MATTHEW 4:12-23 - A BRIGHT LIGHT

CATCHING UP ON THE STORY:

The last story we encountered in Matthew was the story of Jesus’ baptism. In between Jesus’ baptism and this week’s text rests Jesus’ wilderness temptation. In his baptism, Jesus declared his intention to be fully and completely obedient to the will of the Father. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, this will get tested.

Except for Jesus’ journey toward the cross, nowhere else in Matthew’s gospel will Jesus’ obedience be so thoroughly tested. Jesus will be tempted to use his powers to turn stones into bread. He will be tempted to throw himself off the top of the Temple to see if God would send angels to protect him. Finally, Satan offers him dominion over all the kingdoms of the world, if only Jesus would bow down and worship Satan.

In their own way, each temptation seeks to force Jesus to use his powers as God for his own good and his own advantage. Each time Jesus refuses because he knows that his mission, his obedience to the Father, is not about seeking his own advantage, but seeking healing and salvation for others.

After remaining steadfast to his intention to be fully obedient to the Father, Jesus sets out to gather a band of followers.

MATTHEW 4:12-23

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13 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:

15 “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.”

17 From that time Jesus began to proclaim,
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

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

23 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.

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read the text aloud. Then, read the text to yourself quietly. Read it slowly, as if you were very unfamiliar with the story.
1. You’ve probably sat at length in a dark room. Or, perhaps you’ve sat in the woods in the hours before dawn waiting for the first light of day to break during hunting season. What happens when you sit in darkness? Do you get accustomed to the world around you? What happens when the light is turned on or the sun rises?

2. Matthew quotes Isaiah 9 to describe the state of Israel and the world as sitting in darkness. For what is darkness a metaphor? Why would Matthew use it here? Have there been times in your life when you felt as if you were sitting in darkness?

3. Matthew describes Jesus as a great light that has now dawned. How does Jesus fit into the darkness metaphor?

4. How is Jesus like the coming of light to a dark room or dim forest? As the light, what does Jesus reveal to us about our world? In your times of darkness, how has Jesus been light to you?

5. What does it mean to repent? Why does Jesus tell us to repent?

6. After bringing light to the world, Jesus’ first call is for us to repent. His second call is for us to follow him. Jesus is calling us to something deeper than just salvation. To what is Jesus calling us?

7. Notice the way those whom Jesus called left everything behind. What are some practical ways in which we can respond to Jesus’ call in the same way? What have you left behind to follow Jesus?

8. After the two set of brothers respond to Jesus’ call, what does Jesus do (verse 23)? In what ways is a response to following Jesus also a response to participate in his mission in our world?

SO WHAT…?

If we take a step back and look at the whole of what Matthew is relating to us we find that a specific movement becomes apparent. The movement begins in our dark and shrouded world. We are not totally blind, but the nature of the world as it should be is hidden from us. It is like we sit in a dark room where only the shadow of things is viewable. We have learned to navigate the world well enough, but we are just stumbling about.

Along comes Jesus who flips on the light switch revealing to us the world for what it really is. Jesus’ revealing to us will continue as we move forward in the Sermon on the Mount. As our eyes begin to adjust to the world around us we hear two calls. The first call is to repent, to turn from those things that would keep us from really truly understanding and participating in God’s kingdom. As we turn away from those things that would obscure our view of the world as God intended it to be, we hear the second call, the call to follow Jesus.

This second call is not a call to salvation, that is part of the first call. The second call is a call to a lifetime of learning at the feet of the master teacher, Jesus. This following is an emersion in the life of the master, a daily commitment to time with the master, listening, asking questions, and digesting answers. Of course, this following is not without its consequences. Likely, we will have to leave all we thought we knew behind. We will have to relearn what it means to live in our newly revealed world. This may put us at odds with those around us. It may even mean that we must leave
our fathers and mothers, and our families behind. This is the cost of discipleship.

The reward that comes with our repentance and our obedience to the call to discipleship is great. Not only do we get to have daily relationship with the one who created and sustains all things, we get to participate in his kingdom mission. If we repent, if we answer the call to discipleship, we get to proclaim the message of good news in word and in deed.

We are not quite there yet, the reward part that is. We have much to learn. Next week we will begin our lessons with the Beatitudes.