**Family Service Talk 9th July 2023**

**Matthew 4:23-5:1 + 5:14-16**

***23Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 24News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. 25Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4%3A23+-+5%3A16&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23235a)***] Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.***

***5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2and he began to teach them….. …..14“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.***

Today is the start of a new series of Family Service talks entitled …. “Sitting with Jesus” and todays theme is ‘What did Jesus say’. Thank you to Andrew / Gill for the reading this morning – what exciting times we heard about! Jesus’ ministry was just ‘taking off’ and people all around the area of Galilee wanted to see him …. and hear him …. and find out for themselves what exactly was happening!

If we look back a little in Matthew’s gospel to set the scene, we see that, having left the toddler Jesus safely settled in Nazareth with his parents at the end of chapter 2, chapter 3 picks up the story almost 30 years later. John the Baptist tells the people to repent as the kingdom of heaven is near – the Lord, spoken of by Isaiah (40:3), is on his way. Then we read that Jesus came to John to be baptised in the river Jordan …. The Spirit of God descended on Jesus and God spoke from heaven declaring that Jesus was his Son whom he loved and with whom he was very pleased.

Moving on, we read that immediately after his Baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days and nights. In that time, he was tempted 3 times by the devil but resisted, quoting scripture each time.

Finally, we read that, when Jesus heard that John had been imprisoned, he returned from the desert, left his home town of Nazareth and moved to Capernaum on the northern end of lake Galilee thus fulfilling another prophecy from Isaiah (9:1-2). God’s plan for Jesus’s time on earth was gathering pace – it was time for Jesus’ ministry to the people to begin. Capernaum was a great place for it to start although, in many ways, it may have seemed a little random at the time.

But isn’t that exactly how God often works today ….. in ways that seem very strange to us but turn out to be the best possible way for maximum growth of his Kingdom … and our faith!

Galilee was a densely populated area – lots of good-sized towns and villages, lots of synagogues in which to be invited to preach. It was on a well-established trade route and was surrounded by lots of Gentiles and much pagan influence. The Galileans were known to be tough, courageous, open to innovation and change and were happy to rebel against the accepted way of doing things – the ideal place for Jesus to, potentially, quickly gain a large following and indeed a wonderful seed-bed for the growth and spreading of the gospel message.

It is so exciting when we realise how perfectly God had planned everything so that His word through Jesus might spread to those who needed to hear it in huge numbers. Thus, we heard that, as Jesus travelled about in Galilee, word spread far and wide (a big advantage of being on a busy trade route) and people came huge distances to follow Him.

And what was Jesus doing as he travelled around? Preaching …. Teaching …. Healing.

He **preached** the gospel message clearly and with authority…. ~ the kingdom of heaven had come ~ God was with them and cares for them ~ he could heal them in every way ~ he offered hope, peace of heart, freedom from sin, eternal life with God

He **taught** people …. ~ what the gospel message meant ~ how they should live their lives when they chose to follow him ~ how it would not be easy but would bring them peace and joy from God

He **healed** those who were brought to him …. ~ from illness, demon possessions, paralysis and more

And, in God’s power alone, this is exactly what Christian ministry for God’s kingdom should look like today …. Preaching, teaching, healing. Where we see this happening in churches, we see God’s kingdom on earth growing in faith and number.

Going back to our reading from Matthew, we now move to the start of Jesus’ longest recorded sermon, the Sermon on the Mount (called by the late Michael Green ‘the supreme jewel in the crown of Jesus’ teaching’). In its 3 chapters (probably delivered over several days), it gives a clear picture of what life must look like for followers of Jesus – a distinctive lifestyle that has values that are different from those of the world.

And where did this sermon take place? …. The biggest synagogue in the area? …. The home of the chief rabbi in Galilee? …. NO!! …. On a hillside near Capernaum where all the crowds could gather round, whoever they were (Jew or Gentile), and hear what was being said.

Jesus sat down (as a rabbi would), and began to teach his disciples. They sat with him so that they could learn from him and we can do the same today – reading the Bible or praying. But most importantly, Jesus was sat where the people were so that the gospel message could be freely heard by all who came. What a lesson for us today ….

We now look at what Jesus said in his teaching… Jesus’ teaching started with what we now call the Beatitudes – a list of ways that God’s way of living contradicts the world’s way. Perhaps a warning to the disciples of what was ahead of them as they followed Jesus. But also, an amazing assurance that, as they committed to this new, challenging way of life, they would be blessed in every way by God, bringing them incredible hope and joy. And this assurance is also for us today as we live our lives in the way God calls us to – we will be blessed by God which will fill us with a deep and lasting joy regardless of what we are going through.

Wonderful though this is, it is not the end of the story. Jesus goes on to illustrate what his followers must then do now they are blessed and filled with the joy and hope that comes from living God’s way. He called his disciples the salt of the earth and the light of the world. In other words, they needed to be out there among the people, spreading the flavour of Christlikeness (just as salt brings out the flavour in food), showing people a different way of living to which they may be attracted. And they also needed to be visible – to let the light within them that comes from God’s blessing on them be seen by all who were around. And as people saw the disciples living differently and doing good deeds, they would praise God.

Just as Jesus taught his disciples on that hillside near Capernaum (in the presence of probably hundreds or even thousands of others listening in), he says these words to us today. We, as followers of Christ, are his disciples and we too are called by God to live differently and visibly. To show, by all that we do and say, a better way of living – God’s way! To show the joy that shines out from us because we are filled with God’s blessing by his Spirit – the blessings that are ours **now** because we follow Jesus.

And our prayer must be that people around us will know that the difference they see is because we believe and trust in Jesus and will want not only to praise God but also to get to know him and trust him as their Lord and Saviour. Amen