

Sermon - Jan.25, 2026

The Rev'd Canon Dr. Lorne Mitchell

Holy God, may our reflections on scripture this day, inspire us to be strong followers of Jesus in both word and action. Amen.

In our gospel reading today we hear,

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee...

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

In Jesus' time, Galilee was the region that is just west of the Sea of Galilee. In Old Testament writings, the area included what was known as the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. It was the land allotted to those 2 tribes of Israel.

In our first reading, we heard Isaiah prophesying about how, in spite of their anguish, something hopeful will happen in their midst:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-on them light has shined.

Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, is located up in a hilly part of the region. It's about 30 km southwest of the Sea of Galilee – about the same distance as from New Hamburg to downtown Waterloo.

This is the place where he knew the land and the people best. He knew their hopes and fears. For many years they had been occupied by the Greek and Roman forces and Jesus would have known their frustrations and weariness.

The Galileans were seen as people slightly lesser than the people who lived Judea, around Jerusalem. Galileans were seen as second rate Jews. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” That’s what we hear from a bystander in one of the gospels.

No, the Jews of Galilee were seen as rather suspect because it was said that centuries earlier they had intermarried with some of the outsiders when conquered. No wonder that they were rather surprised at Jesus’ behaviour. He came from Galilee - how is it that he could speak with such a sense of authority?

When I was in my early twenties, I was studying psychology at York University in Toronto. At that time, York had a rather eclectic group of professors in the psych department. There was professor Coleman who taught the psychology of personality; Professor Holmes who taught a course in the psychology of mysticism. And then there was professor Bakan – a large round professor who looked a bit like Santa Claus.

He was Jewish and he taught a course called the psychology of the Bible. I was quite fascinated with him. He was steeped in the Jewish traditions of Kabbalah and Zohar. I remember him reading through passages in the New Testament like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew.

And he said, “Jesus was very much in the tradition of the Jewish Prophets. He really was a very wise man for his age. It’s too bad he died so young” – a rather interesting point of view...!

But I also remember him saying that, from a Jewish perspective, one thing that set him apart from others in the prophetic tradition was the manner in which he spoke. It’s evident, he said, that Jesus spoke with a sense of authority that people were not used to hearing.

He was not like John the Baptist – warning people and telling them to get ready... No, Jesus was saying that “with my very words and my very being, God is breaking into the world and it’s going to change lives” ...

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God at hand; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Words like these are both evocative and provocative. They evoke the story of a long awaited Messiah, a promise of how the one true God will bring peace, justice and healing to the people. And yet these words are also provocative.

They are spoken with so much authority that they challenge the ones who are interested in keeping things just as they are. They provoke a confrontation with people and demand that they either believe in the good news of God as it is unfolding - or not. There really isn’t much middle ground.

Is this why Simon and Andrew left their nets? Was it really as dramatic as Matthew tells it? Did they know Jesus before this meeting? Did they and James and John know that Jesus wanted them for more than just the afternoon? It's fun to think about the conversations that happened on the shores of Galilee.

We'll never know for sure, but I suspect that it was a powerful two way encounter. Jesus saw in them people who were ready to follow and believe in the good news - and they in turn saw in him someone they trusted. Someone who spoke to them with a compelling authority.

I think my old professor was on to something. This was something that set Jesus apart. And personally I think that it's helpful to know that right before this part of Matthew's gospel, Jesus has just gone through 40 days of being tested by Satan in the wilderness.

To me, this story speaks of how Jesus came face to face with the darkest part of humanity and the darkest part of Creation. His encounter with Satan is the Story of encountering the full dark complexity of being human. The full possibility of death, destruction, evil, power and meaninglessness.

He looked at it straight in the eye and said ... No... No there is something more powerful than this... something that can overcome all these things... and that is what I have come to reveal to the world.

And perhaps these Galilean fishermen could see it. For Simon, Andrew, James and John – perhaps they trusted him enough to follow him because they could see this.

Can you see it? Can you see in the words and actions of Jesus an authority that is above all others? I can. It doesn't make perfect sense as we judge things in this world - but I can see it. Jesus continues to reveal that which has authority over all things.

It's the love that is not afraid of anything; the love that brings down walls and fences; the love that binds and heals that which is lonely and broken hearted; the love that forgives again and again; the love that brings hope into even the darkest places.

Across the ages this is what continues to be revealed to me and to you and to people yet to be born. With all due respect to my wonderful psychology professor, this is not simply the result of a wise man who died young.

I follow Jesus as my Lord and Guide because I trust him – He is the love of God made known to the world as never before.

Like the Galilean fishermen long ago, we have decided to trust in him too.

Amen