22-28 January 2023 Matthew 4: 12-23

About turn

Read the passage from Matthew. It is written below.

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, 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 lake – 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.

**Bible notes**

The quotation from Isaiah encourages us to look beneath the surface of the story. It is a bit like the mood music in a TV drama – someone has moved house and the music reveals the significance of the moment: is this happy, sad, triumphant or tense? The music also gives us some hint as to what will happen next. Jesus has moved to Capernaum. But this is much more than a house move, it is the beginning of something long awaited. It is the moment when the kingdom of heaven comes near. Just as the sun rose gloriously over the Sea of Galilee, so a spiritual light was rising among them. There are differences between our text of Isaiah 9 and the quotation given in Matthew. This is because Matthew’s quotation is taken from the Septuagint, the Greek interpretation of the Old Testament, whereas the NRSV version of Isaiah is translated directly from the Hebrew. The Septuagint (LXX) version is more

intense, referring to the people who sat in darkness (rather than ‘walked’) and were in the region and shadow of death. The general meaning is the same though – the days when Jesus commenced his ministry were a hinge moment in history. Perhaps this should shape how we read the calling of the first disciples? The simplicity of the call – ‘Follow me’ – and the immediacy of their response can make us cast about for a more nuanced story: surely they must have already met Jesus, surely they did not entirely leave their families in the lurch, and so on. These things are quite likely so, but they miss the challenge of the ‘now’ within the story – now is the moment when the ministry begins, now is the moment to recognise this and to take the risk to follow him.

**Reflection**

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

If you go into a travel agent, how many brochures are about sitting by the pool and how many about adventure holidays? There will almost certainly be many more of the former. And (with apologies to those who do always choose ‘adventure’) this reflects the choices many of us make – that we often prefer something familiar, restful, quiet (relatively) and less challenging. If the disciples had done that, where would we be now? Jesus’ call to follow required leaving the familiar behind. It needed a complete change of focus and direction. And it needed this ‘immediately’. What does that say to us?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

 

**Questions**

* What happens when you swap the G to a C? What might this tell us about repentance?
* How is life transformed for those who repent?

**Prayer**

Adapt to your local context.

#### **A prayer of thanksgiving**

Father God,
Thank you that you sent Jesus
who came to give us freedom through the cross.
You have called us to put down our ‘nets’ and follow you.
You have offered us new life in you –
a new path to follow, as a new light has dawned.
Thank you that you walk beside us on the journey,
the journey from darkness into your marvellous light.
Thank you that you offer us life full of adventure,
life in all its fullness.
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Lord, send us out
**as renewed people.**
Help us to turn away from what is wrong
**and turn to what is right.**
Help us to turn towards our neighbours
**and to all who are lost.**
Help us to turn away from distractions
**and towards more adventuring with you.**
Help us now
**and always.**
**Amen.**

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