

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Matthew 4:12-5:1**  
**“What The Kingdom Looks Like”**

January 18, 2015  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Epiphany)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

MATTHEW 4:12-25, 5:1 "WHAT THE KINGDOM LOOKS LIKE"

IIA' 4:12-17 THE EMERGENCE OF JESUS' WORD AND COMMUNITY, NEW LOCATION.

		<b>1) vv.12-17 Sacred Geography: Fulfillment, Light, Kingdom.</b>	3:3, Now Prepared//Mk. 1:14a, 1:21
		Counters Charge Messiah Not Expected From Galilee (Jn. 1:46), Open To Gentiles From Start	
12	a1	Now <u>when he heard that</u> John had been "handed over,"	Time Signature: <i>when</i> // <i>From that time</i> , 2 Movements
		he withdrew into <b>Galilee</b> ;	(Strategic Retreat: 12; 12:15, 14:13, 15:21) Is. 53:6, Divine Signal, Mt. 14:1-13
13	2	and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Caperna-um <u>by the sea</u> ,	New Location, 8:5, 14; 9:1, 11:23, 17:24
	3	in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,	General Area Of These Two Tribes
14	4	that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah/	Jesus' Movements Are Guided By God
	4'	might be fulfilled:	7 <sup>th</sup> & Last Fulfillment Citation
15	3'	"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, Is. 9:1(2), 5-7 (Messiah), Loose Adaptation Of LXX	
	2'	toward the sea, <b>across the Jordan</b> ,	Wretched State, God's People Penetrated With Pagans
	1'	"Galilee of the <b>Gentiles</b> "—	Not A Compliment, Warrant For Return, //28:16-20, 1 Macc. 5:15, 1 Enoch 48:4
16	b	<b>the people</b> who <u>sat</u> in darkness/ have seen a great light,	1) Geography (vv.12-15) + 2) Message (vv.16-17)//vv.18-22, 23-25
	b'	and for those who <u>sat</u> in the region and shadow of death,/ light has dawned."	Davidic Messiah, Past Tense, Jesus Is The Light! Urgency! Kingdom = <i>Reign/Rule/Dominion</i>
17	a'	<u>From that time</u> Jesus began to <b>preach</b> , saying,	(Strategic Advance), Public Ministry To Israel, 4:17-16:20 //16:21, After The Move To Capernaum, Fishing Village
		"Repent,	(Imperative: ought) John's Cry, Reverse Course, Change Of Mind
		for the <b>kingdom</b> of heaven is at hand."	(Indicative: is) Mk. 1:14-15, Reason: The King Is Near! //3:2; 5-7, 10:7

Jesus Has Authority To Summon Disciples, Transcendent God Is *Coming Down* From Heaven

**2) vv.18-22 Two Examples Of Response To Message: Call Of First Disciples (Students).**

		Becoming A Risky Follower, 2 Examples Of Turning, Not Mere Remorse	
18	A1	As he walked by the Sea of Galilee,	//Mk. 1:16-20, 1 Kgs 19:19-21, Amos 7:15, 1) Travel
		he saw <b>two brothers</b> , Simon <b>who is called Peter</b> and Andrew <b>his</b> brother,	10:2, 16:16-18, 2) Jesus Sees
		casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.	Big Business : Tradesmen, Equipment
19	2	And <b>he</b> said to them,	Incomparable Value, 3) Jesus Speaks The Kingdom
	a	"Follow me,	Not A System, a) Command To Himself: Allegiance As Apprentices
	b	and I will make you (pl.) fishers of men."	Lk.5:10, b) Promise Of Mission From The Start, 13:47-48
20	3	Immediately they left their nets and <b>followed him</b> .	4) Radical Obedient Response: Priorities Reordered: Imitation
			Radical Break With Culture: Commitment + Sacrifice, Left Family, Work, Stability
21	B1	And going on <b>from there</b>	1) Travel
		he saw <b>two other</b> brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother,	2) Jesus Sees
		in the boat <b>with</b> Zebedee their father, mending their nets,	After A Night's Fishing
	2ab	and he called them.	3) Jesus Speaks (Implied), Not Apply For Job
22	3	<b>Immediately</b> they left the boat and their father, and <b>followed him</b> .	Nucleus, 4) Response, Economic Cost, 13:44-46
			Attraction/Magnetism Model, Disciples Observe, Never Replace Him, To Leave Parents Was Unthinkable

**1') vv.23-25 Sacred Geography: Kingdom Word And Deeds.**

		Normal Activity //Mk. 1:39, 3:7-13	
		//9:35 Closely (Agents), Kingdom Not An Ideal But An Invading Power, New Possibilities	
23	a	And he went <b>about all</b> <b>Galilee</b> ,	Mk. 1:39, 6:6, Phase 1: He Seeks Them Out, //9:35, 11:1
	b1	<b>teaching</b> in their synagogues	Deism Is Out! Geography + Kingdom Ministry (3x), 28:19 <i>all</i>
	2	and <b>preaching</b> the gospel of <b>the kingdom</b>	and (3x), 3 Kingdom Weapons! Holistic, Mk. 1:15, 21, 39
	3	and healing <b>every</b> disease and <b>every</b> infirmity among <b>the people</b> .	Kingdom Teaching (5-7), Miracles (8-9)
24	b	So his fame spread throughout <b>all Syria</b> ,	Kingdom Makes Things Right On Earth! God's Mercy Displaces Distortion
	b'	and they brought him <b>all the</b> sick,	Outside Judaism, //Mk. 1:32-34, 45 Summary, Phase 2: They Seek Him Out
		<b>those afflicted</b> with <i>various</i> diseases and <b>pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics</b> ,	Life Before Medicine! Mk. 1:28, See Dt. 7:14-15a, Is. 29:18-19, 35:5-6
		and he healed <b>them</b> .	Desperate People 8:28-34 (Demon), 9:1-8 (Epileptics), 17:14-21 (Paralytics)
25	c	And great <b>crowds followed him</b> from <b>Galilee</b> (NW) and <b>the Decapolis</b> (NE),	Gift = No Prior Requirement Of Confession Of Sin Or Faith Before Healing! 4:20, Mk. 3:7-8, Gentile Territory
		and Jerusalem (Center) and Judea (SW) and from <b>beyond the Jordan</b> (SE).	Global Revival Within Judaism!
5:1	b''	Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain,	Mk. 1:45 "every quarter," Universal Appeal, All Points Of Compass, <i>Big Z</i>
		and when he sat down his disciples came to him.	7:28, Dt. 9:9, Mk. 3:13

## A Brief Treatment Of Matthew IIA' 4:12-5:1

This thought unit concludes Section II of Matthew (3:1-5:1) which falls into a concentric pattern of four sections (A. 3:1-12, B. 3:13-17 // B' 4:1-11, **A' 4:12-5:1**). A and A' contain parallel announcements of the kingdom (1:2 // 4:17), the initial appearance and handing over of John (1:1//4:12), crowds who respond to John and disciples who respond to Jesus (1:5-6//4:18-22), the fulfillment of Scripture from Isaiah (1:3//4:15-16), references to the Jordan (1:6//4:15), to Jerusalem (1:5-6//4:25) and to *all* (1:5-6//4:24). The structure of **A' 4:12-5:1** is a 3:1 concentric pattern (1. vv.12-17, 2. vv.18-22, 1' vv.23-5:1). Inclusions are multiple: *Galilee* (v.12b//vv.23a, 25a), *across/beyond the Jordan* (v.15b//v.25b), *Gentiles//Decapolis* (v.15c//.25a), *the people(s)* (v.16//v.23d), *preach* (v.17a//v.23c), *kingdom* (v.17c//v.23c), and at the center two parallel call stories (vv.18-20, 21-22). Matthew's careful ordering continues.

Matthew's editing of Mark 1:14-15, 21 in vv.12-17 is purposeful. He begins with a time signature, *Now when....* News of John's arrest prompts Jesus to *withdraw into Galilee*. Matthew then adds a second geographical report that Jesus, upon *leaving Nazareth, went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of* (the tribes) *Zebulun and Naphtali*. The order of v.13 is not accidental. We know this because when Matthew inserts his quote from Isaiah 9:1-2 (LXX) in v.15, it forms an elaborate 8:2 concentric pattern: 1) *Galilee*, 2) *by the sea*, 3) *territory of Zebulun and Naphtali*, 4) *spoken by Isaiah // 4' fulfilled*, 3') *land of Zebulun and Naphtali*, 2') *toward the sea*, 1') *Galilee*. Jesus timing and travel are guided by God in the details, as echoed in Isaiah, so that from the beginning Jesus is directed to and beyond Israel toward Gentiles (28:16-20). He invades old tribal lands even as he edges towards outsiders. The Isaiah quote continues in the two parallel statements of v.16 using the light of sunrise as an image of hope and salvation. Jesus relocates to Capernaum, as far East toward the Gentiles as one can go without being in the Decapolis (v.25a). A second time signature, *From that time*, opens v.17 where Jesus offers the fresh reality of God's rule and calls for a decision to turn towards him and it. That Jesus' initial preaching is the same as John (3:2) points towards continuity and advance. The last prophet and only Son agree on God's new approach. Jesus fulfills ancient prophetic promises; Jesus is light in darkness and life in death; Jesus embodies God's rule which is descending from heaven to earth. It's a new day, to the Jew first, then later to the Greek.

The central component (2. vv.18-20, 21-22) contains two examples of what it means to turn toward Jesus in order to embrace the new possibility of God's reign. Matthew follows Mark 1:16-20 closely with only a few changes, the major one being that he emphasizes not the immediacy of Jesus' address but the swiftness of their obedience. Unlike the rabbis, Jesus' disciples did not apply; they were summoned and called not to the study of Torah but to personal adhesion to Jesus, *Follow me*, a relationship that would eventually give them a share in his work, "and I will make you fishers of men." The two stories have the same four parts: 1) Travel (v.18a//v.21a), 2) Jesus sees (v.18b//v.21b), 3) Command and promise (v.19//v.21c), 4) Obedience and abandonment (v.20//v.22). Where he goes they go; they now *followed him* as apprentices and understudies. The first four disciples are two sets of brothers who knew each other well as fishermen. Jesus' invitation is compelling; he has power to disrupt life and claim allegiance. They pay the cost and follow the light. That the final section (1' vv.23-25) is conformed to the first (1. vv.12-17) is indicated by the extensive inclusions noted above. In three sections a geography report (vv.23a, 24a, 25) is followed by a ministry report (vv. 23b, 24b, 5:1). Jesus ministry is threefold: teaching, preaching, and healing, i.e. word and deed. Matthew delights in repeated universals: *all*, *every*, and *various*. The geography of v.25 moves through four points of the compass and Jerusalem in a Z pattern beginning with Galilee in the NW. The rule of God at ground level has amazing effects as life is restored through Jesus, "and he healed them" (v.24d). Life is put right, and grace precedes the demands of the coming teaching.

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## WHAT THE KINGDOM LOOKS LIKE

*"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men (and women)."*

The slogan on Jesus' recruitment poster.

### M A T T H E W 4 : 1 9

One of the things that most affects boys is the stories they hear their fathers and other men tell while hunting or around a table outside the earshot of females. Schooling is one thing, education quite another. Schooling is conducted in classes with teachers and curriculum; education is in the barber shop, on the ball field and other places where there is space for memory and conversation.

The stories that caught my attention were of World War II. My father and uncles were submariners, snipers, P-47 and Hellcat pilots, PT boat crewman, tail gunners facing walls of flack over Germany, and attack cargo navigators ferrying troops back and forth to the west coast. At family reunions I'd sneak up close and cock my ear in their direction. My heart beat a little faster when the talk turned from politics and tobacco prices to the war. They were heroes in my eyes, men in their 40's reminiscing about the part they had beating back a darkness that threatened to swallow the world in terror and despair. The spoke of national unity from first hand experience and wondered aloud if the county would ever get through the turbulent sixties and find unity again. It hasn't, except perhaps briefly after September 11, 2001. They won and came home; others did not. It was education by eavesdropping.

It took me years to understand why there was one movie I watched over and over and never got bored. I remember the Saturday I first saw it at the Cheraw Theater. It was 1962; I was nine years old and rode my bike to the show. Fifty cents admission; a large coke, black cow, and bag of butter soggy popcorn ran the tab to a buck fifty. And if you went to the one o'clock show you could stay for the three o'clock at no extra cost. Such was the generosity of a small town. It took a few minutes for my eyes to adjust to the light after four hours in the darkness. I rode my red Schwinn home. The movie was *The Longest Day*, a movie about June 6, 1944, and the theme song I still whistle is *Colonel Bogey's March*. The cast was a *Who's*

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*Who* of leading men: John Wayne, Robert Mitchum, Henry Fonda, Richard Burton, Red Buttons. I was proud to learn from my grandmother that her kid brother Harvey was a colonel on Eisenhower’s staff holed up in some English castle planning the great assault of Operation Overlord. It somehow made me a part of the movie.

This image of an invasion of enemy-held territory is what Jesus taught his friends to pray for, “Thy kingdom come,” which means, “thy will be done,” not in some far off other world but *here* “on earth as it is in heaven.” Earth needs it because only heaven has the resources. “Heaven’s in great shape; earth is where the problems are!” as one scholar put it.<sup>1</sup> The great hope of this faith is that at a time of God’s choosing the upper level of creation, heaven as God’s dwelling place, is going to descend to forever transform earth, which is our dwelling place.<sup>2</sup>

So whether with palms open to the sky or shaking a fist in the face of some evil, the prayer is the same, “Thy kingdom come....” By mindless repetition we dull its impact and forget it’s a prayer offered behind enemy lines in a cosmic battle and anticipates a divine invasion with disruptive consequences. It’s a desperate cry for freedom from an embattled people. The kingdom of God is not a place on a map but a power breaking through. The kingdom is what happens when God shows up to set things right again. “It’s what life would be like on earth if God were king and the rulers of this world were not.”<sup>3</sup> It’s not a religious ideal we build through brotherhood and sisterhood and noble efforts as we progress onwards and upwards to the ideal society while God watches from a distance and applauds.<sup>4</sup> It’s not making the world a slightly better place but a portal into a whole new world. Because the divine king has come near with love and power, new things happen, strange things happen, good things happen as life is put back right. A new day dawns; light shines; darkness is scattered. What Isaiah promised, Jesus enacted in the detail. One

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<sup>1</sup> John Dominic Crossan as quoted in Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003), 133.

<sup>2</sup> On this cosmology as an antidote to Enlightenment Deism (and its ancient source in Epicureanism), which banished God upstairs so we can run the world down below with God at a safe distance, see N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2015), especially Chapter 5, “Rethinking Heaven,” 89-104.

<sup>3</sup> Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 132.

<sup>4</sup> The modern doctrine of progress.

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kingdom presses in to displace another, and in the collision of the two great energy is released, as when a warm and cold front collide, and Jesus lived at that boundary.

The *kingdom of God* was the central image of Jesus' ministry.<sup>5</sup> It is- at the same time- a religious and a political image, this worldly and otherworldly because when God shows up in person, all of life changes: the inside and the outside, the individual and the institutional, the spiritual and political because God has come down to reclaim it all. The goal of this faith and of Jesus central role in it is not just to take your soul to heaven for a pleasant interim after death as a disembodied soul; it is for God to reclaim the whole of creation, scrub it clean, and make it new. Matthew 4:17 is the launch of the new reality, "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent (change your mind and turn around), for the kingdom of heaven is *at hand* (the God of love and power is near enough to be touched)."

With Jesus and the One who sent him, a world of new possibilities is near. He is the point of the spear in a great invasion; it's a divine D-Day. The long entrenched Axis powers of sin and evil and violence and death are now to be seriously challenged and their effects undone. Jesus goes from being a *sleeping Savior* hidden in Nazareth to a *public Savior* come home to Galilee, doing in the power of the Spirit what even he had never done before: going public, leaving Nazareth, establishing a base in Capernaum, announcing the new rule, calling students to follow him and learn his ways, traveling from village to village with true words and the deeds of power to back it up. It was a major dislocation for him, the entry into his Messianic vocation.

It was a steep learning curve to leave Nazareth, go to John for baptism, live through forty days of fasting and spiritual combat in the desert, then walk home and experience the Spirit flowing through him in preaching and in ministry to the sick. When he touched people through his word and hands, things happened. We forget that, though he was the Son, he too had to do things for the first time and reflect on what he was learning about divine cooperation. What if you looked up and saw a swarm of sick people coming your way, some carried by family, others on crutches,

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<sup>5</sup> For a review, see N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1999), Chapter 2, "The Challenge of the Kingdom," 34-53. An exhaustive treatment is John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking The Historical Jesus*. Volume II, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), "Part Two," 237-508; a more popular treatment is Ben Witherington, *Imminent Domain* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2009); on the implications for faith and ministry, see J.P. Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).

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every one desperate, every one counting on you to do something because of the reports they'd heard?<sup>6</sup> At a human level it must have been exhausting to give each one attention, to focus on them and respond to the giftings and revelation of the Spirit at the same time, what we call *two-way listening*. And with each new person fresh power was needed. There was no one-size-fits-all technique.

When we pray with the sick, there's often no evidence anything has happened. We did no harm, but did any good happen beyond affirmation and safe touch? It's an art that's been lost to our churches and which we are only beginning to recover. Modern Methodists have grown skeptical of the mystical dimension of our faith and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But, on occasion, encouraging things happen, as two weeks ago when we prayed after the service for an African American United Methodist minister with severe asthma. It was hard for her to talk. As we prayed she reported warmth in her chest, so we prayed again, and then she left to return to the low country. Two days later I called to check in, and with joy she said she had not coughed since we prayed and could talk without gasping for breath. Something had changed by her own report. In a second call this Wednesday she said it lasted for a week until a niece sneezed on her and she got the flu! Thank God for little victories!

**TURNING TO THE TEXT**

**1) The First Sign Of The Kingdom (vv.12-17)**

The first sign of the kingdom is hope revived.<sup>7</sup> "To live without hope is to cease to live," wrote Dostoevsky. When the past is scripted and the present a dead end, hope

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<sup>6</sup> For scholarly reviews of Jesus' healing ministry, see Andrew Daunton-Fear, *Healing in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), Chapter 1, "Jesus And His Contemporaries," 1-16; Graham Twelftree, editor, *The Cambridge Companion To Miracles* (Cambridge, England: University Press, Chapter 6, "The Miracles of Jesus," 113-130; Graham Twelftree, "Deliverance and Exorcism in the New Testament," in William Kay & Robin Perry, *Exorcism & Deliverance: Multi-Disciplinary Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), Chapter 2, 45-68; N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2011), Chapter 10, "Battle and Temple," 119-127; Clinton Arnold, "The Kingdom, Miracles, Satan and Demons," in Christopher Moran and Robert Peterson, *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway), Chapter 6, 153-178.

<sup>7</sup> See Scott McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos. 2014), Chapter 11, "Kingdom Is Hope," 179-204.

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withers; it is then that depression and all its ugly siblings set up roost in the souls of people. But with restored hope, plans can be made because the future has again opened up for business. Hope is a potent form of spiritual energy and a gift of God's grace. Hope in God is never false hope; it is a light from the future.

Matthew has multiple ways to indicate that Jesus is *Emmanuel*, God among us. The one that dominates the first chapters of his Gospel is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, as we are told in the birth stories.<sup>8</sup> Three decades later he is both baptized with the Holy Spirit and announced as the one who plunges others in the same reality.<sup>9</sup> The Holy Spirit is the agent that deliberately leads Jesus into the wilderness for forty days of fasting and a face-off with the Evil One.<sup>10</sup> The source of Jesus' *existence* is the Spirit; the source of Jesus' *power* is the Spirit; the source of Jesus' *daily direction* is the Spirit. The Father wills, the Spirit empowers and guides, the Son obeys and fulfills the ancient promises of the prophets. This God is Trinity in action opening a new world in the midst of the old one. Not good advice, not good ideas, but good news of an event that changes everything at ground level. When Edison turned on the first light bulb, it was a bright day on the earth, an event that changed everything. Same when Bell invented the telephone. Einstein's theory of general relativity gave us a new set of eyes for all creation. The world changed when the atom was split, when penicillin was first purified, when computers went desktop. There are historical events which cast everything into a new light and open up unforeseen possibilities, and that is what *the Jesus event* was all about. It was an event that opened up a new world. The impossible was now daily.

The details of Jesus' life- where he lived, what he said, who he called, and every act of power: all these can be understood as his ongoing response to the guidance of the Spirit with whom he lived in a continuous partnership. We prize autonomy; Jesus prized dependence. We prize initiative; he prized responsiveness. He is one with us and yet unlike us. Jesus is a new kind of human being who delights in moment-by-moment obedience. As Savior he does for us what we cannot do for ourselves; as Leader he models for us what we've never before seen, which is to live as we were all designed to live, in intimate communion and cooperation with God.

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<sup>8</sup> 1:18-25.

<sup>9</sup> 3:1-22.

<sup>10</sup> 4:1-11.

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It has helped me to see Jesus as *the man of the Spirit* and as *the model charismatic*. He heard God clearly; what he heard he spoke, and what he saw he did.<sup>11</sup> He was without sin and thus without the static that blocks our hearing. Jesus was a clear window; at our best we are cracked and smudged. We hear from God, but not so clearly. A bit of the Spirit's loving energy sometimes flows through us for a sign and a wonder, but not much and not often. Behind the scenes of the Gospel is a depth dimension we rarely notice, and that is Jesus' ongoing dialog with the Father and the Spirit. Behind every move is a prior direction, behind every word a prior hearing, beneath every healing an anointing of the Spirit for that deed. Jesus was not a robot; he had a will of his own, but it was always exercised in cooperation with the Father's will and the Spirit's enablement. His perfect freedom was exercised in perfect cooperation. He is a portal into another reality which has come near.

A second way Matthew points to Jesus as the revelation of God is by noting how his physical movements fulfill Scripture. In his withdrawal after John's arrest and his departure from Nazareth for Capernaum, Matthew heard an echo of Isaiah 9, "The land of (the tribe) Zebulun (in which Nazareth was located) and the land of (the tribe of) Naphtali (where Capernaum was), toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles." Even where he sets up base camp when he leaves Nazareth behind is orchestrated by the Spirit to give new meanings to old Scriptures and put pagan Gentiles within range of God's grace. Jesus is the key that unlocks the riches of the Book, and what we find within is hope, "... 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." Pastor Robert Russell tells a story:

"Forty years ago there was a house... that kept their Christmas lights burning. Even through the first of February the lights outside burned every night. I became a bit critical, 'If I were too lazy to take my lights down, I'd at least turn them off at night.' In mid-March there was a sign outside; 'Welcome home, Jimmy.' They had a son in Vietnam; they unashamedly left their lights on in anticipation of his return."<sup>12</sup>

In Jesus God cut on the lights on and left them burning Without hope there can be no patience or endurance. Without hope plans will not be made. Without hope the

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<sup>11</sup> John 5:19-30.

<sup>12</sup> Edited, PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 4:12-25.

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soul gets sick. But when the light of hope breaks in we can get off our duffs and join what God is doing. It is no accident Isaiah said the people of his day “*sat* in darkness” and that they “*sat* in the region of shadow and death.” They were on their fannies in the dark! When there is no light, it makes perfect sense to sit down and sit still and wait. But when light dawns, you stand up, get the lay of the land and start moving. About half my job is going into spiritual hospital rooms and hanging IV’s of hope. The other half is going into the dark corners of people lives and asking God to show me where the light switches are. The first sign of the kingdom is hope restored. Hope in the living God. Hope in a struggling marriage. Hope in an ordinary church. “Those who sat in darkness have seen a great light,” and the light-bearer and light-bringer is none other than Jesus.

**2) The Second Sign Of The Kingdom (vv.18-22)**

The second sign of the kingdom is new allegiances. John Donne wrote, “Christ beats his drum, but he does not press men; Christ is served with volunteers.”<sup>13</sup> Now that quote must not be misunderstood. It is the call of Jesus that creates the possibility of discipleship, of being his understudy. In that day it was common to seek out a well-schooled rabbi and attach yourself to him for a season. Initiative was with the student, and a student might exceed his master and move on to another rabbi. Not so here. These four blue collar men did not seek Jesus out, and they will never surpass him. He walked into their work world issuing commands and making outrageous promises, “Follow me, and I will make you become *fishers* of men.” If they’d been bankers it would have been, “Follow me, and I will make you build human capital for God;” if lawyers, “Follow me, and I will tutor you to argue God’s case.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Steve and Lois Rabney, editors, *Side by Side: Disciple-Making For A New Century* (Wheaton, ILL: Cook, 2000), 17.

<sup>14</sup> On the ancient concept of discipleship, see Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995) and *Following the Master: An Biblical Theology Of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); James Dunn, *Jesus’ Call to Discipleship* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992); Ben Witherington, *On The Road With Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2011), Chapter 3, “Fishing For Followers,” 31-54; for practical treatments, see Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), Leonard Sweet, *I Am A Follower* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2012), Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2006).

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From the start Jesus, despite his unique identity, refused to be a lone ranger. He would train a team from the beginning to remember what they saw and heard; they would learn to think as he thought and live as he lived. They were a traveling laboratory and a wandering classroom, the finest education ever offered. Watch and learn, show and tell, participate and understand. The kingdom of God in and through Jesus creates community, and these four men are the first examples of what it means to “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He turned their lives around by turning them towards himself. The allegiance he called for was not to the law or to some theological system but to himself as a person, “Follow *me*...” From master fisherman to amateur disciples, from something they knew well to something about which they knew next to nothing, the only promise being one of transformation along the way, “...and I will make you fishers of men.” Make no mistake, to become an understudy of Jesus is to risk the whole of your life.

The first miracle of Jesus was not healing a blind eye or casting out a demonic personality; it was getting four commercial fishermen to leave it all for the great unknown of a three year camping trip! Such was the power of the Spirit through the Son to reach deepest part of men and women and dislodge them from their former lives. The draft notice could have been refused; the miracle is that it was not.

President Theodore Roosevelt was a charismatic figure. The journalist William Allen White wrote of their first meeting 1897. I suspect the four fisherman would use similar language if we could interview them:

“He sounded in my heart the first trumpet call of the new time that was to be.... I had never known such a man as he, and never shall again. He overcame me. And in the hour or two we spent that day at lunch, he poured into my heart such vision, such ideals, such hopes, such a new attitude toward life and patriotism and the meaning of things, as I had never dreamed men had.... After that, I was his man.”<sup>15</sup>

Jesus is magnetic. To do business with him is to be pulled out of my comfort zone, which Bruce Wilkinson describes this way:

“A Comfort Zone is a cozy quilt of relationships, the padding of routines

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Bailey and David Kennedy, *The American Pageant*, ninth edition (Washington, D.C.: Heath, 1991), 676.

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that makes us feel good... We're pretty sure we can succeed... and be happy here. Outside, well who knows? Outside... lies the Great Unknown. It's why we don't want to go there."<sup>16</sup>

Jesus is the great meddler with Comfort Zones. He calls people to himself; life is reorganized around a new center. Doctrine is the way we structure and understand the relationship after long reflection. Sacraments are the forms of community remembrance. Ethics is the lifestyle appropriate for his followers. But the issue is finally him. What Jesus called them to was a good but not necessarily easy life.

Jesus knows your name, history, shoe size, besetting sins, and still he calls you to follow, to learn his ways, and to- in the process- be deeply changed. His invitations are never addressed to *Occupant* but to Peter and Andrew and James and John and Phil and Lori and Mary and Catherine. The living core of this faith is attachment to the person of Jesus, a willingness to say Yes whatever your life circumstances. Nothing else happens without that. They left nets and boats and disrupted family; you may have to leave tangible symbols of your work and life as well.<sup>17</sup> He has the right to mess with us, our stuff and relationships.

How's your Comfort Zone feeling about now? A little cramped? Good. It means the Spirit is working. That longing you've been burying, that dream you're embarrassed to remember, that thing that keeps nagging you when you relax enough to listen to the beating of your own heart, that is his call and the key to your future. God want to use you to bring people under the benevolence of his kingdom rule, and you cannot do it alone. From the start those who believed in him belonged to one another. The *you* in "I will make *you*" is not singular but plural. Not *you* as an isolated individual but *you* as a group, a team, a band of brothers and sisters.

A second sign of the kingdom of God is that people have a deep sense of belonging to Jesus and increasing sense of belonging to one another. If there is either an embarrassment about him or a reluctance about one another, something's missing. But when conversation about him flows freely and when we believe we are in this thing together, there the kingdom is breaking through and making headway.

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<sup>16</sup> *The Dream Giver* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 88.

<sup>17</sup> On the sociology of early discipleship, see Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family* (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2009), Chapter 3, "Jesus' New Group," 53-75.

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**1') The Third Sign Of The Kingdom (vv.23-25)**

If I was to rank the three paragraphs before us in terms of their perceived threat from the least to the most difficult, I would leave them in the present order. Who can argue that standing in the light of hope is better than sitting in the darkness? Psychologists tell us hope and a positive orientation towards the future is part of a healthy personality. And for those of us in the church, we are familiar with the ideas of call and conversion. We sing hymns like “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.” We call people to become beginners as disciples. We send money to missionaries. But when it comes to Matthew’s third paragraph in verses 23 through 25, when it comes to the overtly supernatural, to gifts of the Holy Spirit like healing and deliverance, our defenses go up. We are alert to charlatans and frauds, to religious hucksters and supposed healers who promise much and deliver little. We are highly skeptical because we are largely inexperienced. We haven’t seen enough to believe; it all seems like some pious fairy tale, so we ignore and dismiss it.

The third sign of the kingdom of God is the healing and restoration of people through means that go beyond standard medical and psychological therapies. We are speaking about the loving energy and power of the Holy Spirit flowing through Jesus Christ in the first sense, and through us as his ambassadors to people in need. If anything, Christianity is a healing movement, and where there is no healing or healing is rare, we should ask, What’s wrong? If it happened then, why not now? One option is to say it didn’t happen then, but even the most skeptical historians admit Jesus was understood by his contemporaries as a powerful healer.<sup>18</sup>

Something new was happening, and when word got out, people came from all quarters to see if it was so. They brought their sick with them, and they did not go home disappointed.<sup>19</sup> Many people never made it to Jesus, but no one who came left unhealed, which is precisely why Matthew in his summary could be so lavish with the

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<sup>18</sup> For a brief introduction, see Jack Moraine, *Healing Ministry* (Choctaw, OK: HGM Publishing, 2010); for a more in-depth treatment, also from within the Vineyard movement, Alexander Venter, *Doing Healing* (Capetown, SA: Vineyard International, 2009). On the history, see Francis McNutt, *The Nearly Perfect Crime: How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of healing within the context of a kingdom theology, see Venter, *Doing Healing*, “Part Two: Theology,” 66-156.

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words *all* and *every* and why he was so detailed in his listing of ailments: *disease, infirmity, the sick, those with various diseases and pain, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics*. It's not a scientific catalog, but this summary leaves the impression Jesus dealt with the full range of human misery. If it hurt people, it touched him, and he did something about it. And there is no evidence he ever asked a sick person for a moral resume or required a prior confession of sin. The healing love of God in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit flowed through Jesus unimpeded precisely because the Father is just that merciful and because Jesus was fully available in both directions. No fee was charged; it was low-tech and high-touch, a free gift from the Messiah to restore people for faithful living. Go visit an inner city ER on a Saturday night to see the desperate kind people Jesus must have faced every day. I spend a lot of time in the halls of Self Hospital, in rehab and nursing home facilities, and at Hospice. I pray with the ill and the broken and the dying. And on occasion, and it's always unpredictable, we meet surprises. A little bit of kingdom loves comes through the clogged pipes of Pastor Phil and drips on a person, but Jesus was an open pipe. In him the creative love of God flowed at full force.

Only since 1992 with the addition of services of healing to our *Book of Worship* have our pastors had official guidelines for healing prayer. It is the restoration of a neglected part of our Christian tradition and a response to the tremendous wave of healing that are the gifts of the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions to the church at large. Since we could no longer ignore what God was doing outside our circles, we wisely decided to bring it inside. What remains is for pastors to actually use our resources without apology. Our people should not have to go elsewhere to receive this kind of prayer.

Matthew is clear. With four disciples now in tow as observers, Jesus toured Galilee preaching the kingdom and engaging in a comprehensive ministry of multi-level healing.<sup>20</sup> Word and deed; kingdom words back up by kingdom deeds. Matthew distinguishes between medical and demonic problems, both of which continue to need to be addressed. I often tell people, "You need to go see your doctor or psychiatrist about this." And sometimes I say, "This is a spiritual problem. Let me take your history and decide how to proceed." As people in a fallen world we are subject not only to the breakdown of the body through disease and accidents; we are also vulnerable to evil and the long term effects of sin. The complexity of the human

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<sup>20</sup> On the miracles, see Graham Twelftree, *Jesus The Miracle Worker* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1999).

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**Matthew 4:12-5:1 ..... 15**

situation is matched by a corresponding complexity of healing resources. Drugs, surgery, diet, exercise, rest, psychotherapy, laying on of hands with prayer, confession and forgiveness, sacraments, spiritual disciplines, and- in some cases- release from demonic strongholds: all are of God, and the wise pastor will use them all, ones the world applauds and the ones it doesn't have room for.

Matthew does not hesitate to use adjectives that sound like exaggerations. Jesus healed not *some* diseases and *some* infirmities, but *every* disease and *every* infirmity. Not *a few* of the sick but *all*. Matthew delights in the listing that Jesus healed *various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics*. From Day 1 the first four disciples were immersed in a strange new world and launched on a steep learning curve. They heard his teaching about the Father's kingdom and saw what happened when the giftings of the Holy Spirit flowed through him. It was lecture plus lab. It's hard for pastors to find this kind of training today and so not much of it happens in our churches. Our United Methodist Comfort Zones are well monitored and securely in tact. But around our edges things are happening!

I find it freeing that Jesus did not require either a confession of sins or a profession of faith before he offered help. It was not a fee-for-services model. It was not managed care but promiscuous love. Verse 24 ends with the loaded phrase, "and he healed them." What wonderful words. Yes, they were soon sick again because the world had not yet changed, and all eventually died. But they knew in that moment that God loved them through his Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Each had been touched. A glimmer of the kingdom was seen, and they would never again be the same. Jesus repainted their picture of God. Who is God? Whoever it is who's doing strange stuff through the prophet from Nazareth. Who is God? Whoever it was that raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is the human face of an activist God.

It wasn't until I reviewed a map of the Holy Land that I understood the intent verse 25. It's not a random listing of regions but a theological geography. If you mark the points and connect the dots they form a big Z. *Galilee* to the Northwest, *Decapolis* to the Northeast, *Jerusalem* in the center, *Judea* to the Southwest, *beyond Jordan* to the Southeast. Matthew takes us around to compass to announce that Jesus has universal appeal. People come from all quarters and from the center. He and his benefits are for all. This is what the kingdom looks like in the early stages. Hope is restored as light dawns; people respond to the call to be Jesus committed apprentices; there is evidence of the gifts of the Spirit in signs and wonders. There is more to this great faith than we have yet explored.

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CONCLUSION

Late one evening a theology professor and physician sat working on the next day's lectures. He shuffled papers placed there by his housekeeper. He was throwing them in the wastebasket when a magazine- not addressed to him but delivered to his office by mistake- caught his eye. It fell open to an article titled "The Needs of the Congo Mission." He began reading, but then was consumed by the words, "The need is great here. We have no one to work in the northern province of Gabon in central Congo. It is my prayer as I write this article that God will lay a hand on one- one on whom, already, the Master's eyes have been cast- that he or she shall be called to this place to help us." He closed the magazine and wrote in his diary: "My search is over."

He gave himself to the Congo. His name? Dr. Albert Schweitzer. That little article, hidden in a periodical intended for someone else, was placed by accident in Schweitzer's mailbox. By chance his housekeeper put it on his desk. By chance he noticed the title, which seemed to leap out at him. By chance? Hardly. The providence of God, the call of Jesus Christ, "Follow me."<sup>21</sup> And he did. In 1906 Albert Schweitzer published his review of the historical Jesus. He ended the book with a testimony as to what it means to become a follower:

"He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side.... He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."<sup>22</sup>

Will you follow Jesus? Will you become his student in the ways and means of the kingdom? Will your life be drawn into something much larger and more dangerous?

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<sup>21</sup> "To Illustrate: Providence," *Leadership*, Summer 91, 48.

<sup>22</sup> A. Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1968), 403.

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