**Matthew 4:12-25**

**12** Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. **13** And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, **14**  so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: **15**  “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— **16**  the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” **17**  From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” **18**  While walking 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 fishers of men.” **20** Immediately they left their nets and followed him. **21** And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. **22** Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. **23**  And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. **24** So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. **25**  And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

**“He Beams With Brightness”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. If you asked a person where hospitals came from in our country, what would they say? How would you answer the question? Some try to give the impression that hospitals are humanitarian organizations that just sprouted up from the natural goodness of men. However, most houses of healing throughout this country have connection to either a Christian or Jewish based affiliation (Issues etc. 1/17/14). This is far from a coincidence because healing originates not merely as a work of man, but finally with God. The Lord told Israel entering the Promised Land, “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand” (Deuteronomy 32:39).

The word hospital is similar to other words we hear such as hospitable and hospitality. We notice how this ties especially well to the Great Physician Jesus Christ. Long before any viewed sickness under a microscope or had prescription drugs from a doctor. God made known His love of healing in fullness. Jesus Christ neglected neither the physical struggles people faced nor the spiritual sickness deep-seated within every individual. This foundation of how God wants to heal the whole person enlightens a world of sin and death. So connected is salvation by the Gospel to both body and soul that after Christianity became a legalized religion. They were hospitable to a Roman culture that persecuted them for centuries. Rather than hatred, they built hospitals in towns where there were churches.[[1]](#endnote-1) Epiphany answers fears and doubts with faithfulness. Jesus is the promised light delivering us from our darkness to have eternal life in Him.

The light of Christ shines in a dark world. This was the promise foretold by Isaiah. “…The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” Galilee was a region containing the two farthest northern tribes of Israel, Zebulun and Naphatli. Since they were on the fringes of the nation, trouble caused by unfaithfulness of Israel over the years was the hardest on them. By the time of Jesus, these tribes were in name only, a culture mixed up with pagans from foreign lands, and shunned by the more protected Jews in Jerusalem. After the arrest of John the Baptizer, God turned up the light of His love. It was to those spiritually and physically destitute in Galilee that Jesus would draw near. Now alone in His public ministry, He spoke with the same watery words as John the Baptizer, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Jesus draws near with His light to our dismal and corrupt culture. The invention of artificial light is a blessing that made the world a brighter place, but no artificial anything of man changes the hearts of sinners. Jesus said, “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:21-23). It is to such darkened and destitute hearts today that the Gospel proclaims, “Repent, for Jesus is at hand.” As our Lutheran fathers explain it, “In a word, there is no inner repentance unless it also produces the outward putting to death of the flesh.”[[2]](#endnote-2) This happens by baptism showing no other kingdom shines with such love for sinners, just as Jesus did in Galilee. Repentance is now the life of Christians recognizing who stands in the darkness with His Word and presence to save.

The light of Christ calls us to live with Him. It is with this momentum of the Gospel in Galilee that carried away His disciples. He said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” This was not the first time Peter, Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee had heard Jesus. They were not put on the spot as if they were making a “decision” for Jesus similar to the false teaching of an altar call. Baptism already claimed them in the name of Jesus. He was now directly calling them by His authority to be in His ministry. These disciples were soon to be His apostles. Yet, none of it depended on their glory as if Jesus was picking a dream team like for the super bowl. They would be sufficient and secure only by what Jesus would give them. “An earthly king gathers together an army that by its efforts he may attain glory. The Lord gathered together his apostles not that by their efforts he might attain glory but that by his own effort he might win victory for them.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

Jesus calls us by baptism to follow Him. All are disciples because they are part of a body called to life by Jesus. The apostle Peter tells us, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9). It is to cast nets of good news in Jesus into the dark lives of those in this world. At the same time, there is an office distinct from the whole, where like the apostles, Jesus wants the Church to call ministers of His Word to feed, teach, and protect His sheep. Of course, the life of following Jesus puts preachers right in the middle. St. Paul knew the cure to the Corinthians who wanted to play a worldly game based on worldly glory. He said, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” The Gospel stands on its own. Skills or a person can serve God, but none of it is His Gospel. This alone is God’s work by His means of grace where He seeks to save sinners.

The light of Christ remains our redeeming light. This is what He showed the disciples He called to follow Him. “And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.” The wholeness of body and soul is what God wants to address. It is never an either/or, but always a both/and. His ministry gave forgiveness by the judgment He would endure in both body and soul on the cross. His ministry healed the spiritual and physical problems people had in life. Of course, the cure came finally only in the light filling the black hole of death. No light shines out from death’s dismal darkness. None escapes the force of its pull. Yet, the hospitality of God greets all with Jesus saying, “It is finished.” Where no lights shine, where the Devil seems to win, there is an answer out of the depths, an empty tomb, a light in the risen life of Jesus. He has said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” (John 8:51).

Jesus comes as the redeeming light for lives today. The war over health care programs cannot compare to what God has provided as a better plan that money cannot buy. He warns those wanting to save their lives to gaze upon the perfect death given up for sinners. Just as those who deny love for the suffering face the perfect life that lives to serve the weak. Jesus tells us, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29). Just as we need hospitals for the body, how much more a need of hospitals for the soul. Jesus has provided His Church as the place where darkness does not rule the day. Healing is in the hands of One man and His Word works with life insurance in His Name. Luther tells us, “For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ’s lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God’s grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils.” What shines on our lives by the Divine Service of God. We confess is the same light of Christ that will raise the dead and bring a world where life has no need of hospitals. How much healing do we need in our world today out of mercy for the mess. Yet, the source of all healing is Him who already loves us. Jesus is the promised light delivering us from our darkness to have eternal life in Him. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hospital#Roman\_Empire [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Concordia The Lutheran Confessions 176. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ancient Christian Commentary Anonymous [↑](#endnote-ref-3)