

# Manteca Presbyterian Church

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Series: Unbroken

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## “Light & Hope”

Karen Keene

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### Isaiah 9:1-4

*1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—*

*2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.*

*4 For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.*

### Matthew 4:12-23

*12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— 14 to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 15 “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—16 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 has come near.”

*18 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. 19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.*

*21 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, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

*23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.*

*New International Bible*

Good morning – I am Karen Keene, a member of this church and I will be bringing the message to you today. Let us open with prayer..... May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Oh LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

When I speak in public, especially when I am preaching, I often use this prayer as the opening – either spoken or silently – to center myself and prepare myself to speak. I assumed it was biblical, but I didn’t know where these words were in the Bible. This past week I found the prayer in the Psalms and I want to share a little bit about how I came to be reading the Psalms.

Earlier this month, Pastor Larry spoke in his sermon about New Year’s resolutions, how difficult they are to keep and that we often give up on them within a few weeks or less of committing to them. He asked us to commit to a

New Year's resolution. Pastor Larry then encouraged us to Never Give Up....No Matter What!

So how are you doing with your resolution? Are you keeping up with your commitment, are you struggling, have you given up entirely? Do you need to refocus and try again?

Pastor Larry encouraged us to share our resolutions so that we could encourage each other. So, I want to share with you where I am with my resolution. Two years ago I resolved to read the New Testament straight through over the course of a year and to journal about my thoughts each day. I mostly kept up with the daily routine, although sometimes, when I was busy, I would journal only a few times a week. I accomplished my goal of reading the whole New Testament in a year and finished on New Year's Eve 2018.

For 2019 I resolved to read through a Daily Devotional book that had a Bible verse and a thought for each day and then journal about that. I made it to spring, although I wasn't as consistent as the year before and eventually stopped. I Gave Up.

I still read a bible passage or a devotional most days but they were more random things I came across in my daily social media reading and I mostly stopped journaling. I wasn't happy with myself about this because I don't like to give up on resolutions and goals that I set. So towards the end of December of last year I decided I wanted to set a goal again of reading the Bible every day and after some thought and prayer I settled on reading straight through the Psalms - a Psalm a day - and journaling about them. This will take me to summer (there are 150 Psalms) and then I plan to move onto Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, etc. So far, I have mostly kept up with my daily Psalm reading and journaling, although I have found myself journaling every few days when I am busy.

Many of the Psalms I have read so far are pretty similar - beseechments for mercy, protection from enemies, some complaining from David who was

the writer of the Psalms, descriptions of God's strength and might, as well as thanks and praises to God.

Whenever I read the Bible I always look for words that are found in the hymns and songs that we sing and listen to. When I find them, I sing them to myself and often note them in my journal. And over the first few weeks of Psalms reading I found a few. Then I got to Psalm 19 – and I found the prayer I opened with. I was thrilled – what a find! As I said earlier I didn't know where it was in the Bible and so it was exciting to find it at the end of the 19th Psalm. This find gave me encouragement to keep going – to see what I would find next.

Earlier this week I found a Psalm full of words I have sung in both a hymn and a praise song. And of course on the 23rd I read the 23rd Psalm which is one of the most well known and well loved passages in the Old Testament. So – I encourage you, if you are keeping up with your resolution – Great! If your enthusiasm is flagging or you have given up entirely, I encourage you to try again, to maybe shift your focus or what you are doing – remember that God has a plan for you, a message for you.

If you are sharing your resolution with someone else, ask them how it's going, and encourage them, and please also ask me how my Psalm a day plan is going. I can always use encouragement and reminders. Tom and I are sharing this Read a Psalm a day plan for the year. It is interesting to share our thoughts and insights into what we have read. And encouraging one another by checking in is very helpful in keeping on track, or getting back on track, with our resolutions.

Now to shift to our Bible passages for today – I have always been fascinated by Jesus' use of the words from Isaiah in the opening proclamation of his ministry. So when I read the lectionary passages for this week and saw that Isaiah 9:1-4 and Matthew 4:12-23 were listed I looked forward to studying these passages and learning more about their meaning.

To start, I think it is helpful to understand the context of Isaiah 9. Verse 1 says: *“But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”*

Isaiah was a prophet who lived approximately 700 years before Jesus was born. He lived during a dangerous and dark time. His prophecy was written approximately 730 years before Jesus started his ministry in fulfillment of Isaiah’s words. The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were northern provinces of Israel which had been conquered by the Assyrians. This area was bordered by the north shore of the Sea of Galilee and contained a major trade route – the “way of the sea”. The Jewish people in the region lived among Gentiles, governed by cruel rulers. They were living in darkness, in anguish, but they could take hope in the prophecy of Isaiah, that one day they would be delivered from bondage, that they would see a great light, that a light would dawn.

Matthew says in Chapter 4 verse 12 “Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee.” John the Baptist, had come before Him, to prepare the way for Jesus. He called the people to repentance, denounced the religious leaders and threatened them with judgment. Prior to his arrest, John had baptized Jesus, which was a sign of Jesus faithfulness to accomplish God’s purpose for Him. After his baptism, Jesus withdrew to the wilderness where he spent 40 days and nights preparing for his ministry and where He was tempted by the devil. John’s arrest must have been very difficult news for Jesus to learn. John was his cousin and they most likely grew up together and knew each other well. John’s arrest coincided with the beginning of Jesus active ministry in Capernaum.

Before Jesus moved to Capernaum, we read in Luke 4: 18-19 that he had addressed the synagogue in Nazareth, his home town, using the words of the prophet Isaiah from chapter 61:1-2: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the*

*brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". Then He said, "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing".*

This is another example of Isaiah's prophecy from over 700 years before being fulfilled by Jesus. The people of Nazareth did not accept his proclamation. In Luke 4, verse 29 we learn that they were enraged and drove him out of town to throw him off a cliff, but he passed through the midst of them and went on his way. He was on his way to Capernaum.

Approximately 730 years after Isaiah's prophecy, Matthew says that *"Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled"*.

Capernaum is about 20 miles northeast of Nazareth where Jesus had been living. It is located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was much larger than Nazareth and on a major trade route – remember Isaiah's words "the way of the sea" – a Roman road connecting Damascus which is northeast of Capernaum with Caesarea which is on the Mediterranean Sea. Being on a major route, the news of Jesus teaching could spread far and wide. This area is also surrounded on three sides by Gentiles, so the population may have been more open to new ideas than people in smaller, more secluded towns such as Nazareth. Jesus move to Capernaum, which was the home base of his ministry, was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Similar to the people in Isaiah's time who were living under Assyrian rule, the Jewish people during Jesus time were also living in a time of great darkness and fear. The Roman empire ruled the region with an iron fist. The empire was cruel with high rates of taxation. People lived in fear and poverty, with heavy, grinding workloads to eke out a meager existence, under threat of death. Our next verse says: "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." Jesus came to bring light to the world – to overcome evil with good,

to overcome sorrow with joy, to overcome untruth with truth, to bring salvation instead of condemnation. It is also interesting to note that His ministry and light were focused outside of Jerusalem, which was the home of the temple and remained a place of darkness which prevailed at Jesus' crucifixion.

Jesus came into this dark place – the people were walking in darkness and He came to them as the light of the world. Think about how long people had waited. There was approximately 730 years between Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus fulfillment of that prophecy – that is a long, long time - but the people waited and hoped. Through great hardship they persevered. They didn't give up – they continued to wait and trust and hope, to take solace in the prophecy that one day a savior would come, a savior who would be the light of the world.

Matthew 4:17 says *“From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”* Jesus used exactly the same words as John the Baptist used in Chapter 3 focusing on repentance and the kingdom of heaven.

Repentance means a change of heart, a change of mind. It means being regretful for one's sins and changing the direction of our lives. The kingdom of heaven is the place here God rules and Jesus has brought that kingdom near to us. Jesus is telling us to change the direction of our lives, to give up the old, to follow Him, to invite Him into our lives. By doing this, we will be closer to Him and His kingdom.

The remaining section of Matthew that we read today is focused on calling the disciples and Jesus ministry. In Matthew 4:18-20 He called four fishermen - Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother as well as two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. He asked them to follow Him and be fishers of men – and they immediately dropped what they were doing and left to follow Him.

Think about that – they left their nets, their livelihoods, their families, their friends, their homes to follow Him. That took a lot of courage as well as a lot of trust and hope. He asked them to leave their lives behind – to leave the old behind, to follow Him and be a part of Jesus’ ministry and God’s plan. They didn’t ignore his invitation or say they were too busy or bargain to follow Him later after they wrapped up their affairs, they followed Him, just as they were. They took a risk and stepped out in faith. They followed Him throughout Galilee, while he taught in synagogues and proclaimed the good news of the kingdom. They were with Him as he cured disease and sickness among the people. They saw him interact with Gentiles, treating them not as people to be shunned but as people to be welcomed. They traveled with Him, observing him at a close distance. They learned his manner of speaking, His loving way of dealing with people, they observed how he solved problems and dealt with opposition. As they participated in His ministry, they became more like him in thought, word, and deed.

Jesus didn’t pick perfect people to be His disciples and follow Him – he picked ordinary people, living in ordinary circumstances, who through his love and power, by following Him and learning from Him, became extraordinary. The disciples were with Him throughout His ministry. While they faltered when Jesus was arrested and killed, they didn’t give up. They were overwhelmed and overjoyed at His resurrection and they continued His ministry, spreading the Good News to thousands and thousands of people. They persevered – they didn’t give up. Because they didn’t give up and because the thousands of people they spread the message to of Jesus’ love for us shared the news and they didn’t give up – the Good news of Jesus and the light that Jesus brings to the world, spread down through the ages.

Just like Jesus called the disciples, who were ordinary people to follow him, He calls us. He doesn’t require us to have great ability, just willing availability. By calling us, He equips us, He gives us what we need to follow Him. By developing a relationship with Him, spending time in prayer, study, devotions, and praise, we get to know Him, and learn how to serve as His hands and feet in the world. We can show His love through our actions and

the way we approach life. And we can continue to spread the Good News of Jesus, to share with those around us, as the people before us did, so that His message of hope and love continues down through the ages to come.

Our current world can seem dark – the current discord in our country, no matter where you are on the issues, is difficult and distressing. The coronavirus outbreak in China, destructive storms, flooding, fires in our country and across the globe, closer to home, concerns for friends and loved ones who are sick or struggling. All can contribute to a sense of darkness, of bleakness. But we can take comfort in Jesus who is the light that brings us hope. And we can spread Jesus' light through the darkness by following Him and sharing His love with those around us. We can encourage each other to never give up, and to find hope in Jesus' light that shines through and dispels the darkness.

A quote I want to share with you is “When the world says, “Give up,” Hope whispers, “Try it one more time.”

Several years ago, my work colleagues in Salt Lake City, took me out to lunch to celebrate my birthday at a Tibetan restaurant that had a really great lunch buffet. When the restaurant staff learned it was my birthday they sang a Tibetan birthday song to me then presented me with this fabric scroll that they explained to me was my message for the coming year. When I unrolled the scroll, the title of the message was “Never Give Up” and this is what it says:

No matter what is going on – never give up -develop the heart.

Too much energy in your country is spent developing the mind instead of the heart. Develop the heart.

Be compassionate. Not just to your friends but to everyone. Be compassionate.

Work for peace in your heart and in the world. Work for peace.

And I say it again – Never give up. No matter what is happening. No matter what is going on around you. Never give up.

This wall hanging has been on the wall above my desk for several years now – I look at it every day and it has been an on-going source of encouragement – to not give up. To develop my heart as well as my mind. To be compassionate. To work for peace. All ways in which I strive to live out my faith in Jesus and the walk with Him that He has called me to. A reminder to not give up. To never give up. And to hope, for to never give up requires hope – hope for a better future.

In a few minutes Tom is going to sing “Hope of the Nations” for our offertory. I encourage you to listen to the words which include: Jesus, light in the darkness, Jesus, truth in each circumstance, You are the source of Heaven's light on earth... In history You lived and died, You broke the chains, You rose to life...You are the hope living in us, You are the rock in whom we trust, You are the light shining for all the world to see.....remember these words as you go out into your daily life – Jesus is the light of the world, He is our hope. Never give up – He is with you.

## **IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's ideal**

**Romans 3:23**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**

**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**

**Romans 8:5**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow  
Him to become the master of our life**

## **Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below...**

*“Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me.”*