. Yet, for all the concern shown, and the conflicting emotions, the key phrase in verse 9 is one of faith: “O God of my salvation”. Oh Elohim, my Yeshua, my Joshua, my Jesus.

Isaiah 9:1-4

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,” appears in Matthew 4:16 and in Acts 26:18 and culminates in John 8:12, where Jesus says: “I am the light of the world.” In her book *Walking in Darkness and Light*, Kathy Galloway writes that because we so rarely experience real darkness it is easy to forget what it’s actually like to walk in the dark. It takes longer to get to where you’re going, sometimes you don’t get there at all, you get lost or you get fed up or despondent, you turn back, you give up. In the dark you shorten your steps, bump into things and feel the physical tension as you stumble and feel your way ahead. In the dark you hear noises that seem different, louder, stronger, perhaps more threatening than they would in the day. Your imagination plays tricks, you see things that aren’t there and fears rise. Your heart starts to race and your breathing falters. Walking in the dark you are guarded, tense, fearful. Freedom, mobility, beauty, relaxation are all gravely limited.

Darkness suggests a world where nobody can see very well or knows which way to turn; it conveys a sense of uncertainty, of being lost, of being afraid or threatened; it suggests conflict between races, nations, individuals of all types and ages; darkness fills our newspapers; and it is often darkness that causes us to pray.

What a relief to see a light in the distance. You follow the light you have and pray for more light. God’s purpose is like a stream of light shining into the world, exploring and exposing the dark places and helping pilgrims find their way. It is our privilege as God’s children to help shine that same light to reach and guide others and to become a beacon of light ourselves. Our good actions and our prayers can be channels of God’s goodness and light.

The 8th-century BC prophet Isaiah was writing at a time when the Israelites were threatened by the Assyrians, their powerful neighbour. They lived under the darkness and threat of terror, violence, war and invasion, but Isaiah was

alarmed by their blindness to their own injustice and disobedience. It was their wrong relationships and skewed priorities that would inevitably bring destruction upon themselves unless they changed their ways and became people of the light. The prophecy of Isaiah is that into this same darkness, whatever its form or force, a great light will shine, and where the gospel is proclaimed, that light will shine ever brightly. The Advent hope and promise reveals Christ as light of the world. The terror of darkness comes from what we cannot see, the terror about light comes from what we can now see.

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

This passage is a call to unity in the midst of divisions in the early Christian community in Corinth. Paul outlines the divisions in the community, which seems to have divided itself under the authority of different leaders. Paul also discusses the authority by which people are baptised; it is in the name of Jesus Christ that people were and are baptised, it is not in the name of the person performing the baptism. Paul in this passage also hints at the different roles of people within the fledgling Christian community in Corinth.

I see: Paul’s call to unity in the midst of divisions.

I wonder: How we as individuals, churches and communities can bring about unity in the midst of fragmentation.

I understand: The importance of seeking unity for people of faith in order that the Good News of Christ’s death and resurrection for all may be maintained.