

**Sermon Notes:** January 25, 2026

[Lectionary Readings](#)

**Focus:** Galilee of the Gentiles

Matthew 4 has several pieces. It tells of Jesus going to fast and pray in the desert. Right after, the Spirit moves him to Galilee. He does not have a moment to transition. From the desert straight to bad news. John the Baptist was subject to violence, silencing, and prison bars. Why? because he was a superstar who threatened Herod's grip on keeping people afraid.

Instead of going to Jerusalem to confront this imprisonment head-on. Jesus leaves his wilderness fast to set up shop in Galilee. The Greek word is stronger than him "withdrawing" to Galilee. He abandoned the desert never to return. He would not hide in Galilee. He would reposition - likely in Peter's home. Northern Galilee was a place shaped by empire, economic pressure, cultural mixture, and long memory of trauma. His new homebase is where people desperately needed his love and ministry. God is our homebase wherever we are.

These details matter for those of us who feel overwhelmed by what we are living now: nations bombed, people murdered, lands spoken of as a commodity, human lives reduced to leverage. Matthew's claim is not that God ignores these things, but that God's light does not enter history through spectacle or dominance. Galilee would be the new center of spiritual power and transformation

Isaiah's promise quoted in Matthew is not that darkness will be shouted down or argued into submission. It is a promise that light appears where people really live. Jesus could not turn Rome around, but he could heal those beat down by it.

Many of you are morally awake but emotionally exhausted. This passage says that you are not wrong to feel grief. Darkness is named. But the Christian response is not despair or rage alone (I've got my share of rage). The better choice is healing when you can and bonding with those who hope despite the darkness.

What if we thought Jesus residing in Peter's home in Capernaum as an icon:

- A house, not a palace
- Healing bodies, not winning arguments
- Calling ordinary people, not recruiting heroes

The kingdom Jesus announces does not begin with control over borders or land or nations. It begins with people being seen, touched, fed, and called by name. That matters when the news cycle trains us to think only at the scale of rulers.

Matthew reminds us that the light Isaiah promised does not flood the world. It dawns. Slowly. Locally. So, the encouragement here is not Pollyannaish or "look on the bright side." It is that you do *not* have to carry the whole world. You are called to carry light into the places where you are. This is done with God help and the Spirit's strength and the example of Jesus' life. You can love neighbors, protect the vulnerable, and refuse to let cruelty numb compassion. **On page 2**, I go into details about the specifics of Matthew Chapter 4 from the Lectionary.

**Where did Jesus go?** *When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum.* Matthew is making a theological claim about Jesus expanding his ministry to the Galilee of the Gentiles. Matthew is silent on exactly where Jesus stayed, but Mark's gospel completes a puzzle piece. *Mark* understands Peter and Andrew's house as Jesus' operational base after leaving the desert. In Capernaum, excavations have uncovered a 1st-century home later transformed into a house of worship which is now flanked by a Franciscan, octagonal church with ruins on the grounds.

“Made his home” (κατόκησεν) can be read as establishing a base of ministry, not settling permanently. Capernaum functioned as a logistical center: for this first phase of ministry synagogue teaching, healing, lake access, disciples' households.



St. Peter's Church, Capernaum – today

**Who is the focus?** Matthew quotes Jesus' move as fulfilling Isaiah *so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ...on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.*”

This is not exactly Isaiah's words. Isaiah writes that God will honor *Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan 9:1*. Matthew is making an evolved statement. Jesus is the conduit for ministry in Galilee of the “Gentiles” (to Isaiah's “nations”). Jesus makes his ministry in the cultural crosshairs of Roman Israel.

**But it not just Gentiles.** Jesus still calls mostly Jewish people into his ministry. But the chronology is confusing. Did Jesus move into Peter's home before he knew Peter? Likely not. Re-read the passage and see if you know what I mean. The best I can do is imagine that Matthew is being theologically intentional rather than chronologically precise. He compresses and reshapes the timeline so that Isaiah's prophecy frames the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and “home basing” in Peter's home. I'll leave at that. If you have insight, please let me know.

**Foundation** *Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.* Jesus got to Capernaum ready to begin. It was a massively important homebase for him, for all people. **Todd**