

TFTD 23.4. Saturday Feb 25
Matt 4.12-25 On the Edge



Galilean fisherman casting his net (with pilgrims in the background!)

The way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,

and on those who sit in a land of deep darkness,
on them the light has shined. Matthew 4.15-16

Matthew is very conscious that the good news has a back-story — and you'll find it in the Bible. Like the scribe who "brings out of his treasury things old and new" (13.52), Matthew knows that the new thing that

God is doing in the present is deeply rooted in God's age-old revelation to his people in the past.

So as Jesus quietly moves down to begin his ministry in Capernaum by the sea (v.13), Matthew's quotation from Isaiah ch.9 reminds us that God's kingdom is rooted in a particular place with its own local history and dynamic.

Seen from Jerusalem, Galilee is marginal, far away from the Temple and the centres of power. To the prophet Isaiah, the people of Galilee were way out there, on the edge of everything. But Galilee was no backwater — it lay on one of the great trade-routes of the east, linking the ancient cities of the desert with the way of the sea, running down towards the coast. Galilee looked outward to the Gentile world — a hint of the wider horizons that Jesus' mission will open up.

Isaiah's words remind us of the Christmas story, when the star stood in the sky over Bethlehem and the wise men travelled from the East to find the baby king and worship him. A lot has happened since then. Jesus and his parents were forced out of Bethlehem to escape Herod's murderous plans, and had to relocate to Nazareth, out there in Galilee of the Gentiles (you can read the story in Matthew ch.2). And now, after another Herod has arrested John the Baptist, Jesus makes his way back to Galilee again, moving down to the little fishing village of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee

(Matt 4.13).

And it's there, out on the margins, that the first signs of God's kingdom start to appear. It was the marginal people of Galilee, the people on the edge, who first heard Jesus' message: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near (v.17). The message runs like wildfire through that border region, reaching out with the good news of healing and restoration (vv.23-25). You may feel as if you're on the edge of things, but you're very close to the kingdom of heaven.

And it's on the margins that Jesus starts to recruit his team: four fishermen, called and chosen to "Follow me" (v.19). How did they learn their trade? Not by going to school, but by watching: watching fathers, uncles, brothers, and learning the trade as they went along. Now I need you to watch me and learn from me, says Jesus. There's work to be done (vv.18-22).

God bless, Loveday

'The place where we are, at this apparent edge, is where God is doing new things. And those who daily see the new things that God is doing in the world have the obligation toward God and toward the rest of the Christian world to go back to the old centers, which often have lost much of their vision, taking to them our renewed vision of what God is doing today.' Justo Gonzalez

Lord Jesus, thank you for calling me to follow you.
Help me as I study Matthew's Gospel
to become a watcher and a learner
in your school of discipleship. AMEN

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