

### WHEN IS A LIGHT IN THE DARK?

Most Sundays, theme and sermon are based on the lectionary passages.

The listed passages are chosen to relate to each other.

Even so, the texts are lifted, as if isolated, from the Biblical narrative, and there is a risk to that: we may miss the broader context of the selected readings.

The Biblical writers commonly made connections to other stories--giving form and perspective to their messages, as Matthew did in today's Gospel text.

So, stepping back to get a broader view of the Matthew pericope, we realize that this scene is immediately after Jesus was tempted by the devil.

Jesus would have been both exhausted and relieved.

He had just endured intense physical, psychological and spiritual assaults.

His condition would be like someone who just fought off a beast, and was wounded, bloody, yet elated to survive.

It would be like battling a storm for days, in a small boat, to finally view calm seas and land on the horizon.

Or enduring torture and interrogation, and then finally to be acquitted and set free.

Before, his brutal time of temptation, Jesus experienced the elation of being Baptized by John and being affirmed and blessed by God.

It would have been very comforting to know that John the Baptist was clearing the path for him. John was boldly preaching, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

John was getting people ready to receive Jesus.

John was as a brother to Jesus in God's service.

*It is good to know that you are not alone, especially after an intense time of trial and tribulation.*

Weak and relieved / exhausted and elated, ready to start his ministry for God, Jesus heard the bad news: John the Baptist had been arrested.

Jesus had barely started, and things were turning dark and bleak.

John pointed to Jesus, and his arrest would have done the same.

The arrest revealed that the authorities had no patience or tolerance for the Gospel message, and,.... just like today, there is a stigma that comes with being arrested.

Jesus suddenly was pushed into the group considered as radicals, protestors,.....maybe even anarchists.

The euphoria of launching his ministry had quickly turned inside out, and so Jesus decided to retreat -- to get away.

Jesus headed North, away/ out of the Jewish culture controlled area.

There would have been some Jews there, but those Jews were not the cookie mould / staunch ethnic tradition Jews.

He went to the region that long ago was the home of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali--2 of the original 12 tribes.

Jesus retreated to find refuge in Gentile land, away from the immediate control of the authorities. He needed to gather his thoughts. Jesus needed to rest.

Matthew, the author, connects this escape to the Isaiah 9 message.

*It's not uncommon, to put a gloss / a nice rationalization when writing history.*

Isaiah 9 is a beckon of hope for those at the end of their rope.

The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were at the northern frontier of ancient Israel, and they were the first to be overwhelmed by the invading Assyrians, 700 years earlier. They never recovered; as noted, that area remained a Gentile area.

Still, Isaiah wrote that there is hope--that the people in darkness will see a great light,.....some day,.....some day.

Matthew is suggesting that Jesus' arrival is just that day.

However, I imagine that Jesus' "light" was pretty dim, maybe just a flicker. He likely drifted,...unnoticed... into West Galilee.

Perhaps Jesus was sitting on the shore, gazing at the water, wondering.... wondering..."what's going on." It wasn't supposed to be this way.

Thirty years of preparation, John setting the foundation and the wonderful encounter with John,..... being Baptized,.... the heavens opened up,..... and there was God..... God blessed Jesus, and the world was about to meet the saviour--deliverance at last. Then,.....

Then,..... boom,..... near starvation, all the while all kinds of lush opportunities to take the easy way pierced his soul, then it was over.

Yet, Jesus endured,....even prevailed,.....it was as if he just crawled out of a deep well,..... only to be kicked back in with the news of John's arrest.

This scenario is often the case: a mountain experience frequently invites a nasty response.

I think the demonic is active, especially when we feel good about things,..... and maybe have our guard down.

It feels like being stranded and seeing the rescue ship slowly arrive, .. only to be torpedoed at the last moment.

Jesus' light was just a flicker, barely a glow....., not much more than a spark. There is no recorded impact of his initial time there.

Perhaps it was a time to back track / to face the cold reality -- to give up.....or.... to start again,.....without John.

Was it just a way of paying tribute to John the Baptist.... or...was Jesus digging deep into his small reserves....to pick up John's banner / John's message?

Verse 17: Jesus uses John's exact words, as he takes on his mission, too, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Jesus was Not going to let John's light go out.

When a small dim light is lifted up to illuminate the darkness, it becomes / it truly becomes a **great light**.

The movement started. Jesus began walking along the shoreline.

There was a spark, enough of a flame to get going / to carry on where John left off.

Likely, as Jesus was walking, he came to realize / to see that he could Not do it all. Even THE Messiah can not do it alone. Jesus needed help.

With each forward step, his flame / radiance began to glow brighter.

*A Good walk / a good stroll alone,...with God,...can do that. It can help re-energize and bring life into focus.*

And,..... a good walk can bring you to people, too.

Jesus needed help, and he came upon two brothers casting a net into the sea. Jesus had the nerve to ask the ridiculous.

*Can you imagine going up to strangers and asking to them drop everything and to start gathering people to God?*

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Well, that is what Jesus did,.....and the two dropped their nets, their jobs and their security,....and followed Jesus. They DID!

Amazing.

What did Peter and Andrew see in Jesus?

They let go of everything to follow him.

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Not too far away, James and John were spotted with their father, in their boat, mending their nets,.... just like it was any other day.

Suddenly, they joined Jesus, too.

What did James and John see in Jesus?

They left their poor father, their boat, nets.... their old life.  
What did they see in Jesus to make them do such a thing?  
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Maybe they saw a light from their darkness?

Maybe they saw a small, yet growing bolder and brighter light that was miraculously defying the dark.

Yes,..... I think that is what they saw.

It was there,.....reflecting off the dry tear tracks on Jesus' face.

The light was there, ....showing the strain and the determined bulging blood vessels on Jesus' forehead.

The light was there,... illuminating the way,...their journey,....their destiny of hope.

In Jesus, they must have seen the passion of God,.... right there, before them.

And I bet, James and John's father saw it, too. Without protest, he would carry on. He was releasing them, but he was no longer alone.

That had to be what happened.

What did they see? What was so motivating?

There are many things that motivate people, such as fear, greed or anger.

Fear can cause us to run away.....or to freeze and defend what remains.

Anger can propel people to destroy, to disrupt and to deceive.

Greed:..... people are driven to do all kinds of selfish, destructive and absurd things from greed.

And, there is love. Love is a motivator.

Love is like a flame. Even a small flame breaks the darkness.

A little light can open up grand vistas of possibilities and hope.

\*When is a light in the dark?

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NEVER!

What gets you going?

What's the motivation?

Why do we do what we do?

Why do we work? Why are we are?

What is the motivation?

Where is the light that pulls us to move / to change / to risk .... to follow Jesus?

What is the motivation is our church?

Are we moving forward as we should be.....or are we pulling back in defence / protecting what we have, and not risking to lose anything?

Years from now, when the historians record these days, will they proudly write: Osler Mennonite Church saw a great light.

They never took their eyes off Jesus, and everyone noticed.

They dropped their nets, got out of the boat and followed?

In spite of difficulties and disappointing news, they did NOT let darkness prevail. They keep the flame glowing.

They were as Christ.

And, the people who sat in darkness,.....saw a great light.

The kingdom of heaven is near.

Please bow and pray with me.

[God,..... we can see the light / we do comprehend Christ, Yet.....

we also, know your son was killed, three years after this episode by the sea of Galilee.

We are afraid.

Help us to see where the light / your light ..... YOUR love is shining.

Help us to see that there is more beyond the horizon and our limited view. Give us faith like those four disciples who had no idea what was next.

Grant us faith..... to follow your son.

Amen]