



St John Lutheran Church

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Text: Matthew 4:12-17

Theme: "Groping in the Darkness or Living in the Light?"

Arise, shine; for your Light has come, and the Glory of the Lord has risen on you. Amen.

... Groping in the Darkness or Living in the Light?

"Now when He (Jesus) heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth He went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,

toward the sea, across the Jordan,

Galilee of the Gentiles --

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."

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

The two tribes of Israel had dwelt in this land long ago, but the people who occupied it when Jesus came into it were hardly the physical sons of Jacob. **The land had** been the site of almost continuous warfare ... **a battleground** where Zebulun and Naphtali had become two of the ten lost tribes of Israel. **Depopulation and repopulation** were accomplished over the centuries by the Syrians and deportation imposed by the Assyrians. **The forces of** Alexander the Great swept through as the Greek civilization reigned. **The Roman armies** marched through and conquered this during their rule. **Along with the** devastating battles of militaries and the alien occupations of armies... **the** hosts of pagan gods literally exploded in this land of darkness. **So the people** of Galilee were of mixed ancestry and the spiritual condition of the people of this land was deplorable. **They were... Groping in the darkness.**

And so it was when Jesus came to the Galilee of the Gentiles. In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome It ... grasped It ... understood It ... comprehended It (John 1:4-5).

Now, here is a strange truth. Those who sit groping in the darkness of sin, death and the devil, do not want the Light! REPEAT!! It seems that it should not be this way... but it is. The Light that is needed is the Light not wanted. Imagine that you are sleeping in your bed during the darkest part of a cloudy, moonless, starless, lightless night. **Someone suddenly rushes in on your peaceful slumber... turns on every light in your room, shines a flashlight in your eyes and tells you to wake up ... to rise up for the light to lighten your way out of your room has come! What might be your reaction?**

I imagine that you would squint your eyes, hold a hand out to block the flashlight, cover your head with a blanket and bury your face in a pillow ... all in order to shut out that invasive, painful light. Probably there would be some rather frank, angry words yelled at the one who has come and invaded your quiet, peaceful, slumbering world. "Turn that light out, get out of my face, leave me alone, and shut that door on your way out thankyouverymuch!!" Then as the smoke continues to billow into the room and you cough, you shout, "Get away from me." The fireman says, "If you stay here you will die in the fire that is consuming your house at this very moment. I am here to help you by bringing the light that will lead you out of this burning building."

However, when Jesus came into the land of spiritual darkness... it wasn't to keep people from being burned up by a fire... but it was to rescue people from the fires of hell. But the reaction is not much different. Picture the Light of the world ... Jesus, God in the flesh... revealing a glimpse of His Divinity to a fisherman who responds, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Here Jesus walks upon the scene and an unclean spirit declares the truth, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are, the Holy One of God!"(Mark 1:24).

Now, are those who have never known the Lord or those who have departed from Him and His Church, particularly excited or necessarily receptive to the Lord and His Word visiting them? They prefer groping in the darkness to having the Light of Christ. Even you and I, who are Christians and rejoice in the Light of God's Good News, often want to keep Jesus at arm's length, attempting to confine Him to a white box and kept up on a shelf. We slip in here once a week to touch base and then run away, attempting to leave the Lord behind for the rest of our days. But as we do this, He pursues us...

Why? Why does He pursue us down the years? Why did He go into the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, to Galilee of the Gentiles? Well, the Bible tells us so that the Light of the world might be revealed to the people who sat in darkness. And what is the message of this Jesus? What did He begin to proclaim as He walked in this land of death? Simply this, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Repent? That seems such a negative word, and it is when repentance is viewed as our work. In reality, repentance is not our work... but God's gift that He grants (2 Timothy 2:25) where His Word does its work. Repent is a command and carries with it the power to do what is required. In other words, "be sorry for your sins and look to Jesus for the forgiveness that He gives."

Are you having some difficulty seeing your sins? **Here, let the** Light of the Word shine a bit brighter that you may behold Him Who knows all thoughts...**and who** hears all words and sees all deeds. **Are you having** some difficulty seeing your Savior? **Here, let the** Light of the Word shine a bit brighter that you may behold Him Who has taken all your sins upon Himself. **Watch Jesus walk from the land of Zebulun to the Place of the Skull with the sins of the world cast upon Him. Behold the Son** of God coming out of Egypt and journeying to Jerusalem where the atonement for the transgressions of the world is made ... **where** the payment for all sins is paid. **Behold the Light** of a new day when the disciples of the Lord are shown the empty Easter cave.

To believe that Jesus died for you and to trust that He rose again from the dead, that, dear friends, is living in the Light.

Jesus stands in the land of Galilee and repeats the proclamation of John the Baptizer with an invitation to repent and declaring that in Himself, in Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. **But remember this... Jesus can** be present and the Kingdom of Heaven at hand... **and yet** this does not guarantee that everyone present is a member of the Kingdom. **There were many** people in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali who were visited by Jesus but did not believe in Him. **These unbelievers continued** to grope in the darkness!!

Looking at the Catechism might be helpful here. **The Kingdom has** come and, indeed comes of itself; but we pray that it may come unto us also. **How is this done? As Luther says "When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His Holy Word and lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity."** **That, dear people** of the Lord is not groping in the darkness, **but is rather, living in the Light.**

While this might seem a natural place to end this sermon, still a point made earlier needs to be made again and applied to you and me personally. **In relating the** events of the descendants of Zebulun and Naphtali, a truth was declared that we need to be reminded of ... **that** while the Lord remains faithful, His people are, all too often, faithless. **Children are not** taught or told the Word by their fathers... **the fathers** who are called to be heads of their families. **Mothers, in the** weariness of the life of this world and the disappointments which inevitably come, **too often** neglect their domestic duty of telling the faith to their sons and daughters. **So grandchildren grow** up with bits and pieces of God's Word and great-grandchildren die without the gracious Messiah.

Mission work begins at home ... **in your house ...and** in this House. **It begins with** you and me in our families and in this family called St. John, Libby, and it involves the stewardship of the Gospel that we have been given and with which we are entrusted. **We are called** to tell the story of **the Light of the world** and to share that Good News wherever and whenever we have opportunity.

The Light of Epiphany extends beyond the walls of our homes and this Home and house of prayer...and goes to the ends of the earth. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Him (Acts 239). Indeed, we pray dearest Jesus that we, our children and others who are far off might not be groping in the darkness... but living in the Light. In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen.

Epiphany 3A, 2008

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