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Psalm 27:1-9  
Matthew 4:12-23

## CALLED AND BEFRIENDED

Matthew has a thing for prophets. Matthew really likes prophecies. We know he is the Jewish writer of the Good News. He's writing a gospel that would be understood by those who had grown up in the synagogue who'd been trained in the ways of the temple. We're only in chapter four of Matthew and already seven times Matthew has connected the life of Jesus and his ministry to Old Testament prophecies—born of a virgin; born in Bethlehem; his mother and father take him to Egypt for safety; there's the murder of children as they attempt to kill Jesus early in his life; the family returns and resides in Nazareth; he is preceded by a prophet, John the Baptist, who announces him; and now, for the seventh time, Matthew connects Jesus to the Old Testament and he begins his ministry in Capernaum, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Seven references in four chapters. All of this because Matthew means to connect Jesus, like John before him, to a deliberate decision by God to reach out to people who need their lives changed. Seven references to prophecy to emphasize our struggle without a relationship with God. For without that relationship, we too remain in the dark. Think of it. Jesus changed his city of residence from Nazareth to Capernaum, in order to show everyday people that our ways are not God's ways. That left to our own decisions, our own wisdom, practicing faith the way we choose, we will literally be under the shadow of death. The worst part is that we humans tend to increase the extent of that shadow upon others until the light of Jesus dawns in us. For then and only then can our calling be transformed into friendship. Then and only then can the kingdom of God, or as Matthew says, the kingdom of heaven (because he's afraid to make a direct reference to God), only then can our deeds and our actions be "Thy Kingdom come" in this life.

Do you have that great light as part of your daily words, habits, and practices? Does the illumination of Jesus shine in your life when you leave this room? Has the light taken hold of you? Is life different, or more harshly, would anything really change in your life if you did not profess Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Seven prophecies fulfilled already by the fourth chapter; and as you read on in Matthew, seven more prophecies are fulfilled before Jesus is crucified.

All the while, Jesus is preaching repentance and healing for those who are in need. All the while, he's traveling around Galilee intent on meeting people at their point of need; not where they think they need to be, but where they really are. Jesus is preaching repentance. The word is so much bigger and broader than we really think. We've heard enough times from this pulpit and from our Christian education classes that *metanoia* means changing directions, a course correction, a compass heading that is different than the one we were on. We know that is what the word literally means. It's not about a feeling of remorse, but about the action of actually changing our direction, our lifestyle.

Forsaking one life course for a very different life course; one that God has planned for us.

But do we also know that repentance means something much broader? It really means taking on a new identity. Life has changed so dramatically that we are known in a different way—that our relationships are new and the old ones are radically affected by our relationship with light and truth embodied in Jesus Christ. How many of us have relationships which need that kind of setting right? Relationships that can stand up to the light of Jesus which holds us and heals us.

Notice how in Matthew when Jesus simply comes near, nothing can remain as it was before. Jesus is only passing by James and John; and in a flash, a twinkling of an eye, they leave their worldly pursuits behind and began something supremely important. Their lives take on new meaning as they become part of God's plan of salvation. Look back at verse 19, it's really pretty amazing. We emphasize the fishing part—the fishers of men, we remember from our King James Bible—but the important word in this verse isn't fish, it isn't the verb, it's the noun. The different message is the people are the point of all this seeking repentance and meeting people at their point of need. Teaching always leads to the miracle of service. That's why mission experiences are so important. They do a wonderful job of deepening our connection to the message of Jesus and sending us back to the Word so that the Holy Spirit can nourish us. You see, God's word always leads to ministry and mission and ministry and mission always takes us back into the Word.

Brian McLaren and Tony Campolo have written a parable together in a book that is called *Adventures in Missing the Point*. This parable is about that intimate relationship between repenting and the miracle of serving one another. It goes like this.

In a little town that was very boring because not much ever happened, a group decided to hold a foot race, a mini-marathon of sorts. On the appointed day, the people gathered, and the athletes were there in their athletic finery. The race began as scheduled, but immediately something strange happened. The first runner to step across the starting line stopped, and then the other runners who crossed that line abruptly stopped as well. One man fell to his knees crying, "I have crossed the starting line! This is the happiest day of my life." He repeated it over and over again, and soon he even broke into song, singing about how happy this day was for him, for he had started the race.

Another woman stepped across the starting line and began to jump for joy. "Yes, yes, yes," she shouted, raising her fists in the air, "I am a race runner. I am finally a race runner." She ran around, jumping and dancing, getting and giving high-fives. All shared in her joy at being in the race. Several people formed a circle and prayed quietly, thanking God for the privilege of crossing the starting line. They also thanked God that they were not like the skeptics who had come to that race but had not dressed as an athlete. (I add my own little scene: I also envision a group of Presbyterians who are already fretting and planning next year's race and critiquing everything that had gone wrong up to this point.)

There are spectators there who are baffled by all of this strange behavior. They look in disbelief; they're looking at the darkness. Finally one observer turns to a neighbor and suggests that maybe they ought to get involved in this race. So they did and many other spectators joined them. It was a marvelous scene. People kicked off their dress shoes, slipped out of their jackets and threw them aside, taking all of the unneeded clothing and laying it on the grass. As they began to run, they ran past the praying huddles, the crying individuals, the jumping high-fivers, (and the Presbyterians); and as they ran, they found hope and new joy in every step. As they ran, they grew stronger. Up every hill and with every mile, they felt a strange sense of renewal, and then they were surprised because they learned that the path never ended. This race had no finish line, so they never got bored again.

God is calling us to a new identity and God is calling us to the miracle of serving one another. This is the message of Christ.

Amen.