

JANUARY 25, 2026

Sermon Text **Matthew 4:12-23 (NRSVue)**

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

13 He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, **14** so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles—

16 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.”

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

18 As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers.

19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” **20** Immediately they left their nets and followed him. **21** As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and (Jesus) called them. **22** Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

23 Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

SERMON TITLE: “Lord, I am coming!”

The ancient psalmist who gave us Psalm 27 wrote:

8 My heart has heard you say, “Come and talk with me.”
And my heart responds, “LORD, I am coming.”

“Lord, I am coming.” It sounds like a scene in a movie, someone lying on their deathbed who has accepted their mortality, is looking at the door to the life ever after, and is stepping through that portal confidently. It sounds like a statement that tells family and friends around them that they’re ready to let go, to enter into the doorway to life eternal willingly. I’m coming, Lord – keep that door open.

We’re crossing a threshold today in our church year, a passage from the Gospel of Matthew sandwiched between Jesus’ baptism at the river Jordan and his temptation for 40 days in the wilderness, and later – the Sermon on the Mount. We’ll go to that event next week. But first on this Sunday in Ordinary

Time, the season of Epiphany, we see the foundational acts of Jesus' ministry revealed to us. In Matthew's account of Jesus, we hear words that illuminate both God's nature and the purpose of the incarnation in Jesus' life and ministry. And in these words, we hear the direction that we should follow – if we have ears to hear.

Jesus left the emotional challenges of the wilderness and the temptations he faced there, and was confronted with the emotional challenge of hearing of the arrest and imprisonment of John the Baptizer. But his withdrawal to Galilee isn't going into hiding; it was actually jumping into the deep end of his ministry. In early first century Palestine, Galilee was considered the same as the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah – "Galilee of the Gentiles." Jesus was going to a strongly occupied part of Palestine. He wasn't going away from, he was going to, conflict. He wasn't going to familiarity, he was going to a place filled with difference and challenge to the religion he was raised in.

We're told he left behind his hometown of Nazareth, and now made his home base in the seaside city of Capernaum. Matthew lets us know that he is fulfilling ancient prophetic writings. By going into a region that wasn't exclusively Jewish, Jesus is making a clear statement to his fellow Jewish people – his ministry isn't just for people that worship like them, speak like them, look like them. Just like the expansive proclamation to shepherds and magi foreigners, the beginning of Jesus' ministry shows it is for all people – even the enemies of the Jewish people, even those that the people of Israel would have said were not part of the promises of God.

The ancient prophets are further alluded to in the call of Jesus' first disciples. The call of the two pairs of brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, follows the pattern of call stories in the Old Testament: the prophet travels, sees others doing their work, calls them from that work to follow him. Read in the book of 1 Kings Chapter 19 about Elijah's call of Elisha – you'll hear the echoes. Elijah saw Elisha in the fields plowing; he called him to join him by placing his cloak over him; and after a short goodbye party, followed Elijah into his ministry. And so in Matthew we see a recreation of this. Jesus sees four fishermen by the seaside doing their work; Jesus beckons to them to follow him. BUT, this time it doesn't result in reflection, questions, debates – they drop their nets – their work – leave family – and their life is transformed. They will never be the same again. Again, Matthew is echoing the prophets, sending the message that this teacher, Jesus, is not just another itinerant rabbi. He is a prophet sent by God, like the ancient prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Ezekiel, and eventually John the Baptist. The old is being made new by Jesus.

Before this call to the disciples, Matthew gives us the statement by Jesus about repentance, a repetition of John the Baptist's own proclamation in 3:2. Matthew highlights Jesus' use of "Repent!" indicating the continuity and consistency between these two separate ministries. John preached by the River Jordan "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven *has come near.*" But, Matthew subtly shows there is a difference between the two. The written Greek language has a lot more grammatical nuances than the English language. In the grammar used in John the Baptist's statement, it could also be translated: the kingdom is near, *but not yet*. John is not proclaiming to be the Messiah; he's preparing the people of Israel for a kingdom that is close, but not here quite yet. The grammar of Jesus' proclamation nuances something different. Jesus' proclamation could be translated as saying: the kingdom is *here at hand*. More of a present tense. And so in the words of John and Jesus, the arrival of God's kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ is working toward, and at the same time embodies, God's rule in the here and now. John created expectation; Jesus' ministry will create participation.

God's kingdom is not just about "end times", a "last days" event in this passage. God's kingdom isn't just some future point, but for the here and now. One of my New Testament professors, Stanley Saunders, stated emphatically the New Testament does NOT make a clear distinction between the here and now and a faraway end time. Early Christians saw themselves as living in both, living for God's promises in the future, and in God's promises in the present time – even while the fallen world was still very visible, and the pain and suffering of human life still pulled attention away from worship of God. And Jesus' statement "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," is talking about God's presence among them in himself, and the ministry he is bringing speaks to God's desires for eternity, but also in the here and now. Jesus' ministry – his teaching, his healing and releasing human beings suffering from their demons – is God's kingdom. This is what our God of love wants for us. And this is why God incarnate, Jesus, taught us to pray these words. "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on *earth* as it is done in heaven." We can't as Christians just live for a life after the one we've been given; we must live to bring God's kingdom to the here and now, the present time.

We see from Matthew 4:12-23 that Jesus' ministry is one of gathering AND participation. Participation in God's work. And along with participating in showing God's work as God's son, Jesus brought along believers that eventually participated in this work themselves. In the Gospel of John passage we explored last week, after John the Baptist directed his disciples to look to Jesus, Jesus' response to their tagging along was to ask "What are you looking for?" In the Gospel of Matthew, as well as Mark and Luke, Jesus is more clearly the one

extending the call: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” Matthew’s account of Jesus isn’t asking for reflection and explanation; Matthew’s account, as well as the other synoptic gospels, is asking for immediate action. Jesus’ didn’t just gather his disciples together to be taught, to give him company, to provide first-hand witnesses to his healing miracles after his death. Jesus gathered his disciples *to participate* in Jesus’ kingdom work. And in following him, the disciples’ skills were turned into something different – not fishing for creatures of the sea, but fishers of human beings. By answering the call to follow, they would be transformed.

Today’s baptism of Keyleigh and Shyann wasn’t just a gathering of a couple of new names to add to the membership roll of this church. It wasn’t a religious ritual that ensures they don’t go to a place called hell. It was an acknowledgement – an acknowledgment of God’s call on their life, to live in community with us, to do God’s work through this body of Christ called The Church. It was a promise to participate in the life of the church, doing the acts that Jesus’ did in his ministry through their own gifts and talents. Keyleigh and Shyann, you have already answered the call and followed. Teaching – you’ve helped with Vacation Bible School and Sunday School. Healing – comforting a frustrated child or young person. Learning from Christ, in your participation in Bible Study. Today, you essentially answered “Lord, I hear you” and “Lord, I am coming.” Maybe without knowing it, you are a living, breathing example of Matthew’s words: an example of Jesus’ mission and ministry to gather, and to participate.

The work of Jesus goes on through the church when we gather together in worship, fellowship with each other, provide care and comfort during difficult life moments, participate in Bible Study and Sunday School, take mission projects in our community and beyond. When each of us participates in the ministry of this church, as we are able within our resources and abilities, we are participating in Jesus’ ministry, started in Galilee in the first century and continuing on through the centuries. And so today, alongside Keyleigh and Shyann, we all ponder our own ministry, ministry to those seated around us, or through Facebook and online posting, and ministry outside these walls, to those that don’t look like us and talk like us and live like us. Every time we gather, we should consider how we participate. And also, again consider how we answer Jesus’ call “Follow me, and I will make YOU fishers of people,” with the words of the ancient prophet:

8 My heart has heard you say, “Come ...”
And my heart responds, “LORD, I am coming.”

Amen.