

Sermon Manuscript
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We begin as we live in the name of Jesus, the Messiah.
A reading from the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 9:1-4

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

A reading from The Gospel according to Matthew the fourth chapter:

Matthew 4:12-23

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, 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

sea—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.

As I travel for work, visiting congregations in Indiana and Kentucky, I listen to a lot of sermons and podcasts. One of my new favorites is “ShulBros Week in Review.” It’s recorded by brothers who joke about their week for the benefit of their mom, who is recovering from cancer. Since she can’t go out, this sweet, silly podcast is just for her, and if anybody else happens to listen, that’s great.

One of the things I love about this podcast is it's just family -two brothers who have grown up together who have all these inside jokes and all this shared language. With one word one of the brothers can set the other brother off with the giggles that last for minutes. I enjoy this insider family language that means something because of the way it's been used for decades that it doesn't necessarily mean to Outsiders who are just hearing the word.

I think that's what we have going on in Isaiah and in Matthew. So think back to the Assyrian Conquest, the Assyrians, a particularly brutal Empire, even for the ancient near East which was not necessarily a happy-go-lucky place anyway but just really, really nasty, and known for their nastiness, come in and conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel and are deporting people through the north across the Fertile Crescent to Assyria for the tribal

allotments of Zebulon and Naftali. That's the far north of the northern kingdom. You see a parade of exiled people dying along the way. The Assyrians are particularly brutal in moving people out and moving other people in and torturing people along the process. So it's an extremely bad scene and you can think of it as essentially The Killing Fields.

The Assyrians don't stop at the northern kingdom. By about 701 before the Common Era, they're at Jerusalem gates and threatening the holy city and Isaiah gives a prophecy and the prophecy that hope is not gone, that that lands that have languished in oppression and darkness and the prophecy is that hope is not gone, that lands that have languished in oppression and darkness will rejoice and why will they rejoice?

A ruler is going to be born -the king is going to be born and this ruler will reform the people will lead the people back to devotion to the one true God, will not allow injustice to spread, will help the poor and the needy. The government will be on his shoulders and his very name will testify to who God is. God is a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an eternal father, a Prince of Peace. This name will be on this human ruler and everybody will see God is here with us and making everything great and we have reason to hope we're not just going to be downtrodden by foreign intruders who are killing us. We are going to be saved by a God who still loves us and who is with us. This ruler is, of course, Hezekiah. Isaiah is talking about Hezekiah the king to be born in his lifetime who will lead religious reform in the Kingdom of Judah and shove off the Assyrian oppressors and will bring hope to the people. The initial fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy happens probably a couple decades after it's given and so there is this King, this anointed leader, this Messiah if you will, simply meaning an anointed person who shows them that God is with them and God still cares.

Fast forward a couple hundred years- again the land is oppressed, this time by Romans rather than Assyrians and the lands of Zebulon and Naftali have been conquered. Initially much less brutally than by the Assyrians but it's never fun to be conquered and so these same lands and the people within them much more importantly yearn for freedom.

And what happens? A leader, an anointed person, comes. Somebody who will work on behalf of the poor, someone who will turn the hearts of people back to God, and someone who will inhabit these lands. Jesus moves to *Capharnaum*, (Capernaum) and sets up shop. This is going to be a home base for the breaking out of the Kingdom of Heaven. He is not going to sit on a throne - at least not in the human scale lifetime. He's going to hang out with fishermen and people who buy and sell salted fish, and dyed clothing, tax collectors, prostitutes, unimpressive folk.

Jesus is going to fulfill certainly no less and quite a bit more the words of the prophet Isaiah than Hezekiah earlier right. The government is indeed on his shoulders he testifies and lives that God is a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an Eternal Father, the Prince of Peace. This is who Jesus is, so rejoice Zebulon and Naftali you who have dwelt in darkness shall see a great light.

And the great news (see how I went past good news- good news is Jesus here) the great news is that God is always God. God is always about freeing people who live in darkness and subjugation God is always about redemption and salvation. We should not see a distinction between the God of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, the God of the New Testament and the God of our age because God is about the same mission freeing that which is imprisoned, fixing that which is broken, and above all redeeming that which has been sold into slavery, especially to sin and death. God is always about salvation. God is always shining a light into the dark places, and that is extremely good news.

We get a peek of Salvation and Redemption under the reign of Hezekiah. We get a much fuller picture under the Earthly Ministry of Jesus. The fullest picture yet, friends, is yet to be realized. The Kingdom of Heaven is still coming, in more and more fullness all the time, and we are called to be part of that in our baptismal callings and that is exceedingly Good News!

Rejoice! A light shines in the darkness. It is Jesus, the Messiah, who has empowered you by the work of the Holy Spirit to be the body of Christ in our places.

Thanks be to God!