

Friday, February 24, 2023  
Season of Lent  
Day 3

### **Matthew 4:23–25**

<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. <sup>24</sup> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. <sup>25</sup> Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

### **Reflection**

When I was a kid I was big into superheroes. Our family would watch *The Incredible Hulk* and *Wonder Woman* on TV and, every once in a while, my brother let me read his *Spider-man* comics. I'm not sure exactly why I loved these characters and stories, but I suspect it was the attraction of hidden power for someone who felt frightened and powerless.

Naturally, when I began to go to church and hear the stories about Jesus walking around healing and delivering, I was drawn in. If I'm honest, that's how I've spent a lifetime envisioning Jesus: as a man distributing power at will. No wonder I was keen to have Jesus in my life. Here was hidden power that I could access. I, like the crowds in Matthew's summary, began to follow Jesus too. Perhaps this is a natural place to enter into Jesus's story.

Now, here's the tricky part. When Jesus called the four brother's in yesterdays reading, he called them to follow him and they did. Those who are coming from all over are also following, but they have not (necessarily) become disciples. At the beginning of chapter 5, Matthew says that Jesus saw the crowds. Everybody's following Jesus, but there is now a distinction: disciples and the crowds.

What I missed as a kid in search for the means for safety, was Jesus's teaching about the kingdom. I had heard about needing to be saved and I had invited Jesus into my heart. But, that had nothing to do with the kingdom. I saw (in my mind's eye) Jesus healing and delivering, but that had nothing to do with the kingdom either. Salvation, healing, delivering, and kingdom all go together, but I didn't see it.

I hope you do. In our passage Jesus goes about "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom" and "healing every disease." This is critical to catch! The proclamation and the power go hand in hand. What is Jesus's good news? That the kingdom has come. How do we know? Because the power of God is literally restoring the people of Israel. The power that Jesus exercises is the presence of the kingdom of God. Salvation is not escaping hell or securing heaven. Salvation is being reincorporated into the life of God (kingdom). Right now we get a foretaste when we are reconciled with God and experience deliverance from sin and we look forward to the full salvation when Jesus comes again and we are raised entirely to the new life of the kingdom.

That means discipleship is not merely making a prayer when I'm 6 years old and then waiting to go to heaven when I die (preferably when I'm too old to care). Discipleship is the lifelong practice of following Jesus in order to have transformation. To have my old self/life put to death in order for my new self/life to live in Jesus. When approached in this way, we truly enter the kingdom and experience the power of Jesus.

It is natural to be attracted to the novelty of power. I still like superheroes! However, the goal of Jesus's ministry is to invite the crowds to move from self interest to sold out discipleship. To move from the old life of the old age, to the new life of the new age. The season of Lent is all about this shift from crowd to disciple. Will you move from merely watching Jesus to now trusting to Jesus's lordship and all that entails? The kingdom of God is not a spectator's sport, but a realm to enter.

### **Prayer**

Lord, we confess that it is more comfortable to sit on the sidelines and watch. It is more natural to seek after your raw power for our own purposes rather than your presence for personal transformation. Yet, we can hear your voice again and again to follow you in a different way, in a deeper way. We must let go of everything to enter into your kingdom and we must give up ourselves to enjoy your power. Holy Spirit, give us the strength and the courage to fully place ourselves in your hands, making ourselves your disciples and confessing you as our master. Amen.