

Daily Discipleship

Third Sunday after the Epiphany (A) – Matthew 4:12-23

Discipleship: *Following the Light of the World*

Focus Question: *When do you need Jesus to shine light on your path?*

word of life

“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.” Matthew 4:16 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 4:12-23

After Jesus hears of John’s arrest, he withdraws to the Galilee area. This means leaving his hometown of Nazareth and making a new home in Capernaum. Yet, he is not often home. Instead, Jesus devotes his time to preaching, teaching, and healing. He is on a mission.

Only Matthew’s Gospel introduces this change of a hometown for Jesus to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. This small detail is significant for those who understand the settlement of the twelve tribes of Israel and the promises associated with each. The prophet Isaiah is quoted as his words pertain to the geography, but also to the image of people sitting in darkness and seeing a great light. This image of Jesus as the light of the world is only in Matthew’s Gospel, but not developed in Matthew’s writings.

It is the Gospel of John which develops that image. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:5 NRSV) Jesus claims the title himself as he says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12 NRSV)

1. *When have you heard Jesus referred to as the light of the world?*
2. *What are the implications when light breaks through darkness?*
3. *How might light become a symbol of hope?*

Jesus picks up the preaching theme introduced by many of the Old Testament prophets and especially John the Baptist. Jesus proclaims, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 4:17 NRSV) To repent means to literally change one’s direction and face a new way. Jesus breaks into reality to introduce a new way of being.

4. *What does the word “repent” mean to you?*
5. *Why might Jesus focus on repentance?*

Ministry is not intended to be a solo enterprise. One of the first things Jesus does is call disciples to follow him. The scene of Jesus calling the fisherman is a familiar one, but Matthew keeps the story at its bare minimal. There is no description of a bad fishing night, advice from Jesus about casting nets on the other side of the boat, or overflowing nets. Jesus simply calls the disciples and they *immediately* follow him. They are obedient to the call, leaving their boats and torn nets. Brothers James and John even leave their father to mend the nets.

6. *What questions do you have about this passage?*
7. *What questions might the fisherman had for Jesus?*
8. *At what point do people of faith leave their questions aside and follow, trusting in God to provide the answers?*

Throughout the first chapters of Matthew, there is a theme of obedience. People genuinely desire to please God, live in a right relationship with him, and respond with radical obedience. There is light in Jesus which invites these followers to change their lives to follow him.

word *among us*

The storm knocked out all the electricity. This was not the first time for this to happen, but each time it was unsettling. Slowly, the family moved through the familiar dark house and found a flashlight. Click! Light shone in the room and overflowed down the hallway. They looked at each other with some relief. It was going to be all right. There was light.

Next, they found the candles and matches. They placed their candles in strategic places to cast out all darkness. Then, they relaxed and waited for the repair trucks. They could not work on their computers, watch television, or do much of anything. And so they talked with each and shared stories. They stayed up late, laughing and being silly. On that night, light cast out all darkness.

1. *Recall a time when you were in a dark place.*
2. *How was light brought into that place?*

Jesus is the light of the world. He is the one to cast out darkness. In his ministry, he cast out darkness as he preached, taught, and healed. His light was not kept for a few, such as the Jews. The light of Jesus could not be restrained or contained, but overflowed to the Gentiles and world.

3. *What does it mean for Jesus to be the Light of the World?*
4. *How have you experienced Jesus as the Light of the World?*

Some people do not want light to be cast upon them because they are comfortable in their own ways. Others are so lost that they are aching and searching for someone to show them the way. They are tired of stumbling and falling in the darkness.

5. *Where do you find yourself today – in light or in darkness?*
6. *Can you relate to sitting in darkness? Explain.*

This passage also includes the description of Jesus calling his first disciples. First he calls the brothers of Peter and Andrew followed by the brothers of James and John. All of them respond to Jesus by immediately leaving their nets to follow him. Note how the word ‘immediately’ is used in Matthew 4:20 and 4:22 to describe the response to Jesus. Their radical obedience to Jesus’ invitation is striking.

7. *What kind of person leaves their livelihood to follow a teacher?*
8. *Do you think Jesus would get the same response from people today? Explain.*
9. *Who in your life models the life of an obedient servant of God?*
10. *What might you learn from that person?*
11. *How do you show your obedience to God?*

Prayer

Light of the world, shed your light upon us. Show us your ways and keep us on the right path. We pray this in the name of Christ. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 9:1b-4

last word

Light a candle.

Pray for God to enlighten you
in all decisions in the coming week.



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3 Epiphany (A) Page 2 of 2