

Sermon Notes – February 1, 2026
The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 4: 12-23
Peace Lutheran Church
“In Jesus We See the Kingdom of God”

A few weeks after Epiphany, our readings feature light imagery to mark a era of life and freedom made known in Jesus Christ.

In its original context, Isaiah 9: 1-7 probably was an oracle for the coronation of a Judean king, likely Hezekiah. The opening verse identifies three areas corresponding to Assyrian provinces: Zebulun and Naphtali (Galilee), “the way of the sea” (Dor) and “the land beyond the Jordan” (Gilead). These references contextualize Isaiah's words of promise as over and against recent destruction under the oppressive hand of Assyria. Through Isaiah, the “light” imagery is often associated with political deliverance (10: 17). Today we hear similar language around refugees escaping war.

The second reading entails the thesis statement of 1 Corinthians (1: 10) followed by description of the community's disunity (vv. 1-7) and the start of Paul's response (1: 18-4: 21). Paul uses “same” (*auto*) language three times in 1: 10 (“agreement,” “same minded/purpose”), making his call to unity unmistakably clear. Socioeconomic distinction in the church community at Corinth played heavily into the divisions. Addressing especially those conditions, Paul calls for humility grounded in the message of the cross (1: 18-31). This unity is not the same thing as uniformity. Paul's call for unity is no less challenging for all today.

The gospel reading highlights Jesus' ministry as fulfilling the vision of Isaiah 9: 1-2 for “light” dawning upon a people in darkness. That Jesus makes Capernaum his “home” means it becomes the base for his public ministry. The quotation in Matthew 4: 14-16 is the seventh of fourteenth fulfillment quotations in Matthew, all of which begin with similar formulas to show that the events are divinely ordained (1: 22-23; 2: 5-6, 15, 17-18, 23, 3: 3, 8: 17, 12: 17-21; 13: 14—15, 35; 21: 4-5; 26: 56; 27: 9-10). While various theories surround the language “kingdom of heaven” (instead “of God”), the likeliest explanation is to avoid overuse of God's name. The passage's closing verse, in which Jesus “curing” every disease and sickness (4: 23) is repeated (in 9: 35), provides a bookend framework for the teachings and miracles throughout Matthew 4-9.

The positive response of the first disciples resonates with missives from the Old Testament (like 1 Kings 19: 19-21), suggesting Jesus' prophetic status. Matthew uses “follow” language more often and more technically than any other gospel as a reference to discipleship, which entails forsaking any other ties and

economic stability - as seen in this passage. The presence of James and John's father in the boat is twice repeated (Matt. 4: 21-22), emphasizing the surprising nature of the brothers' decision. Though occupationally risky, Jesus later promises such followers "a hundredfold in return," as well as eternal life (19: 29).

Today's readings describe a new season of life and freedom made known in Christ, calling us to leave behind the ways of sin to embrace His grace, a new vocation, and a new promise of provision. Jesus' call to "Follow Me" still stands today.