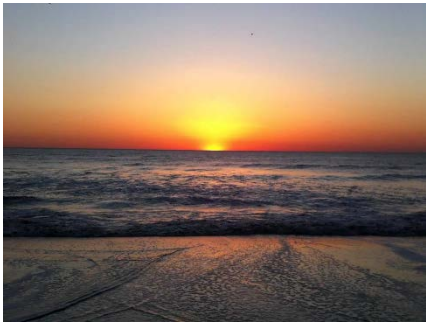


Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the great light that shines on our darkness, Jesus Christ the Lord, amen.

During my Air Force years, we lived in Virginia at Langley Air Force Base for about 5 years. I loved that part of Virginia. It's close to Virginia Beach and the Atlantic Coast. Langley was located on the Chesapeake Bay and so had the most beautiful sunrises. (SLIDE)



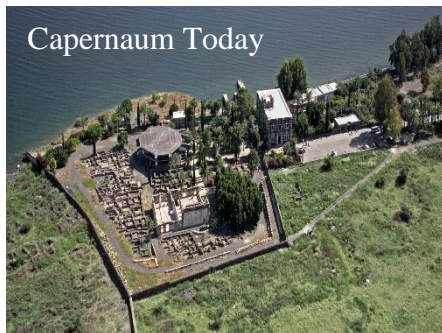
This picture doesn't really do justice to the magnificence of God's creation every morning, but if you imagine the most beautiful sunrise you've ever seen, that's what we were treated to almost every day... The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light. The people of the region around the northwest shores of the Sea of Galilee must have also had some breathtaking sunrises and yet our Gospel text says they sat in darkness.

In my reading this week I discovered the Old Testament Hebrew tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were the first two of the 12 tribes of Israel to be conquered and exiled by the Assyrian army. (SLIDE)

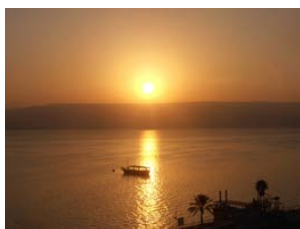


This slide shows the territories where these two tribes lived. The Assyrians conquered Zebulun and Naphtali in the year 722 BC... By the time Jesus

moved to Capernaum and began his ministry there, the people of that particular region on the northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee had been under the oppression of foreign armies for over 750 years or at least for most of that time. As a people, the Galileans were dispirited, depressed, and despised. They might have enjoyed beautiful sun rises, but they were probably too dispirited and depressed to even notice them. Because they were the first to fall to the invaders, they were blamed by the rest of Israel for their failure. So, depressed, dispirited, and despised, the people of the region around Capernaum had indeed sat in great darkness, emotionally and spiritually for centuries. (SLIDE)

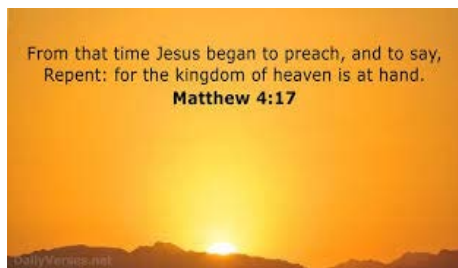


Even though Capernaum was a fairly large metropolis by the standards of the day, all truly orthodox Jews lived in Jerusalem, not in backwater Galilee. Isaiah's poem about the light dawning on the darkened lands of Zebulun and Naphtali plays upon the historical memory that those were the first of Israel's territories to fall victim to Assyria's cruel obliteration of the old northern kingdom. With that historical background, could the Kingdom of God have been inaugurated anyplace else? (SLIDE)



This is a picture of a sunrise over the Sea of Galilee from the shore near Capernaum. Our Gospel says Jesus ministry began after he had heard John the Baptist had been

arrested. As John fades from the scene, Jesus emerges. John came preaching repentance and a baptism of repentance. John was not the light, but pointed to the light. When we notice the beauty of the sunrise we're primarily looking at how the light dances and plays off the water or the clouds. We see the many colors of the refracted light and only then notice the beauty that God displays. Here's the thing, Jesus isn't the refracted light. He's not the light that's reflected off the clouds or the water. Jesus is the sun itself. Jesus is the one who has risen over the spirits of the dispirited. Jesus is the one who shines into the deepest recesses of the depressed. Jesus is the one who brings love and acceptance to the despised. Yes, Jesus came first to the Jews in Galilee, but on the cross his light shone to the entire world. In the person of Jesus Christ and then later through the fishing crew he summons, an epiphany dawns. Along the seashore, in the land of Gentiles, the long-lost Israelites, a bright light shines in the darkness as Jesus comes and takes up residence. He comes with a call to repentance and the Good News that God's reign has begun. The message is the same today. Turn around, look up, come home! God is having His way in the world! (SLIDE)



For people who have been beaten down,
Jesus comes as bright and beautiful as the sunrise
of a new day. I don't know what gets you down,
but I can tell you I have plenty of reasons to be

dispirited, depressed, and I know what it's like to be despised. I've come through times when I didn't want to get out of bed, much less proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Thanks be to God He never gave up on me. With the help of my family and my spiritual director, God brought me through those rough times and made me a stronger, more compassionate person as a result. I read once that Jesus' call to his disciples was a call to those who had already been rejected by all other Rabbis. (SLIDE)



The call stories we have in the second half of today's Gospel were calls to fishermen involved in their life's vocation. If they had been the best and brightest of little Jewish boys, they would have still been in school and under the tutelage of some other Rabbi. That's how schools worked back then. Every year only the best and smartest got invited to return. Those not invited back were sent back to their families. In the case of Simon, Andrew and James and John they went back to their family fishing business. So, even in the selection of his disciples, Jesus picked the dispirited, depressed, and despised. There seems to be a distinct pattern developing here...

Jesus doesn't immediately send out those he says will soon catch people instead of fish. First, they must follow Him. In Jerusalem they will learn what following Jesus is really all about. In Jerusalem Jesus will reign, although not in

the way most people hoped and prayed for. Jesus will be crowned, but it'll be a crown of thorns and His throne will be a cross between two criminals. His glory will be a sign over his head that reads This is the King of the Jews. After all that, then they will be sent out, not singly, to fish for a new disciple here and another there, but together, to become the Missionary's Net God will use to haul through the world, gathering as many as possible into the collected catch of God's forgiven people.

You and I are the result of many generations of disciples that came after those first 4, Peter, Andrew, James, and John. It's into Christ's body we've been caught by their missionary net. First, by redemption. While we were still weak and broken, Christ stands in for us—for both sinners and those who have been sinned-against. Christ breaks our bonds to sin and death by redeeming us with his own precious blood. This is foolishness to others, maybe even scandalous, but that's the wisdom of the cross. Second, we're caught in the missionary's net by reconciliation. We're saved not merely for ourselves, but for each other. The need for deeper and more enduring Christ-centered relationships should be our focus. True intimacy and connection with one another begins with Christ standing with and between us. Based on that Christ-centered relationship, we're given the mission of being ambassadors for Jesus in the mission of reconciling the world to God. The third part of the missionary's net is re-creation. Matthew's Gospel

contains a long journey to Jerusalem with many detours and obstacles along the way. Jesus uses this long journey to re-create His followers in his image so they will be prepared to follow Christ as their lifelong work. Our journey of faith is also a lifelong journey where we face many detours and obstacles along the way. Like those disciples, we have the promise directly from Jesus at the end of Matthew's Gospel story where He promises He will be with us until the end of the age. Every day along our journey Jesus is the one who brings us out of the darkness and re-creates us as his Holy people.

May you hear Jesus calling you to repent and to follow Him today. May Jesus be the light for your path that catches you in His Missionary's Net through redemption, reconciliation, and re-creation. Having been redeemed, reconciled, and re-created in Christ, may you be His light for many others to get caught in the missionary's net and become part of the Body of Christ shining ever brighter until there's no one left in this world sitting in darkness! Amen.