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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Third Sunday after the Epiphany (Series A)

January 22, 2017

Text: Matthew 4:12–25

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Upon learning of John the Baptist's arrest, Jesus travels to the northern regions of Israel and begins preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (vs. 18). It's curious that Jesus begins His post-baptismal ministry in Galilee. The most reasonable place to begin was Jerusalem – the center of the Jewish world, or better yet, Rome – the center of the known world. But Galilee? That's about as far away from Jewish civilization and culture as one could get. By in large, the people were poor and spoke with a thick, distinctive accent. Their history was filled with defeat and spiritual compromise. In addition, it was filled with Gentiles, non-Jews, who worshipped false idols. In John chapter one, Nathanael is recorded as saying, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (vs. 46) Nazareth was in Galilee.

But the Lord Jesus begins His ministry, not with human wisdom, but in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Matthew, quoting the prophet Isaiah declares, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (vs. 15–16).

Galilee is the region of failure, compromise, death and darkness. God's grace breaks forth with beaming brilliance in the midst of Israel's darkest region. That's the kind of Savior Jesus is. A sinner-saving Lord who bears the sins of all people including those who dwell "in the region and shadow of death" (vs. 16). God promised centuries before that the realm of darkness would be broken. The fulfillment of that promise begins in darkest region of Israel: Galilee of the Gentile!

Take heart in knowing, dear saints of God, that our Lord Jesus will not abandon you in your darkness, not matter how dense and thick it may feel. The light has dawned in Christ. And the light of our Lord's love and grace will continue to shine its bright beam into our hearts, minds and lives. God has promised. He is faithful and good. In the midst of the darkness of sin and spiritual oppression, family crises, health

concerns, or you name it; our Lord remains faithful in shining His divine light of grace upon us.

And so our journey in this Epiphany season continues to become all the deeper and richer as the light of Jesus continues to be revealed to us. The sinner-saving Lord born in Bethlehem's manger is the Lamb of God who bears the sins of the world and preaches the arrival of God's kingdom. When Jesus says these powerful words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," He is declaring that God's kingdom is here now. "I am God's royal Son who shines in the deepest darkness," says Jesus. The time of daily turning away from evil and unbelief is now. The kingdom of light has arrived. The day of salvation is dawning upon you. Repent, believe and rejoice!

Today – and I literally mean today – is the day of salvation for Christ's kingdom is present in the power of the Holy Spirit through the reading and preaching of God's Word. Simple words read and proclaimed usher in God's heavenly reign. The apostle Paul described such preaching as "the word of the cross... folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Never forget that sermons and our every-Sunday celebrations of the Lord's Supper are a preaching of the cross, the power of God for those who are being saved. Did not the apostle Paul declare, "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26). In this day of grace, the light of the sinner-saving Lord has dawned! Let us walk in that light which no darkness can overcome.

For that is what Jesus does: calls men, women, and children to be His disciples who walk in the light of His preached kingdom. Four fishermen, Simon and Andrew, James and John, hear the voice of the Lord of glory, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (vs. 19). These, otherwise rustic men of labor, become the first apostles of our Lord. They leave their boats and their family busy to follow Jesus. Matthew records no prior meetings between Jesus and Peter, Andrew, James, John. Our Lord's call is an authoritative, powerful call of election and grace. There's no interview process to see if they'll make good disciples or vice versa, to see if Jesus will make a good master. Jesus, and Jesus alone, calls His apostles and His disciples.

While none of us are called to be the Lord's apostles, Jesus calls us, nonetheless, through the powerful preaching of the Kingdom's gospel. And that's good news for you and me. We don't need prior qualifications to be Jesus' disciples. The eternal gospel of the sinner-saving Lord makes us His reborn, recreated children of grace, life

and light. Our hope for today and for an eternal future of joy is fixed solidly upon Jesus.

That can be a little alarming to us. Everything is in the hands of our Lord Jesus. But we mustn't forget that this the Lord Jesus who looked Death square in the face, the Lord Jesus who took everything Satan and Hell could give and He beat them all. This He did, not for Himself but for you; that you may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

But there's one more thing revealed to us about Jesus in today's gospel reading. In the land of deep darkness, Jesus went "teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people" (vs. 23). All the outcasts of that region are coming out to Jesus to be healed. The needy, the demonically oppressed, the deranged, non Jews, Syrians, Galileans of every sort, are included in kingdom of light.

The past two Sunday's we've heard that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is God's Lamb doing what He came to do: take away their sins and all of sins' devastating effects upon this broken world. The apostle Peter writes in his epistle that through the crucifixion wounds of Jesus we are healed (I Pet. 2:24). This is the joy and rejoicing promised by God's through Isaiah's prophecy. The realm and power of darkness is broken in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection are proof positive that He will never revoke that call to come and follow Him; in Jesus we are healed now and for all eternity. On the resurrection of the just on the Last Day, we will all see and experience forever in body and soul all the glories of His kingdom. The darkness is shattered forever!!!

The light of God's kingdom has dawned and it shines brightly for all to see, hear and believe. Let those bright beams bring you the needed comfort and victory. Come, follow me, Jesus says. The kingdom is yours.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.