

Sermon: Matthew 4:12-23 8.00 am Service 26/01/2020

Today's reading is all about fulfilment of prophecy and gathering of people – the Kingdom work of Jesus has begun.

In Matthew's account, Jesus is very specific about the setting and words he chooses to call in his disciples.

To set the scene – Jesus has left his hometown of Nazareth – and remember that later on Jesus would be proclaiming to them and us that not much healing of any kind would happen in his hometown...

He is now living at Capernaum – and the situation in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali is the initial prophetic fulfilment of Isaiah's claim – this would be the place where people of darkness would see a great light...

And the light will shine upon a people and place calling them from the darkness of the current age into the light that comes from them moving towards another direction – toward the kingdom of heaven – the kingdom of heaven is arriving!

But how does that happen – how does the kingdom of heaven arrive in their lives – and in our own lives?

First of all – we should know that Matthew is the only Gospel writer who speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven – we will hear the 'kingdom of God' being proclaimed in the other writings.

We have to remember that Matthew is a Jewish leader trying hard to show his Jewish community that Jesus is the Messiah – he wasn't using the word 'heaven' to refer to a place where one goes after you die – that wouldn't make sense for a message that is calling in the imminent arrival of the light that comes with a new kingdom.

Matthew uses the word 'heaven' to replace the word 'God' – out of respect for the Jewish culture of the day who revered at naming God.

For the Kingdom of Heaven read the 'Kingdom of God' – and in a world that had been ruled by the Kingdom of the Romans for some 60 years – now led by the Herodian family who did their bidding – a kingdom of injustice and oppression – for the first century Jews, this new kingdom movement would mean a call to revolution.

The scripture foretold a righteous King would come – that God himself would reign over the whole world in the spirit of justice and peace. This is the message Jesus was proclaiming – and the one who would call in all he needed in order to mobilise and make this happen.

And this is the message – so longed-for and welcome at the start by the people – that would turn against him in the end as the people realise that Jesus' idea of revolution would be so different to the earthly war-waging and violent revolution that most would have had in mind in order to overthrow the bullying Roman regime –

Jesus was calling in disciples to follow him – disciples who would repent – but not the personal and private sins of individuals – although that would come by default of course – but the repentance was that humanity – would turn from warring and violence towards each other – and turn towards the light of healing and fairness and peace – that they would put their faith and trust in the promise of the kingdom of heaven's call to love God and one another.

The warning was there from the beginning – the challenge thrown out there – if you continue to live in the darkness of violence and oppression then that is the kind of world and life you will create and be part of – nothing to do with God here – just a society who are stuck in the rut of living in a loveless world continually creating conditions to take them deeper into the dark.

Jesus was coming with the message that God didn't want that for the world – rather, he wanted them to come back to a place of peace and harmony. God's forgiving grace could only be brought down to earth by forgiving and grace-filled action.

The repentance was needed to avoid the judgment imposed upon themselves – they were getting in the way of the kingdom of heaven arriving – and Jesus was calling for a change of heart mind.

And he proceeds to call in the disciples who would help him do just that.

When I was training at Cuddesdon – I used to look forward to Wednesdays when the college would be geared up for visitors spending the day with us who were exploring whether they would want to train there – residential or part-

time. The hospitality team for that week would offer tours and invite them to lectures and they would have lunch and get a feel for the place and we would have a college-wide Eucharist down at the village church followed by a sit-down supper in which the team would wait on their fellow students and staff and visitors. It was amazing to hear stories just like our own – of people who were high-fliers – in high-paid jobs – or no job – or successful careers of one type or another – as well as home-workers and home-makers – people in stable lives – who give it all up for the calling to follow Jesus and ultimately to follow him to the point of giving everything up – the security of all that they know in order to follow his call to that particular work of ordained ministry.

And that is what happened as Jesus walked along the banks of Galilee calling his disciples – Peter and Andrew, James and John – and in Matthew’s account Zebedee their father comes too. They had no idea what laid in store for them. No – they never saw the glory or the pain to come of being those first Apostles. All they knew was that the call of Jesus was compelling and they had to respond. These small business workers gave it all up – and likely created hardships of one kind or another for their remaining family members who they loved – and followed.

And for why? Well, who knows, except to say that it was something that they couldn’t not do – when they received the call – the nudge – then nothing less would do....

They became part of the body of Christ – they became hands and feet who would bear witness to the incredible presence and healings of Jesus – why else would one man draw such a mass of crowds and gatherings.

They became part of the mission of God – to bring light to those who were living in the dark – the light that comes from the change of direction – the repentance and response to the call of God to come into his kingdom – and in the name of Jesus the radical revolution of peace and love began.

As we read through this part of the Gospel story – in the days ahead, imagine that it is you being approached by Jesus as you go about your daily business, being called to repent – to change direction – and to follow him – even more closely and more deeply than you are doing so now. Imagine that Jesus is calling you – by name – because actually – he is.....

Amen

Revd Jacqueline Drake-Smith, Jan 2020