**#64 BCP 22 January 2023 SG Epiphany 3**

**Psalm 27: 1, 4-9**

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation;
    whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2027&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-14287a)] of my life;
    of whom shall I be afraid?

**4**One thing I asked of the Lord,
    that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord
    all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
    and to inquire in his temple.

**5**For he will hide me in his shelter
    in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
    he will set me high on a rock.

**6**Now my head is lifted up
    above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
    sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

**7**Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,
    be gracious to me and answer me!

**8**‘Come,’ my heart says, ‘seek his face!’
    Your face, Lord, do I seek.

**9**    Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
    you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
    O God of my salvation!

**Matthew 4: 12-23**

**Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee**

**12**Now when Jesus[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4%3A+12-23&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-23222a)] heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. **13**He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, **14**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—
**16**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.’[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4%3A+12-23&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-23227b)]

### Jesus Calls the First Disciples

**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 lake—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.

### Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People

**23**Jesus[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4%3A+12-23&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-23233c)] went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4%3A+12-23&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-23233d)] of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

I love moments like this in the gospels – moment when we see human reactions by Jesus, living within his vulnerability, feeling his way through the world, aware of what he’s called to do, and of what others are doing alongside him but being pragmatic about how he’s going to do it. Sometimes the best thing to do *is* to withdraw, survey the scene, and then go again.

John the Baptist has been arrested – Jesus’s cousin, possibly his mentor, is now incarcerated, probably arrested as an example to others in this world of Roman law, of occupied territories, of traditions under threat and of danger all about.

Why go to Galilee?

I wonder if he already had a real sense of his calling or his mission at this point. We, and Matthew too come to that, have the benefit of hindsight; Matthew tells us and we are happy to believe him that Jesus went to Galilee in order to fulfil Isaiah’s prophecy; its part of a conversation Matthew’s first readers were having, and that we are still having, about the nature of Jesus, the man, the God, the person, the divinity; academics call this whole discussion Christology, and its fascinating. But to fulfil a prophecy indicates of course that the prophecy is about you; that you are special, that you *are* the one we heard about in the Psalm, the one who will keep us safe in his shelter and who lifts my head above my enemies.

I wonder what it was like for Jesus and his followers; Matthew tells us that he ’withdrew’ to Galilee and ‘made his home’ in Capernaum. This sounds like a soft, gentle, a considered action by Jesus and his friends – “‘tell you what,’ he said to them, ‘we’ll withdraw for a while…’” I hope it was like that too; but there’s always the possibility that it was a frantic, terrified dash for freedom, to regroup into a friendly place, or at least a not unfriendly place, where the message that Jesus and John before him were giving might be better received. We only have to look at Ukraine to see the dynamics of oppression in action. The tougher the message, the more likely it is that the opposition will be fierce. And after all, immediately before our reading today, Jesus has been baptised by John, and has heard God calling him ‘my beloved son’, with Doves flying about the place; and then he was tested in the wilderness by the Devil, and passed the test. No wonder that he felt the need to get away from it all for a while.

We here have the story of two ministries; with his imprisonment, John the Baptist’s ends; with his withdrawal to Galilee, Jesus’s begins, and we see his first steps in Mission, on the beach, later in our reading. But where had Jesus ended up as he contemplated some alternative futures for himself, depending on what he did next?

How did he regain his strength, courage, whatever you like to call it, when in Galilee?

The Lands of Zebulun and Napthali were ancient lands, lost to Assyrian invaders 700 years ago; Zebulun and Napthali were two of Jacob’s sons, and their descendants had populated this region in the north. But they had lost their faith, and were scattered; Gentiles settled there and it became a mixed population, as we heard Matthew say, in calling it Galilee of the Gentiles.

And its miles away; as far as organised religion was concerned, God was in Jerusalem, specifically in the Temple; so Jesus had gone to the outer darkness, but also to the places that would once have heard people singing the Psalm we heard today, he has gone back to the Kingdom of David, his ancestor, the place and home of the great people of his faith. In a crisis, he returns to his earthly founding fathers.

Its all about being at home, about feeling at home. No doubt he felt at home in Nazareth too, at various times, but now, to start his ministry he typically does it right at the edges, among the people you’d least expect him to. He needs just one thing, it seems, he asks of the lord that ‘he may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the fair beauty of the Lord and to seek him...’ The house of the Lord is here, for Jesus; not in Jerusalem. Much of his ministry takes place at the edges.

These two richest of readings show us how God moves amongst us; how God reconsiders things, how he considers options, who might do the unexpected, how he presents *us* with choices. Most particularly though they show us how he is present everywhere, not just within a designated building. “Seek my face” he says in our psalm; that’s our challenge as we bustle in our world this week; seek his face…in all places, especially the in the dark places of the earth.

We seek his face, we remember that we all might be in darkest Galilee ourselves and rejoice that God meets us in that place; rejoice that you are loved in that meeting, and pass it on.

Amen