

Texts: Isaiah 9:1-4, Matthew 4:12-23

Place is very important. Why in the world did Jesus begin his ministry in Capernaum, way out in the sticks, off the radar, nowhere'sville? Matthew cites the reading from Isaiah 9 as the reason. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali, two of the more obscure tribes in the northern kingdom of Israel, alongside the sea (the Galilean Sea), those who live in the dark, and in the shadow of death, have seen a great light. Matthew offers this scriptural connection to that place, that distant, far off town, Capernaum. Jesus, having traveled the 80 miles from his home in Nazareth to get there, starting his ministry now that John the Baptist has been arrested, preached: "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven." That sermon had been preached before; the chapter before, Matthew recorded John the Baptist preaching the same exact words. You may have heard it translated: Repent, the kingdom of God is near.

Dr. Dale Bruner, in his commentary on Matthew, paraphrases it this way: "**Move, because here comes the whole new world of God!**" The verb translated as "here comes" is the same word Jesus will later use when he sees Judas at Gethsemane: "Here comes my betrayer." So when Jesus says, "Here comes the kingdom of heaven", he means here it is! Like "Here's Johnny!" We sense something new has arrived on this inauguration weekend. What has begun, time will tell. Here it comes.

A friend was telling me about his trip to Australia, warning me that things are very different down under. For instance, he said if you ever hear a thump, thump, thump sound coming from behind you, don't ever turn around. It will be a kangaroo, about to jump over you!

Rather than "don't turn around, it's a kangaroo", Jesus preaches, "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" Dale Bruner reminds us that there is an imminent nearness, an impending breaking out of God's newness. And, the kingdom of heaven provokes personal transformation; an upheaval of current reality. Change. You will change: it's almost here. Everything will change.

Before focusing on the next happening that Matthew describes, I want to skip ahead to the last verse of our passage. It's one of those summary statements used as a literary bridge between events or teachings. "Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues. He announced the good news of the kingdom and healed every disease and sickness among the people." What was that? Did we hear that right? That second sentence, the second half of that second sentence: "healed every disease and sickness among the people." Oh, that! Diphtheria, cholera, small pox, cancer, heart disease, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Lou Gehrig's, depression, bipolar; he healed every sickness and disease. As if that's no big thing, not even given its own complete sentence. And, before we get to that, let's talk about these four guys.

That's what Matthew **really** wants us to know about. The small scale here is what Matthew gives more attention and uses more words to communicate, much more than that half-sentence thing about healing every disease and sickness. Jesus visited Simon and Andrew, and James and John, all fisherman, and each responded with change. They repented. They moved. Peter and Andrew left their nets, James and John left their boat and their father, and they followed Jesus. Never went back. Four working class stiffs, from nowhere, who came to be called saints, in Capernaum, which we call holy land. "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven." Did you get that? Big time kingdom impact from small scale personal turns toward following Jesus, chosen by one, two, three, four persons. Moving the marker closer; the kingdom of heaven is coming. The whole new world of God. They left everything and followed. And, oh, by the way, he also healed every sickness and disease.

One or two, compelled by God, to follow a new path. Your decision to change priorities, to recalibrate where you invest time and energy, steering your life to follow Jesus, to believe and to love. And sickness and disease will be taken care of, but this is monumental.

Maybe we cannot cure our loved one's disease. Maybe we cannot slow the approach of death. Maybe some things are too large for us to remedy, too complicated for us to solve. The kingdom is coming closer. Change your heart and your life. Align with the path of Jesus. Compassion. Forgiveness. Gentleness. Tolerance. Kindness. Justice for all. Welcome to all. Generosity. Reconciliation. Patience. Small scale you matter big time.

Each of us here, at some point in our lives, took a new and different turn, off of Ajo Way, and into The Holy Way Presbyterian Church. Into this out of the way place, off the radar. Perhaps you've found the kingdom of God closer here. Twenty-two years ago today, on this date, my family and I made this turn from Western New York state; one, two, three, four persons. Into this church, where we find the kingdom of heaven present. In our worship, in our music, in our mission. In our authentic love and our genuine kindness. In our honest prayer and unbending trust. In our persistent faith and relentless hope. This church lives compelled to follow our Lord.

In the fall, our stewardship team created a video to capture some of what this means at the small scale, personal level. The question posed was: "Why Holy Way?" People wrote their response on whiteboards and we took their photos. We want to do more of these the next two weeks with our larger winter church family and then debut that sequel on February 19. So be thinking about that. Whiteboards, markers, and photographers will be available before and after worship the next two Sundays.

In a few moments, we'll pray and think about our nation, and our world, all those big things and the large numbers, and the many folks who suffer from sickness and disease. Before we get to that, we'll watch the video and then commission one, two

persons who will carry a great light to others who live in the dark, and in the shadow of death. Move; here comes the whole new world of God.