

*12Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14so 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— 16the 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.” 17From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

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

*23Jesus 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.*

The banner headline on the Jerusalem Gazette might have read – John the Baptist movement dead in the water. Leader arrested.

The evening news might have proclaimed – polls show support is waning for kingdom movement.

60 minutes would have recorded the responses of discouraged Jerusalemites returning to the daily grind.

But of course there was no gazette or evening news or sixty minutes back then – we just have what

Matthew tells us: 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.

Sometimes you just need to gather yourself together again. A dear friend moves – management at work changes – you are passed over for a promotion – a marriage ends – hopes are crushed – a loved one dies.

Sometimes you need to gather yourself.

Jesus withdrew and moved to Capernaum. How long he spent before he began again Matthew does not tell us. Was it a week, a month, a year? I do not know how long the withdrawing and moving took. But Matthew does tell us that from that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

The exact message of John now in Jesus mouth. “Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Matthew saw Jesus’ relocation and message as a fulfillment of the promise of the prophet Isaiah, “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.”

You know that prophecy better at the end of it – for it ends with the words, for to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder and he shall be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.

That is a great promise – especially for the land of Zebulun and Naphtali – the area given to the descendents of those two sons of Jacob. For Galilee as it was known in Jesus’ time had in the previous 800 years been under the rule of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, Egypt, Syria, and Rome. One after another armies came to conquer – soldiers plundered and enforced taxes and foreign kings ruled.

But now in that darkness light was shining and that light was Jesus.

Rome still ruled, armies still occupied, taxes were still demanded but all that darkness would be overcome by the light that was Jesus.

Do you ever say to yourself, “If only I could get that raise, or find the perfect job, or meet someone, or – you fill in the blank – then I could really begin living. Surely the people of Galilee thought like that – it was a

notorious area for revolutionary movements. But when God sent the light into the darkness it was not by sending in an army to conquer but by sending God's Son. For no matter who the political ruler, no matter what the taxes were, no matter what security force marched the streets Jesus was calling everyone to a new trusting in what God was doing in him.

In every age since, in every circumstance Christians have lived the truth of Jesus' words: in slave quarters, in concentration camps, in ghettos, in war, in peace, in suburbs, in America, in Iraq, in Sudan, in Japan, in Mexico, in Bolivia some are not ruled by outward circumstances, but by the Holy Spirit. And in America, and China, and India, and in this very congregation there are those who are being ruled by all sorts of other gods.

Long ago in Galilee Jesus called four fishermen to join him in proclaiming the rule of God over human lives for that is what the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God is. When God rules over your hopes and your dreams, your fears and your follies then there is light no matter how much darkness is all around. And when God is not ruling over you then even if you live in a mansion there is only darkness.

For Peter, Andrew, James and John the path of following Jesus was not smooth. When times got tough they grew discouraged – even ran away in fear. But as Jesus had not given up after John the Baptist was arrested so Jesus would never give up on them. Jesus sought them out and brought them back to the work of calling others into God's kingdom.

Do you hear Jesus calling you today? Calling you to faith? Calling you to follow? Calling you to call others?

Nothing needs to change for each of those to happen. Whatever darkness surrounds you, Jesus is your light. Setbacks will not discourage him, he will regroup, he will keep coming for you, coming to others through you.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

