

An Episcopal Perspective

This section of the gospel seems to have the theme of MOVING. Jesus moved from Nazareth, his home town, to Capernaum, not too far away and started his ministry and mission in the world. We have to assume he spent the earlier years of his life learning; first from his mother, then from the local rabbi, then, possibly, from some experiences with a desert group of Essenes. This section begins immediately after his baptism. It was time for him to start a new phase of his life.

One of the first things he did was to start developing his followers. He did not call highly educated or placed people, but those on some of the lowest economic rungs— fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James and John

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Today we are addressing domestic violence and safety issues for victims. It's interesting to note that Jesus leaves Nazareth for Capernaum for safety reasons after hearing of John's arrest. He knew what it was to be stalked! And the Scripture says he made his home there "so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled." "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." (Mt. 4:16)

We know that this great light is Jesus. We have seen and experienced his light in our lives

Matthew 4:12-23

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—

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This is a story of call, of new life, of healing and wholeness that is possible when life changes are made.

Verse 12-13: In response to John the Baptist's arrest, Jesus moves to Galilee.

Verses 14-16: Matthew paints the move as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 9:1-2.

Verse 17: Jesus begins his ministry.

Verses 18-22: Call and response between Jesus and the fishermen. He calls, they drop everything and follow, he calls

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4:12 The writer of Matthew is very careful to only discuss John the Baptist as he relates to Jesus. John is always secondary to Christ. The phrase "withdrew to Galilee" refers to Jesus being threatened by his own people and thus he had to leave his hometown of Nazareth.

4:13 The word "left" in Greek is katalipon which means "to abandon." I wonder what it would be like to be forced to leave your own home? To abandon what you have grown up around?

4:14-15 Here Jesus has abandoned Nazareth and gone into the land of the Gentiles. By doing so, Jesus shows the inclusion of Gentiles in his kingdom. The phrase "Galilee of the Gentiles" refers to territory that once belonged to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. This land along with the Northern tribes had been captured by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Galilee remained basically Gentile until the second century B.C. when the Maccabees gave the residents a choice of "conversion" by circumcision or death. Gentiles

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were all summoned by Jesus to leave where they were and to move with him to be his special workers. They moved. Then he went around to the various villages in Galilee preaching and healing. This meant that those whom he touched were provided with moving in their own lives—from where they were— ill, crippled, dismayed, disoriented, terrified, epileptic, crazed, wracked with pain misery— to a new way of living within their communities. No one could have received this newness in their lives, this moving, without the help of God and the glad support of others.

Abused people and children need to move. Help is being provided. Safe houses, shelters, oversight,

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and we are called to share that light with people who are in darkness and the shadow of death. Quite literally we have such people in our community.

Two statistics: “In 2006, there were 16, 813 domestic violence 911 calls reported to the Knoxville Police Department and the Knox County Sheriff’s Office.”

“On an average day, 46 people call 911 or the Family Violence hotline to report an incident of domestic abuse.” (Knox County E911 and the Community Coalition on Family Violence.)

How can we shine the light of Christ’s Good

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.”

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here could represent those unchurched, those who need to hear about Christ.

4:16 Matthew saw Jesus as the giver of light to a people for whom the dark shadow of death is looming. Later in 5:14, Matthew will write that Jesus declares to his disciples “You are the light of the world.” As Christians, one of our missions is to shine the teachings of Christ into the dark recesses of human relationships. We must recognize unhealthy relationships and define healthy ones.

4:17 The word “repent” means more than saying “I’m sorry.” “Repent” comes from the Greek word metanoia. It literally means “to change one’s mind, a transformation.” It is the idea of making a 180-degree turn and walking in the opposite direction. For the abuser, it is totally letting go of abusive ways. This may take years to accomplish.

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more, more follow.

Verse 23: Jesus’ ministry is stated in one sentence: he went, he taught, he proclaimed the good news, he healed.

Jesus’ ministry was to call the people around him out of the darkness and into the light. He called the disciples from an ordinary life into an extraordinary one in which they are teachers, preachers and healers as well. He called to those who were broken in body and spirit to new lives of health and wholeness. It was a ministry to both the physical needs of the people (feeding the hungry, healing the afflicted) and the spiritual needs of the people (driving out demons.)

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protection, health care, food, clothes, and new growth are movement away from immediate danger and movement within ourselves to new ways of living: helping people who are ready. If you need help, you can call on them.

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News on people who are in darkness and the shadow of death? Perhaps the first light may be light for us. Do we know about the cycle of violence? In domestic violence situations relationships there are three phases:

1. The honeymoon phase: All is sweetness and light;
2. The tension phase: Anger builds in the abuser.

And 3. The blow up phase: there is an explosion and the abuser loses it. At first this may be a shove. This usually accelerates to more physical violence. Then there is

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 fishermen.

19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

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4:18-19 The fishermen in this account are using nets to haul in their catch. Jesus is calling on the Church to help victims of family violence by being an active part in a “safety net.”

Congregations can serve as places to make professional referrals for victims. Jesus’ followers can point people in the right direction and help keep them safe.

4:20-21 By “mending their nets,” we are reminded that we must constantly work on providing the correct services to victims. We have to constantly challenge ourselves to double check if we are saying and doing the right things to turn our congregations into resources and not stumbling blocks for victims.

4:22 Here the Church is challenged to speak out and share the gospel of Christ, which focuses on our relationships to God and our relationships between each other. One of the sicknesses that greatly impacts

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Victims of domestic violence can find much comfort here in the idea that Jesus calls us out of our lives lived in darkness and into the life with him, lives of light and hope. His call to the fishermen was so compelling that they dropped everything to follow him—and he helped them create lives far beyond anything they might have imagined—taking them from lives of manual labor to lives of service, lives in which they could also bring hope and light to others. Jesus called the sick and the hopeless out of their darkness as well, often reaching out to the unclean, unlovable, untouchable members of society. The DV victim hears that she or he is not alone in living a life in darkness, and that Jesus calls to her or him too; that even if the DV victim feels shame or

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repentance— “it will never happen again.” Then it starts over again with the honeymoon phase which inevitably moves to tension and explosion. The honeymoon phases get shorter and shorter and the violence more severe.

There are many types of violence. Physical violence may be the one noticed first but survivors tell us that emotional abuse is the most difficult. Being shamed, called names, being denied affection, being falsely accused of infidelity, worrying about your children—each act is terrible from the one who promised to love, cherish and honor you.

Spiritual violence often takes the form of not allowing the victim to attend church. The offender may taunt her that God can't / won't help her. Or the offender attends church with her and behaves as the upstanding, faithful churchgoer. He dares her to tell and assures her that no one will believe her. Often if the truth comes out, they don't believe her. “N. is such a good person! That could never have happened!”

Secrecy is necessary to keep the victim in the relationship. One way offenders do this is to keep the partner from seeing relatives. “They take too much of your time!” “I want you here with me.” This may be flattering early in the relationship but it effectively isolates the abused party.

These are just a few of the ways victims are kept in abusive relationships. If any of this sounds familiar about someone you know you may want to do something to assist. However, care must be taken lest the situation be worsened.

I have just shone a small light of information on domestic violence. This can help to remove part of the darkness that covers domestic violence. Please consider learning more: reflect on what you have learned; and perhaps think about helping victims in some way.

We have heard the words of the prophet Isaiah two times today. “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.” (Mt. 4:16) Matthew sees Isaiah's promise of liberation fulfilled by Jesus' arrival. May we share with Jesus in shedding light on those who sit in the darkness of domestic violence and hope for those in the shadow of death.

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 he called to the,

22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

22 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every sickness among the people. (NRSV)

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our society is family violence. We can cure this disease by our congregations denouncing abusive behaviors and offering professional assistance to victims.

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embarrassment because her or his life is touched by violence, Jesus sympathizes and cares. Nothing will keep Jesus from calling people out of the darkness of their afflictions and into the light of his love and compassion. There is compassion for modern day people who suffer; Jesus calls to the DV victim as he calls to all of us to leave the darkness of our broken lives and follow him into the light.