

Sunday, 22nd January , 2023

About turn

Materials from Roots Bible Study

Begin with an opening prayer

Lord of light and salvation,
the stronghold of our lives,
we come today to worship you.
You shone in the darkness
and have given us hope,
we walk towards your light today
knowing that your light can never be extinguished.
Lord, we come today to dwell in your house.

Amen.

Read Isaiah 9.1-4 and **Matthew 4.12-23**

Bible notes

The quotation from Isaiah encourages us to look beneath the surface of the story. It is a bit like the mood music in a TV drama – someone has moved house and the music reveals the significance of the moment: is this happy, sad, triumphant or tense? The music also gives us some hint as to what will happen next. Jesus has moved to Capernaum. But this is much more than a house move, it is the beginning of something long awaited. It is the moment when the kingdom of heaven comes near. Just as the sun rose gloriously over the Sea of Galilee, so a spiritual light was rising among them. There are differences between our text of Isaiah 9 and the quotation given in Matthew. This is because Matthew's quotation is taken from the Septuagint, the Greek interpretation of the Old Testament, whereas the NRSV version of Isaiah is translated directly from the Hebrew. The Septuagint (LXX) version is more intense, referring to the people who sat in darkness (rather than 'walked') and were in the region and shadow of death. The general meaning is the same though – the days when Jesus commenced his ministry were a hinge moment in history. Perhaps this should shape how we read the calling of the first disciples? The simplicity of the call – 'Follow me' – and the immediacy of their response can make us cast about for a more nuanced story: surely they must have already met Jesus, surely they did not entirely leave their families in the lurch, and so on. These things are quite likely so, but they miss the challenge of the 'now' within the story – now is the moment when the ministry begins, now is the moment to recognise this and to take the risk to follow him.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

If you go into a travel agent, how many brochures are about sitting by the pool and how many about adventure holidays? There will almost certainly be many more of the former. And (with apologies to those who do always choose 'adventure') this reflects the choices many of us make – that we often prefer something familiar, restful, quiet (relatively) and less challenging. If the disciples had done that, where would we be now? Jesus' call to follow required leaving the familiar behind. It needed a complete change of focus and direction. And it needed this 'immediately'. What does that say to us?

A prayer of thanksgiving

Father God,

Thank you that you sent Jesus

who came to give us freedom through the cross.

You have called us to put down our 'nets' and follow you.

You have offered us new life in you –

a new path to follow, as a new light has dawned.

Thank you that you walk beside us on the journey,

the journey from darkness into your marvellous light.

Thank you that you offer us life full of adventure,

life in all its fullness.

Amen.

A prayer to conclude

Lord, send us out

as renewed people.

Help us to turn away from what is wrong

and turn to what is right.

Help us to turn towards our neighbours

and to all who are lost.

Help us to turn away from distractions

and towards more adventuring with you.

Help us now

and always.

Amen.