Grace and peace from God our Father and the light, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

What do we hear what Jesus does when he learns that John the Baptist has been arrested? Jesus leaves John’s group and before going public he withdraws from to Nazareth and goes to Capernaum by the sea, the largest of 30 villages that surround the sea. It was there he proclaimed what John had claimed “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. The kingdom of God is the same as the kingdom of heaven but the Jewish people do not speak the name of God. Peasants in those days do not have a long-term view nor do they think of what is possible. When John the Baptist is arrested things became tense. The kingdom of heaven and kingdoms of the world are on a collision course. Herod the tetrarchs had arrested John the Baptist to silence him. Now Jesus begins his new public ministry as he replaces John in Galilee, moves from his hometown of Nazareth as he proclaims that the Kingdom of God has come near. Jesus settles in Capernaum, a busy city “in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.” Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the twelve sons of Jacob of old who were brothers of Joseph – the one who got sold into slavery into Egypt because his brothers hated him – and who had areas of the land of Israel named after them – north the province of Galilee. The importance of their names is they designate tribal allocations of the land of Cana that God had sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had shown to Moses and were assigned by Joshua their father. These covenant-evoking names frame the land as a divine gift yet this land is now occupied by imperial powers who oppress those to whom God promised the land. Where do these people who live in the region whom sat in the darkness and the shadow of death find their hope. Isaiah spoke the words quoted in Matthew which shows Jesus fulfilling this prophecy when he comes along seven hundred years later. “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; to those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” Then Jesus was the light and brought them hope by telling the people they should repent because the kingdom of heaven, their hope, is near.

Those very areas that had suffered so much were allowed by God to see so much when God shined the light of his Son by having him grow up in the city of Nazareth as they watched Jesus preaching, doing miracles and healing people in Galilee and by walking on water and causing miraculous catches of fish and by calming the storm and by teaching from a boat on the Sea of Galilee in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.

How many of us have lived like those people and have had a time of darkness in our lives? How about the wars we have had, 9/11, natural disasters and a world wide pandemic? Yet, through others we see the light that Jesus shines in our lives and we follow that light it is up to us to share this light. How does Jesus carry this light to the world through us?

Last week we heard about Jesus encounter with John the Baptist’s disciple Andrew who John said was the Lamb of God. Andrew went with Jesus and then went to his brother Simon and told him he found the Messiah. When Jesus saw Simon Jesus said he would be called Peter. This week, we fast forward to where John the Baptist has been arrested and Jesus sees Andrew and Peter the fisherman casting their nets into the water. He told them to drop their nets and he would make them fishers of people and they followed him immediately.

Jesus went on and saw two other brothers James and John the sons of Zebedee the fisherman in the boat with their father mending their nets and they also followed him immediately. They did not leave their father Zebedee high and dry. To be a boat owner in ancient times means that you have the financial means to hire others so Zebedee can continue on with his business, although it seems fathers like their sons working for them and often have a vision of the sons to continue on with their business. This would certainly be true when James and John were known as sons of Zebedee, the fisherman.

Jesus wants a wider following and recruits these fishermen to help him in his task. Jesus has taken up after John to claim God’s rule as patron/father. Being geographically mobile and breaking with one’s social network (family, patrons, friends, neighbors) was considered abnormal behavior and is more traumatic in antiquity than simply learning behind one’s job and tools.

The term “to follow” the New Testament evangelists apply to exclusively follow Jesus. The term is used to signify that people have joined a noted teacher to learn “a way of life. Because of the immediacy of their response those who followed had previous information about Jesus. We follow because we see Jesus who is filled loving kindness and mercy of Jesus and is humble with a kingdom of nonviolence and non-retaliation. offers an alternate way of reigning as king. Jesus does not rule with violence, oppression, or through division but by being humble as he voluntarily emptys himself of power, identify with the oppressed and burdened, and heals that which is broken. Into this new reign, Jesus calls the disciples to follow him, a way that appears foolish and weak to those who cannot discern it. To those God calls, it is the wisdom and strength, the light that shines in the world. In the shadow of the cross, God makes a way for unity in the midst of division, healing in the midst of brokenness, for peace in the midst of violence, for forgiveness in the midst of betrayal. In Jesus, the light of Gods kingdom draws near and a new way shines for us to follow. We not only find that attractive to us but we find it attractive to share with others, to be a light to the world. Go in humility and love and let your light shine. Amen