

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jan 7th 2013

“When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee ... and went to live in Capernaum by the sea.”

Matthew 4:12

I often watched my friend, Jesus, when he first returned to us in Capernaum after John was arrested. Of course, whenever he was at home in Capernaum he loved the sea and its shores, but now I told my wife, Joanna, that there was something different about his early morning strolls. We knew him well and watched as he moved slowly, picking his way along the stony shore. He gazed south across the water in a distracted way. He seemed to be looking across to Tiberius but really, he was staring beyond it – almost as if he could see Jerusalem from the edge of the sea. As if the water had the answer to some unasked question.

How could he not feel John's arrest deeply in his heart? We all knew his cousin, John, with his disheveled hair and odd clothes. John had always made Capernaum a regular stop in his wanderings and had become loved by everyone. When we gathered around someone's table at dinner, Jesus and John would banter and laugh and tell family stories. All of us were part of wide-ranging discussions with good food and wine, and Jesus -- what stories he could tell!

News of John's arrest had traveled to us quickly and we were saddened by it. In our sorrow, Joanna and I held each other and felt again the unbridled power of the Roman Empire asserting itself on our land and our people. All of us hated the Roman soldiers and after hearing about John, there was a thick cloud of darkness that covered us all. I think Jesus joined us in that grief or maybe we joined his.

Then there was the morning after he had been at home for a few weeks. He was at the market holding a basket of fish and grain when he caught sight of me and greeted me warmly. Jesus had been to our home for a meal just the week before but no one had seen him for several days. His face looked different today and he seemed strong yet peaceful. He spoke to me and a number of us in the village that morning. Later he spoke at the Synagogue. He often taught there but now it had a different feel to it. He was bolder and it reminded me of the daring way John had spoken publicly. He didn't sound like John the Baptist – he just sounded like Jesus – but to Joanna it seemed as if Jesus wanted to take John's place. Then I started to worry about his safety, the soldiers and what would happen with this new boldness so I cautioned Jesus about it. He just smiled easily and embraced me and said he had his father's work to do.

Something changed after that. Jesus was busy, very busy. He started preaching around Capernaum in a way that made each one of us feel as if he was speaking directly to our own hearts. We knew his message was meant for us. He spoke of hope, of how much the Father loved us – and told us when we pray we could speak directly to the Father! And, he challenged us to repent. No one had taught us like this before. Our own Jesus was praying in a new way, speaking in a new way and when he touched those among us who were sick, they were healed!

Joanna and I were sad when he left the village but we knew he would return as he always did. After he left we heard stories about him as he traveled farther away, often followed from town to town by crowds of people who just wanted to listen to him. He cured their diseases, eased their pain and drove out demons. Those who were carried helplessly to him, spoke to him, stood up and walked away.

Back home Joanna and I worried about him and for him. I began to pray the way he suggested and I used my own words to speak to our Father about my worries about Jesus' safety and our frustrations with those who oppressed us. And I turned, as always to the scripture. It was there that the Father answered my prayers as I read the familiar words and realized Jesus was doing what he had to do – for us.

The people who sit in darkness

have seen a great light,

on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death

light has arisen.

Maureen McCann Waldron