

January 22, 2023
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 4:12-23

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen." From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people.

Background:

The arrest of John the Baptist brought his ministry to an end. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all indicate and agree that Jesus did not begin his ministry until John's ministry had ended. The exception is John's gospel, where Jesus and John are ministering concurrently. Some scholars believe that Jesus may have even been a disciple of John in the very early part of his own ministry. In first stages of his ministry he, like John, called people to repentance and baptism as a sign of their conversion. But as Jesus preached, he discovered that he was also gifted by God with the grace to heal. As he experienced this gift and it became more a part of his own ministry, his understanding of himself and his mission evolved. At some point, he began to invite others to become his followers. The gospels do not give a clear understanding of how Jesus came to his own awareness of his ministry. But such explanations are compatible with the human experiences most of us have as we mature into self-understanding.

While John is distinct in describing Jesus beginning his ministry while John the Baptist is still alive, Matthew is unique in his use of quotes from the Hebrew scriptures to explain events in Jesus' life. The beginning of the gospel text for today states that Jesus moved from his home at Nazareth to the fishing community of Capernaum. Capernaum was on the trade routes. That would have provided a variety of people for Jesus to engage with his message of repentance and the coming reign of God. But the fact that Capernaum was within the Gentile territory could have been a source of scandal too. By quoting the great prophet Isaiah, Matthew suggests that this move is not a scandal, but rather Jesus obeying the will of God, whose concern extends to the ends of the earth.

Followers of the Rabbis normally presented themselves for training. Contrary to this tradition, Jesus called his disciples. During the dry season, when farmers were waiting for the harvest, the

work was left to servants. Traditionally, this was the time when men gathered to debate and to “be seen.” It was the time when one who wished to promote a cause or had a grievance would gather followers. It was assumed that in time those followers would return to their normal daily lives. The pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew and James and John, are described as fishermen, one of the most successful and stable family businesses of the day. They are presented as leaving the business, their position in the community, and, in the case of James and John, even their father, to become followers of Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever moved far from home, geographically or emotionally? Why? What was it like?
2. This gospel suggests that the death of John the Baptist was influential in Jesus’ beginning his public ministry. What have been some of the things that played a role in you making some of the career decisions in your life? Can you look back on those as being the hand of God’s presence in your life?
3. What might have been going on within Jesus when he heard that his cousin John the Baptist had been arrested? What do you think his prayer might have been like during these days?
4. The first line of the text states that Jesus withdrew to Galilee. What do you think might be the motivation for Jesus to move to Galilee and then take up residence in the busy city of Capernaum?
5. What do you think it was like for James and John and Andrew and Peter to have Jesus ask them to be his disciples?
6. What do you think those early days of Jesus’ ministry were like? What would it have been like to be part of Jesus’ inner circle at this point in his life?
7. Do you have any awareness that God is asking you to be his disciple?
8. Have you ever been afraid to think about what God desires of you, because it may be difficult, or because it may demand more of you than you are ready to endure?
9. As you experience God’s relationship to you through this text, what would you like to say to God?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

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Excerpts from the readings for January 22, 2023, the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali;
but in the end he has glorified the land west of the Jordan, the District of the Gentiles.
Anguish has taken wing: there is no gloom where there was distress.
The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.
You have brought them abundant joy, and they rejoice before you as at the harvest,
as people make merry when dividing spoils.
For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder,
and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The Lord is my life's refuge.
One thing I ask of the Lord: To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
That I may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord and contemplate his temple.
I believe that I shall see the bounty of the Lord in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord with courage; be stouthearted, and wait for the Lord.*

I urge you that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you,
but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose.
For it has been reported to me that there are rivalries among you.
Each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos,"
or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."
Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?
Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel,
and not with the wisdom of human eloquence,
so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

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He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali,
that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:
Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light,
on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen.
From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers,
Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen.
He said, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." They left their nets and followed him.
He saw James, and his brother John, in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets.
He called them, and they left their boat and their father and followed him.
He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,
and curing every disease and illness among the people.

Excerpts from Isaiah 8:23-9:3; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17; and Matthew 4:12-23