

Title: Darkness does not have the final word

Text: Matthew 4: 12-23 and Isaiah 9:1-4

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As we prepare to hear Hugh's testimony today, of how he has recognized the light and learned to listen to the guiding light of the Spirit, I want to situate his sharing in Matthew's vision of light.

Quoting Isaiah 9:

"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"

Or

"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."

Matthew 4: 13-14

The community that preserved the Apostle Matthew's teaching, also preserved the interconnection between the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus' worldview.

Matthew by referencing Isaiah – includes the names of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, referencing early Israelite history – evoking tribal reference to land allocation to the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, land that was apportioned under the leadership of Joshua after the Exodus and entry 'across the Jordan'. And a prophetic text that evoke the horrific time of the Exile when Assyria seized the land.

The first prophet, known as Isaiah, wrote of a time of disaster – of war and captivity. Which came to pass in 722 BC when Samaria (the capital city of the Northern tribes of Israel) fell into the hands of Assyria. And the people were subjected to imperial power – they were thrust into a thick darkness.

And here is Jesus, a Jewish man, on this very land, in a town called Capernaum. A cross roads kind of town – a town highly influenced by the first century AD Roman rule and with a long history of being Assyrian.

Those listening to Jesus, and later those listening to the testimony of Matthew, knew a darkness. The Isaiah text connects one situation of imperial aggression to another.

Yet by bringing the prophet's words to bear on their situation – Matthew's gospel tells us: this darkness is not the final word.

Light will dawn.

An image of God's life and salvation.

How we might ask? How does light break in.

Is it only a Spiritual Reality? Does it happen in action through a political uprising?

What will Jesus do to bring the dawning of light?

That's when we are encouraged to read on.

And the narrative... this gospel narrative tells us of how Jesus calls a few ordinary folk – Simon, Andrew, James and John...

Jesus gathered them and taught them and form them into an alternative community.

Not one of violence.

But a community that were formed by a set of values – values of God's Kingdom, of God's dream for how humanity could love justice and show mercy and walk humbly with God.

And we as church are this alternative community.

Living out Jesus' values in a world that is filled with violence, consumerism and greed.

Finding ways in our everyday lives to open to God's light.

Hugh come share with us.