

*When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— <sup>14</sup> to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: <sup>15</sup> “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— <sup>16</sup> the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” <sup>17</sup> From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” <sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup> Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. <sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:12-23)*

### **All Gospel Ministry is Jesus’ Ministry**

This past week, I went to Target to buy gloves. My old gloves are in such bad shape that you can see the white insulation of the fingers instead of the black vinyl covering. You can even see the end of one of my fingers. It’s January. This is Michigan. So I figured I should be able to buy gloves. But I couldn’t. I could’ve bought a bikini, but not gloves. I walked out thinking how stupid that is with two more months of winter ahead of us and six months before you can go to the beach here. But you know what? If they could make money selling gloves in January, they would sell them. If they didn’t make money selling bikinis this time of year, they wouldn’t be out yet. Even though it inconvenienced me, retailers do what makes them the most money. They figure that people who need gloves in January bought them in November. By August, you won’t be able to buy swimsuits, because most people will have them already.

Sometimes, what we feel leads us away from the truth. What does this church exist for? Why do we come here? Are we looking for a “feel good” moment? I once got an angry letter from a woman who said that she would never come to a church that would “damn me to hell every week.” Certainly, a pastor who receives a letter like that should ask himself if he’s preaching the gospel clearly because we are here for the ministry of the gospel. Every Christian is a part of the ministry of the gospel. Everyone who supports this ministry with their time and their offerings and their prayers shares in the ministry that goes on here at Peace. But none of us created the ministry we do here at Peace. Jesus gave us the gospel ministry. While he gives us a certain amount of freedom as to how we’ll preach it, we don’t get to design our own message. We’re here to preach and to listen to the message Jesus gave. **All gospel ministry is Jesus’ ministry.**

#### **I.**

Now, if Jesus himself actually came and served this congregation, think of all the things he could do better than I ever could. Well, this morning, we get to see Jesus doing ministry. He teaches us what true gospel ministry is like. **All gospel ministry is Jesus’ ministry. Jesus preached the gospel personally in Galilee.**

After John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee to preach and teach. John had conducted his ministry in the south, in Judea. He was way out in the desert, but the people of Jerusalem had relatively easy access to him there. Jesus himself spent some time in Judea at the beginning of his ministry. He was baptized there. John called him “the Lamb of God” there. He began his work down there. But when John was thrown in prison, Jesus moved back north. In a sense, this was the real start to Jesus’ ministry because from this time on, Jesus took his rightful place. He eclipsed John the Baptist. He needed to do that so that when the time came for him to die, people would understand his death.

When he got to Galilee, Jesus left behind Nazareth, the sleepy, little village where he grew up. Instead, he went to Capernaum. Now, Capernaum was not a large city, but it was important locally. It was prosperous. It was a fishing village but it was also located on one of the main trade routes coming into Israel. Capernaum was a good place for Jesus’ message to get out. The surrounding region got their news from the people coming in and out of Capernaum. And travelers could carry Jesus’ message with them when they heard it.

Isaiah had once described the people of Galilee as **“the people living in darkness.”** What did he mean by that? First of all, it was a long way from Jerusalem, a long way from the temple, the place where Jewish religious life centered. In general, the people of Galilee were probably less observant of the Old Testament laws. Now, that probably meant they were also less caught up in the politics and the sects that divided Israelite faith at this time, but they were also less involved in the positive side of Jewish religion. They heard the gospel less. This was the spiritual backwater of Israel. Isaiah called the whole area, **“Galilee of the Gentiles.”** There was a strong Gentile influence in this part of Israel. Gentile influence brought foreign religious ideas. That contributed to the darkness because Israel was the only nation who had the Scriptures.

Jesus set up shop in an area of spiritual darkness. God had promised he would do that. Isaiah said, **“... the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”** Jesus came to proclaim the gospel to all these lost and confused people because God did not want to lose even one of them. They heard the gospel from the greatest preacher of all time. Matthew tells us, **“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”** Capernaum was his headquarters but it wasn't enough for him to teach at a place where people might hear his message. Jesus went looking for them. When he found them, he did miracles to prove he was the Son of God.

Jesus' message was: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”** How does that agree with the statement that Jesus preached **“the good news of the kingdom”**? That question lies at the heart of true gospel ministry. Jesus was never afraid to “damn people to hell.” He told people they were sinners and anyone who thinks that Jesus would never say something like that is wrong. Anyone who thinks that Jesus would never make anybody feel bad has not read the gospels nearly well enough. Jesus often made his own disciples feel bad. At times, Jesus had the crowds so worked up that they wanted to stone him. They argued with him and took offense at him. Jesus did not preach a “feel good” message. He preached the law so that he could preach the gospel.

Repent means first of all to recognize and confess your sins. You can't understand the gospel until you do. Knowing the message Jesus wants us to preach is more than knowing how to make people feel good. In fact, the law always makes people feel bad. But Jesus gave us this ministry. He calls us to repent because the kingdom of heaven is near. We're going to have to face our Lord soon. Are we ready to do that? Or are we like a man that I once shared the gospel with? We had a very nice conversation about the work I was doing. When I asked him why God should let him into heaven, he said, “My father owned a restaurant. Whenever a poor person needed help, he always gave them a hot meal. I've tried to live my life like that.” This man seemed very sincere. I believe that he did try to live like that. But he was trusting in those efforts to get him to heaven. He believed that he could be good enough for God to let him in. He was smiling a warm and friendly smile when he told me that. Then I told him that wasn't enough. I told him what God really says about sin and hell. Well, his smile disappeared. Then I told him how Jesus died and rose to take our sin away and how God gives us heaven as a gift. But the smile never came back. I never saw him again.

Are we guilty of thinking that we're pretty good people and God will let us in? If so, then we need to understand Jesus much better. We need to repent. We need to admit that we're guilty. We need to recognize that all my best efforts earn me nothing because those efforts are all contaminated. If I gave you a glass of water and you could see that one of my kids used it yesterday for a glass of milk and it never got washed, would you drink it? Most of the water would probably be OK, right? Wrong! The water is all contaminated and you would pour it out. Our best efforts are contaminated with sin. If we think we're getting to heaven because we come here and we write a check and we listen to Christian music and we help people out, then we're relying on contaminated water. God will pour us out into hell.

Jesus calls us to confess the pride and sin in our hearts. But that's only the beginning of repentance. Then Jesus invites us to trust in him. He came and preached the gospel so that we would hear more than just hell and damnation. Jesus lived the life of perfect faith God calls us to live. God has given us credit for Jesus' perfect trust. Today, he looks at us and he sees his Son loving him and trusting in him and humbly bowing before him. Jesus went to the cross and he suffered the hell that we deserve. He took our place and that is the miracle and the mystery of God's grace. God punished his Son for us and he counts that as if we were punished. That makes no sense to us! But to God it is perfectly just and acceptable. It means that you and I are not going to hell. I hope that I never preach a sermon which leaves you thinking in the end that hell is all I care

about. Because the gospel is all about how God solved that problem. The solution is Jesus living and dying for us. The solution is Jesus rising because his resurrection means that God is satisfied with us. It means that God turns a friendly heart to us, a heart that is glad to see us, a heart that no longer counts our sins against us. Jesus rose and we will rise to live with him forever.

## II.

Jesus preached that gospel message himself throughout Galilee. But he knew he was only going to be here for a short time. He had just three years to preach and teach. Then he would die and rise and ascend into heaven. But the Church would go on for centuries. It would need that message every day of its existence here.

**All gospel ministry is Jesus' ministry. Jesus provided for gospel preaching until he returns.**

How did Jesus do that? By calling his disciples. Jesus went down to the Sea of Galilee and he found Peter and Andrew casting nets. They were professional fishermen. Jesus said to them, **“Come, follow me. I will make you fishers of men.”** He went a little further and he found James and John and called them as well. All four of these men left their business behind and became Jesus' disciples. Now, this was not the first time Jesus had spoken to any of them. Last week, we heard that at least of two of them had been disciples of John the Baptist and John had sent those two to meet Jesus. They had spent the day with him and become convinced that Jesus was the Savior. But at this time, Jesus called them to come and be his disciples.

This was the beginning of their seminary training. Jesus was going to instruct them so they could carry on the gospel ministry after he was gone. He was going to make them “fishers of men.” Now, that was still a long way off. The disciples would spend the better part of three years wandering through Galilee and Judea listening to Jesus and learning from him. But they were preparing for the ministry

God used these men – along with the rest of the disciples – to establish the New Testament ministry. That ministry continues today. God used these men to write the New Testament. Everything that we know about the gospel comes from the Bible. And without the New Testament, we couldn't understand the full message of the Old Testament. We would know nothing about how Jesus actually fulfilled all those Old Testament prophecies. All that we know about preaching the gospel comes from what God gave us through these men.

Jesus still works through these men today. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus gave them the very words they preached and wrote. Jesus still works through these words. The gospel message that you hear in this church is not my message, it's Jesus' message. And if it isn't, then you need to get rid of me today. I am here to proclaim what Jesus says. And if I give you God's true gospel, then you have the most unique message ever proclaimed. You have the only message that has real power in it. Sometimes we say that someone's message is powerful. But we mean that it touches our hearts. The gospel is different. It truly is the power of God. Every time the gospel is preached, Jesus works. God himself reaches into your heart. This ministry is the ministry of applying God's power to you. God gathers you here Sunday after Sunday so that he can reach into your heart and renew your faith. He gathers you here, not so that you can serve him, but so that he can serve you. That is the gospel of life.

Why are we here? To hear the gospel. To proclaim the gospel. To share in the power and love of God. Yes, to understand and benefit from that gospel, we must hear the fire and brimstone. We must know that God damns sinners to hell. That's God's message, too. But that part is only the beginning. The heart of our ministry is the gospel, the message of life, of forgiveness, of love and power. Hear that message and trust it. Amen.