

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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**THIRD SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME**

22nd January 2023

Matt. 4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ 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.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Matt. 4:18 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. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ 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. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Matt. 4:23 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.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

There are three scenes here: (1) the timing and location of Jesus’ proclamation; (2) the call of the first disciples; (3) a general description of the ministry.

KIND OF WRITING

- (1) The first scene is a kind of epitome, a synthesis of Jesus preaching, amplified by a quotation from the Bible. Historically, Zebulun and Naphtali are two of the twelve tribes whose restoration is symbolised by the twelve apostles.
 - (2) The call stories are technically short scenes (chreiai), which put their finger on the essential. It is noticeable that all dimensions of human interest (e.g., did they know him before hand? how did they feel?) are omitted and we are left with two theological aspects: the sovereign call of Jesus and the response of the disciples, apparently totally without reservation.
 - (3) The summary statement gives a general sense of reaction to Jesus, to be filled out in the unfolding narrative proper.
- Verse 19** “Follow me” is a unique expression associated only with Jesus. Jesus selects his followers; in contrast, disciples presented themselves to the rabbis for instruction. There is no story in the Synoptic Gospels of someone taking the initiative and successfully becoming a disciple.

Thought for the day: The heart of Jesus’ proclamation is given in today’s Gospel. As is often noted, the word “repent” is not the best translation of the original Greek and it would be better to use some other expression such as “convert.” It really means a new way of looking at everything, a new mind or outlook. It may of course include being sorry about the past, but the real energy is towards the future: “convert and put your trust in the Good News.” We could put it like this: from what are we called to conversion is important; more important is towards what are we being called?

When we join together for liturgy we often begin by acknowledging our ‘gathering’, indicating that we are being called out of our ordinary everyday lives to gather as a community, aware of God’s presence among us. We are also called every day into God’s service, invited to repentance, a change of heart. Like the disciples we are called, and we call; we are gathered and we gather. When we are drawn in by Jesus, we extend the same open welcome to others. The kingdom is at hand, and Jesus’ net gathers indiscriminately, regardless of social or economic status.

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.

(Anne Frank)

TRÍONA DOHERTY & Jane Mellett—Go Deeper

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light” ... Jesus applies this to himself and his message. Who have been the Jesus people who have been a source of light to you? Have you been such a light for others?
2. His message was a call to repentance, to a change of attitude toward God, from seeing God as one to be feared, to seeing God as a God of love. When have you heard that call in your life? What was it like for you?
3. Jesus invited disciples to join him in his mission. In responding, the disciples “left their nets” to follow Jesus. Sometimes we have to disentangle ourselves from other things to give ourselves freely and wholeheartedly to a commitment. Have you experienced being ‘enmeshed’ and being free? Where did you find life?
4. In v 23 we have a summary of the ministry of Jesus – “proclaiming the good news of the kingdom” and witnessing to this by teaching and healing. Who have been the people you have known who have witnessed to the ‘kingdom’, the reign of God in our world? What have been the signs that accompanied their witness? When have you done this yourself?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

Fittingly, Jesus’ preaching begins where John left off and is an echo of what John had said: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand”. The theme of the kingdom is a favourite one of Matthew and its meaning must be understood properly if we are to appreciate all the richness of Matthew’s account of Jesus’ life. The other evangelists call it the kingdom of God, but Matthew’s preference for the term heaven is an indicator of his Jewish background. In Jewish tradition the use of God’s name is avoided. The phrase refers to God’s reign or rule on earth and not to paradise or the end time. It is not, however, a political or geographical entity, rather it comes about when God’s will is done, and that is what Jesus’ life and preaching is all about. It is striking the Jesus’ first action after proclaiming the kingdom is to call disciples because the task of witnessing to the kingdom is not something done by Jesus alone - rather he calls disciples who will share in and continue this work. The call is presented in radical terms - leaving everything to follow him. This is because the kingdom of heaven is a radical option, often at odds with the way of the world and its values.

SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand

The situation in Galilee is tragic. Inspired by a text from Isaiah, Matthew sees the people dwelling in darkness. On the earth there are *shadows of death*. Chaos, injustice, and evil reign. Life cannot flourish. Things are not as God wants them. The Father does not reign here. However, in the midst of darkness, the people will begin seeing a *great light*. In the shadows of death a *light begins to shine*. That is always what Jesus is, a great light shining in the world.

According to Matthew, Jesus begins his preaching with the word *Repent*. This is his first, basic word. This is the time for conversion. Open yourselves to the kingdom of God. Do not *sit in darkness*, but *walk in the light*.

Within the church there is a *great light*. It is Jesus. In him God reveals himself to us. Therefore, even today the first word of Jesus that we must listen to in the church is *Repent*. Retrieve our Christian identity. Go back to our roots. Help the church to move into a new phase of Christianity more faithful to Jesus. Live with a new consciousness of being followers of Jesus. Put ourselves at the service of God’s kingdom. Pray for a new heart for the church.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - Following in the Footsteps of Jesus,

Today’s passage belongs to the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry. It is a very significant time. John has been arrested and Jesus decides he must make his move. He is self-confident, determined; he knows what he is about – a role model for us all in our different vocations and also for the church in the world today.

Scripture Prayers

Lord, we remember with gratitude the great liberation movements which have been your blessing for our time:

- the declaration of human rights,
- the affirmation of women’s dignity and right to equal treatment,
- the struggle for independence in former colonies,
- sharing of gifts between different churches, religions and faiths,
- the breakdown of all forms of racial discrimination,
- the recognition of the rights of children.

All these movements arose at a time when their leaders were imprisoned in one way or another, but new life emerged in unexpected places.

It was like when John the Baptist was arrested and Jesus returned to Galilee and began preaching that a new era of grace was at hand.

Lord, we pray today for those who are feeling lost

- rejected by family and friends,
- overwhelmed by remorse,
- having failed an important examination.

We pray that some Jesus person may go and sit with them, so that the prophecy of Isaiah may be fulfilled, and they who now live in darkness will see a great light, and on them who dwell in the land and shadow of death a light will dawn.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels, Year A