

SUNDAY by SUNDAY

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

LEADER: Bless our ears, Creator God, to listen to the needs of people in our lives.

ALL: You call us to hear family and friends, neighbors and foes.

LEADER: Give us heart to pursue the dreams we can't let go.

ALL: Let us not leave undone what each of us can do.

Jesus calls his first disciples in Sunday's gospel; four fishermen, Andrew, Peter, James, and John. With Jesus they travel all of Galilee as he teaches in the synagogues, proclaims the good news that the kingdom of God is near, and heals people of every disease.

The four become twelve before Jesus turns toward Jerusalem, not counting the women disciples. The gospel culminates with the risen Jesus sending his disciples to proclaim his good news to the nations.

Today of the 333 million people in the United States,

some three quarters of us identify as Christians. This means 250 of us in our nation read and try to live the same gospels that call us to welcome the stranger and feed the hungry. See Matthew 25.31-46.

Among United States Christian citizens, some 22% are Catholics. In Mexico some 80% of the people are Catholic, 100 million strong. With Jesus we all name as the two greatest commandments: to love God with our whole heart, mind, and spirit and our neighbor as ourselves. See Matthew 22.34-49.

Over the centuries and in our present world, Christians disagree. Whole denominations have developed over differences and challenges to reform. Following Jesus calls disciples to active love in the world.

Currently, the suffering and needs of people who

must leave their homes fill our headlines. The Kino Border Initiative serves both sides of the border at Nogales, Arizona. Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas, houses immigrants and helps them connect with sponsors.

Almost a decade ago, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) declared that walking alongside immigrants and refugees is a matter of faith. Its Churchwide Assembly voted to become a Sanctuary Denomination, whose 9,100 congregations will find ways to help. The ELCA identifies as an immigrant church that has worked with immigrants and refugees for decades as a way to practice faith in our world. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service is one of nine resettlement agencies in the U.S.

● **How do you express your faith in action?**



GOSPEL

Jesus preaches that God's kingdom is at hand.



NARRATOR 1: When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea near the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, to fulfill what had been said through Isaiah the prophet:

ISAIAH: Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. A people living in darkness has seen a great light. On those who live in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen.

NARRATOR 2: From that time on Jesus began to proclaim this theme:

JESUS: Reform your lives! The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

NARRATOR 1: As Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon known as

Peter, and his brother, Andrew, who were casting a net into the sea. They fished for a living.

JESUS: Come, follow me. I want you to gather people into your nets.

NARRATOR 2: Peter and Andrew immediately abandoned their nets and became his followers. Jesus walked along farther and saw James and John, Zebedee's sons. They were in their boat, getting their nets in order with their father. Jesus called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father to follow him.

NARRATOR 1: Jesus traveled all of Galilee. He taught in synagogues, proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, and cured people of every disease and illness.

Matthew 4.12-23

● Ask anyone who has visited the Holy Land to share memories of Galilee.

When the sons of the patriarch Jacob, whom God renamed Israel, moved into Canaan and claimed land, the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali settled in the northernmost region, west and north of the Sea of Galilee. A thousand years before Jesus, David united the tribes as a kingdom. After the reign of his son Solomon, the kingdom split. Ten tribes formed the northern kingdom called Israel; two tribes formed the southern kingdom called Judah.

The land of Zebulun and Naphtali becomes the area where Jesus preaches. In 721 B.C., Assyrian armies overran this area and the entire northern kingdom, bringing death and destruction upon its people, a fate the kingdom of the south escaped. In quoting Isaiah, Matthew wants us to see Jesus as the light the prophet centuries earlier promised this defeated people.

In Jesus' time people called this area *the Galilee*, which means *the district*. An ancient trade route ran across Galilee between the Mediterranean shore and Damascus in Syria. The road remains visible in the hillsides around Capernaum to this day.

The trade route brought many non-Jews into the area, contributing to Galilee's title as the district of the Gentiles. Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religion in the first century; Galilee lay at the rural fringe of Jewish life at a crossroads of international travel. From the beginning Jesus ministers among the marginalized in his society.

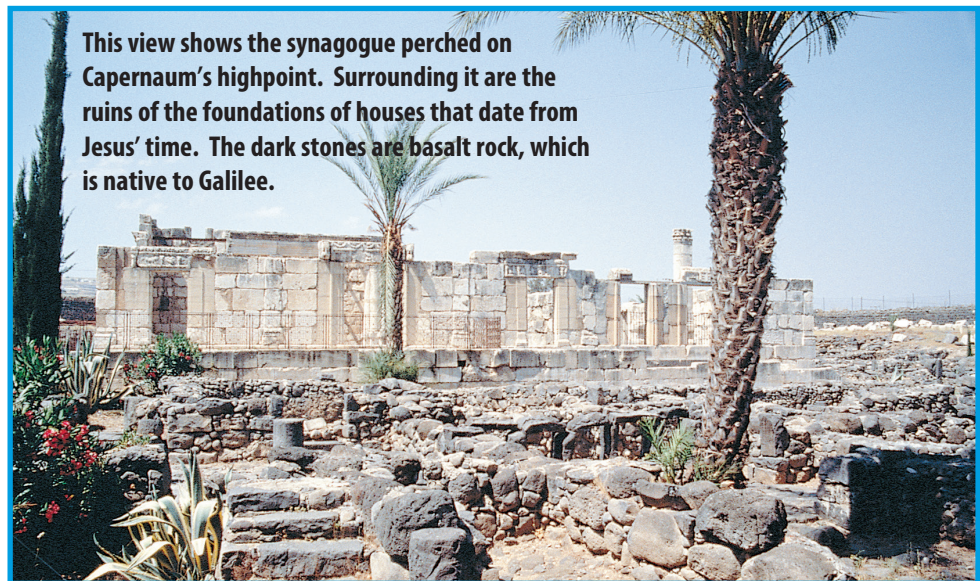
Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee.

Jesus withdraws to Galilee, Israel's hinterland, when he hears John the Baptist has been arrested. The message Jesus preaches, "Reform your lives! The kingdom of God is at hand," is the same message John preaches (Matthew 3.2).

Jesus had journeyed south to hear John and receive his baptism. The Spirit who comes upon Jesus at his baptism leads

him into the desert for forty days for a testing time in which Jesus chooses to live by God's word and serve God alone.

Upon John's arrest Jesus begins his ministry where John left off. Matthew makes a point of telling us that Jesus moves from Nazareth to Capernaum, a fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.



This view shows the synagogue perched on Capernaum's highpoint. Surrounding it are the ruins of the foundations of houses that date from Jesus' time. The dark stones are basalt rock, which is native to Galilee.

Some say the land of Israel is the fifth gospel. Galilee is a place where Jesus walked the hills from village to village. The hills remain, surrounding the lake. People fish its waters as Jesus' first disciples once did. Capernaum today is a ruin, but the black basalt foundations of houses from Jesus' time still stand. A synagogue from the second century rests atop the black stone foundations of the synagogue where Jesus preached.

- What places in your life story does death overshadow? Who has brought light to these places and your life?
- Among what marginalized people in our world might Jesus begin his ministry today?

As his first action in his public ministry, Jesus calls four fishermen to accompany and follow him. From the beginning Jesus

gathers companions. In fact, it is for the work of gathering people into community that Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

The four are at their work fishing when Jesus sees them, Peter and Andrew casting out a net, James and John getting their nets in order. All four abandon their nets for a new vocation—the work of reaching out and gathering people into Jesus' new community.

Many Christians today may wonder why the four so unhesitatingly follow a man who comes walking along the lakeshore and invites them to, "Follow me." Matthew is telling the story of the first disciples' call more than 50 years later. Their initial response to

following Jesus expresses the full commitment they grow into. They give their lives wholeheartedly to spreading Jesus' good news after his death and resurrection. Responding to Jesus' friendship changes their lives. It redirects them from casting nets for fish to gathering people into the Christian community.

From Capernaum, Jesus reaches out to the people of Galilee in their local synagogues. He and his disciples go to them. Jesus teaches that God is near; he brings God near in healing the sick.

- Who has called and empowered you to minister?
- How did you respond? How did your response change your life?

DO SOMETHING

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- Visit the USCCB.org to explore Catholic social teaching on immigration, refugees, and asylum. Visit ELCA.org for more on being a Sanctuary Denomination.
- Visit online the KinoBorderInitiative.org and Annunciationhouse.org.
- Read online about Sister Norma Pimentel's work at the border.

Who walks in darkness?

Ahaz, the young 20-year-old king of Judah, refused to join the king of Israel in the north to fight the Assyrians. Instead he made an alliance with the Assyrians, who happily joined in defeating the king of Israel. In 735 B.C. the Assyrians took captives from among the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, the people at the edge of the northern kingdom.

In 721 B.C. the Assyrians returned and cruelly destroyed the entire northern kingdom, chopped down its vines and orchards, and mixed foreign settlers among its people. The territories of Zebulun and Naphtali became the three western provinces of Assyria. They were called Way of the Sea, Beyond the Jordan, and Galilee of the Nations.

Isaiah, a priest of the temple in Jerusalem, reflects on the political events of his time. In Sunday's first reading Isaiah expresses solidarity with the defeated people of the north, vividly describing them living in darkness and the degradation of mixing blood and gods with Assyria. He promises God will not abandon them.

In the midst of war and injustice to the poor, Isaiah envisions a messiah, a sprout on the dead stump of Jesse, a Spirit-blessed leader who deals aright with the poor and brings enemies to live in peace. He promises God will send Emmanuel, God with us.

Sunday's first reading promises a messiah, one who will bring light and restoration to people in darkness and desolation. A son will be born for the people, a child who will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. This leader will reunite the people of the north and south and rule them with judgment and justice. For Matthew, Jesus is this leader.

God will dispel darkness.

In past times God degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the end God will glorify Way of the Sea, Beyond the Jordan, and Galilee of the Nations. There will be no gloom for those who were in anguish.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom, a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, the way people rejoice before you at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils.

For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.

Isaiah 8.23-9.3

- **What burdens do wish you could lift from people in our world? How might you take one action toward helping?**
- **On what fringes of the Christian community is the Spirit inspiring new and promising leadership?**

PRAY

Think about places that hold meaning for you today, places where you are now investing your life, and people upon whom you want God's light to shine. Name them simply in prayer together.

LEADER: Jesus, you are light in our darkness.

ALL: You call us to gather our neighbors into community.

LEADER: Restore those who suffer to joy.

ALL: Keep alive our desire for peace.

SING: "The Lord Is My Light."



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