

Son of God, God of Bread, Bread for fools
Isaiah 9.1-4; 1 Corinthians 1.10-18; Matthew 4.12-23

“Indeed there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish,” Isaiah promises.

The descendants of Jacob’s sons, Zebulun and Naphtali, were the first ones to be deported by the Assyrians. Not only were the descendants of Jacob *not* in their inherited lands, but there also was no evidence of God’s promise to this people being fulfilled. The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were in anguish. And yet, Isaiah the prophet assures, “Indeed there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish.”

If “there will be no gloom” in those places, then surely *there will be no gloom* in the lands of Elkhart, and Indiana, and all of the United States.

When Matthew tells his story about Jesus, he reaches back into history 700 years. And he places Jesus in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, saying that Isaiah’s prophecy is now fulfilled. There will be no gloom for those who are in anguish because Jesus, the Light of the world, is here. And he is shining!

Yet, when Jesus was born, the people were experiencing the darkness and anguish of occupation and oppression and injustice. Even today, there are still people living in darkness and anguish. And governments continue to occupy and oppress other lands. And peoples with privilege and power continue to occupy and oppress other people.

For 2,000 years we’ve been hearing that the Light of Christ is shining in the darkness. And here we are, in 2017, sitting in darkness and despair. If Jesus is shining, why is there so much darkness? If Jesus is shining, why is there such hopeless anguish? If Jesus is shining, why isn’t there more light?!

But Matthew’s story doesn’t end with Jesus, the Light of the world coming into the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali. That isn’t the end of the story. The story continues that Jesus started preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

So, Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness so that there will be no gloom. The light is shining. But as the story continues we hear that something is required of *us*. The light may be shining, but Jesus is preaching, “Repent.” Our participation is necessary.

But it’s even more profound than that. Repentance isn’t a program. It isn’t an action. It isn’t something to do. Repentance is about being changed. Repentance is about having our hearts and our minds re-formed. It’s about having our understanding and our reason for being transformed. It’s about having our very lives changed. The kingdom of heaven is near—not only because Jesus is here but also because we are being changed and transformed.

It is at this point in Matthew’s story that we have to listen carefully. It is way too easy for us to “already know” the story. “Yeah yeah...I’ve already repented...I’ve already been changed...” True, we may have repented and been baptized and transformed 10 years ago, or five years ago. Maybe even one year ago. But we’re listening to this story *today*. Jesus’ invitation is *today*. It doesn’t matter so much if we had all the right answers yesterday or last year, Jesus is preaching *today*.

As he’s preaching, he’s calling to those he encounters along the way. Matthew tells us that when Jesus sees Peter and Andrew he invites them, “Follow me.” He doesn’t say, “Repent,” and yet his invitation *is* an invitation to repentance. If they are going to follow Jesus, their lives will change. Their understandings and their purpose in life will be transformed. And they accept his invitation. “Without any hesitation, Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed” Jesus.

Now, there's a lot going on in that one sentence. If we were watching this story on video, we'd *see* their repentance. They turn their bodies away from their nets. Their response is immediate, without hesitation, without reservation. Another dimension of their repentance is that they stay with Jesus, they *cling* to him. They aren't just following to go where he goes, they are following Jesus *in order to be near* him. And as we watch we see that their repentance isn't just a one-time change, a one-time turning from their nets to follow, their repentance is a moment-by-moment staying in close proximity to Jesus.

Jesus continues to invite repentance, this time calling to James and John, who are in a boat with their father. They too accept his invitation to be changed. We watch James' and John's repentance. They move away from their father. They move away from their familiar and known identity as *sons of Zebedee* for an unfamiliar and unknown identity beside Jesus.

In both of these encounters, Matthew's story tells us, "Immediately they left." We *see* what repentance looks like. Repentance is about where we place our bodies...and where we place our bodies is always close to Jesus. And Jesus' body is always close to the vulnerable, the oppressed, those in anguish. Matthew's story about Jesus and the Kingdom of God, about repentance and transformation, is about where we place our bodies. "Immediately, they left." Their *leaving* is a bodied movement. It's a change in the location of their bodies. It's a change in their focus and attention. It's a physical, visible change in the placement of their bodies and lives.

And it is also a spiritual and internal change and transformation. The verb translated *they left* is the same Greek verb we encountered two weeks ago: *aphemi*. To let go, to release, to forgive.

Jesus, the light shining in the darkness, is inviting us to keep our bodies close to his body. But more than just our bodies, in order for the light to shine in the darkness, we let God's Spirit breathe our repentance. The Spirit of God is the life and breath of our transformation. It is the Breath of God breathing in us that makes it possible to live letting go, releasing, forgiving. We listen and watch Jesus with Andrew and Peter and James and John. And everywhere they went, Light shined on those where were in anguish. And there was no gloom. The Light of the world, the Light of Christ, was being embodied.

The lectionary interrupts Matthew's story here. But the brilliance of the lectionary is that this story is picked up in 1 Corinthians. In this passage, we hear more about what repentance looks like. And of course it's Paul telling his story of Jesus and the kingdom of God.

"Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no tears within you, but that you be mended/restored in the same mind and in the same purpose."

In Matthew's story, which is of course told from the time of Jesus, the result of repentance was that people were cured of their diseases and their vulnerabilities. Their anguish came to an end.

Paul's story about Jesus is told with his body close to Jesus...but Paul's body is in another time. Paul is preaching repentance in a different time and place. While he isn't talking about curing diseases, he *is* talking about the things that cause us to become sick and be in anguish. Paul sees the pain and brokenness, even in the newly forming congregations that are following Jesus. He sees the divisions from endless rivalries. He sees the anguish, not caused by the political powers, but the anguish *that we cause each other*. And so his call to repentance is an invitation to being mended, being repaired and restored. Paul's invitation to repentance is to bodies in community, an invitation for the communal body, to be made one with each other, whole, complete.

When we live in repentance—in our individual bodies and in communal bodies—when we live in repentance, the Light of Christ is shining and the kingdom of God is near!

When we are holding onto our own nets, tending and mending *our* nets, trusting our own ways of doing things, we may *think* we are following Jesus, but in fact, we haven't left our nets behind. When we stay in our own little boats, holding onto our individual identities and traditions, separating ourselves from others, refusing to get close to strangers and to those in anguish, we may *think* we are following Jesus but if we never get out of our boats we can never leave them. We may want to live without divisions and tears in our relationships, we may intend to live in unity with others, but if we are in competition with others about what is right and what is wrong, judging what others are or aren't doing, so focused on the right way to follow Jesus, we may *think* we've accepted his invitation to repentance, but really, we're only following ourselves.

By all instincts and by all the ways the world operates, following Jesus makes no sense. It is foolish to leave our nets, to get out of our boats, to release our individual identities. Living close to Jesus, placing our bodies beside Jesus, placing our bodies beside the vulnerable makes us vulnerable. Paul names the foolishness: "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent words or reasoning, so that the cross of Christ not be emptied. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

In Paul's invitation to repentance, to live being *mended and restored* with each other, he reminds us of the cross. And it is in the cross and resurrection where we see so vividly, so profoundly, what repentance in the Kingdom of God looks like. We're pretty clear that it means to stay close to Jesus, staying close to those in anguish, placing our bodies with those who are oppressed and vulnerable. If we're close to Jesus, that's always where Jesus is. But on the cross, we also see Jesus placing himself in the space in between. When he prays, "Father, forgive them...Father, release them..." he is placing himself *with* the ones who are causing anguish.

I don't understand this. It makes no sense...it seems more than foolish to take our bodies and be with those who are oppressed and in anguish...and...to forgive the oppressor, the ones causing the anguish. And yet that is what we see and hear in these stories about Jesus. On the cross, Jesus, the Son of God, releases his nets. On the cross, Jesus, the Light of the world, gets out of his boat and leaves it behind. On the cross, Jesus forgives the ones who are causing his anguish. And the world is dark. Jesus is in anguish.

Of course, the cross isn't the end. Resurrection is the end. In the resurrection we see (though not clearly!) the aliveness of God, of the Light that is the Spirit of God. We can let go of our nets because the Spirit of God is holding us in God's net. We can get out of our boats because we are always in the security of God's boat! We can repent, we can let go, we can forgive, because we are being held and carried and breathed by the Spirit of God.

We don't have to understand. It doesn't have to make sense. It is foolish! So let's be fools! Let's leave our nets...get out of our boats...and follow Jesus...clinging to him as we stay close to those in anguish, close to those who are oppressed. Let's leave our nets...get out of our boats...and place our bodies in the spaces in-between...forgiving the oppressor...being mended, being restored, being made one with each other, with all others.

There is darkness. There is anguish. And we, may we be foolish enough to trust the Light of the world. May we be foolish enough to follow the Light. May we be foolish enough to embody the Light...in all places...with all bodies.

"Indeed there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish" because Jesus, the Light of the world, is here. And he is shining!