

Sermon preached at OCC, 25 January 2026

Matthew 4:12-23

Let us pray. Loving God, as we turn to your Word today, open our hearts and minds. Give us courage to see what is true, grace to leave what holds us back, and faith to follow where Jesus leads. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

### *Following Jesus – the truth*

Many years ago, I watched a movie titled *Forrest Gump* starring Tom Hanks. There is a memorable scene in which Forrest begins running with no clear reason. He just keeps going—day after day, across towns and deserts—and before long, people start following him. Some think he must have discovered something meaningful. Others hope he is leading them somewhere important. Whenever people ask why he is running, Forrest simply says, “I just felt like it.” What is striking is not only Forrest's running, but the way people follow without really knowing why. They project their own longings onto him. They hope his movement will give them purpose or peace.

When Jesus called his first disciples, they also followed—but not because of confusion or fashion, and not because of wishful thinking. They followed because they encountered something true. Something that asked them to change. Today's reading from Matthew invites us to reflect on what it means to follow Jesus as the truth.

#### *1. Following Jesus - the truth*

Matthew tells us that Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, and then quotes the prophet Isaiah (9:2) by paraphrasing it—*The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.*<sup>1</sup>

It is an intriguing image. The people are not described as walking in darkness as in Isaiah, but as sitting in it—stuck, unable to move freely, unsure where to go. Anyone who has tried to walk in pitch darkness knows the feeling: you slow down, reach out with your hands, and hesitate because you cannot see what lies ahead. Isaiah says that into such a place a great light has appeared. Matthew understands this light to be Jesus himself. Not simply

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:16 – In Isaiah 9:2 it reads: The people who **walked** in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

information, or clever teaching, but God's truth made visible—God's reality breaking into human life.

After hearing that John the Baptist had been arrested, Jesus withdrew to Galilee. He walked from Nazareth to Capernaum, a distance of around 48 kms. It would have taken at least a day, perhaps two. Matthew does not tell us how Jesus felt, but we can imagine that hearing of John's arrest would have been sobering. Many of us know that after receiving painful news, the last thing we want to do is begin something new. Yet this walk marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Capernaum lay in a border region—among Jews and non-Jews alike. It was not the religious centre of Jerusalem, but a place on the edges. And it is there, Matthew says, that the light dawns. Jesus begins to proclaim: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

At this early stage, people would not yet have fully understood what that meant. But as the story unfolds, they begin to see. In Capernaum and the surrounding towns, Jesus heals the sick, frees those tormented by spirits, restores people to their families and communities, and forgives sins. Again and again, through acts of mercy and power, he shows what God's reign looks like. In simple terms: where God is king, people are made whole. Life is restored. Suffering does not have the final word.

This is the truth Jesus brings—not abstract theory, but God's intention for the world. And when Jesus calls people to repent, he is not simply telling them to feel guilty. Repentance means turning around and facing reality honestly. Letting the light fall on our lives instead of pretending that everything is fine. Only in such honesty can healing begin.

## ***2. Leaving the Old Life Behind***

Matthew then tells us that as Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon Peter and Andrew casting their nets, and later James and John in their boat with their father. Jesus says two simple things: “Follow me.” And then, “I will make you fish for people.” And Matthew writes: “At once they left their nets and followed him.” It is a challenging sentence.

So many things bind us—responsibilities, fears, expectations, security. It is difficult to imagine walking away from a livelihood and routine so quickly. The nets were not just tools; they represented income, family tradition, social identity, and stability. Leaving them meant risk.

For those first disciples, following Jesus meant becoming itinerant—moving from place to place, trusting day by day, learning a new way of life. In later centuries, some Christians have responded to God’s call by entering monastic or priestly life. Most of us are not called in that same way. Yet the deeper challenge remains.

To follow the light is to loosen our grip on what weighs us down. It may not mean abandoning our jobs, but it may mean re-examining what defines us. It may mean stepping out of comfort zones shaped by reputation, fear of failure or desire for approval.

### ***3. The Truth We Follow Becomes the Truth We Live***

Matthew summarises Jesus’ ministry with three actions: teaching, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. The disciples followed him as learners. They watched how he treated the overlooked, listened to how he spoke of God, and observed how he responded to suffering. Slowly, the truth he embodied began to shape the truth they lived.

They learned that caring for others did not depend on having perfect resources. Jesus himself often had little—no permanent home, no wealth, no political power—yet he gave time, attention, and mercy freely. He showed them that truth is not merely spoken; it is practised.

The church’s mission has always grown from this pattern. We are not called to impress the world with our cleverness or strength, but to reflect Christ’s truth with humility and love.

In our story time, we heard about a moment when everyone pretended not to see what was obvious—until a child spoke the truth aloud. The truth had always been there, but fear of losing approval or safety kept the adults silent. The story reminds us that Jesus invites us to see clearly and to speak honestly. Sometimes following the truth means naming injustice, or admitting our own needs for change, or standing with those others ignore, because Jesus calls us to follow him today.

Today in Matthew, Jesus appears as light in the darkness. He calls people to turn and follow. What actions in our lives show that we are truly following Jesus? Where is his light inviting us to turn around, to face something honestly, or to trust him more deeply?

May God give us the courage to see, the grace to follow, and the faith to live by the truth that has come near in Jesus Christ. Amen.