

Warmth

East Ontario, St. Mary's and Holy Trinity

January 25th, 2026

(Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23)

Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Let's talk about keeping warm. Being warm people and a warm church family. Living with -27 weather is a real-life parable for how not to be a cold-hearted person in a cold world.

Late Friday afternoon, my work was done and I'd put in a couple long days, so I took off before the sun went down. It'd been a few weeks since I had a chance to get on the horse I work with down the road. The cold front hadn't gotten out of control yet, and I'm an Albertan, so I just scoffed at everyone saying it's cold out, and I went for it. So, I saddle up my neighbour's horse, and it's feeling pretty nippy but I'm too keen to stop. We ride out toward the open field and she keeps trying to turn back, and I keep nudging her into the open field. We get a ways out into the open field, and I'm pretty sure this whole "polar vortex" thing hit right about then. My hands hurt, my feet hurt, my face hurt, and my whole body goes stiff. So, I say, "Okay, you're right horse, this is stupid." We walk back, and by the time we get to the barn, I'm properly cold, like can't-move-right kinda cold. Unsaddle, let her out,

get in my car, and as I start to warm up, my beat-red hands punish me as they suddenly start glowing and vibrating and feel like they're going to burst inside out.

No regrets! But I should have slowed down before getting on. I should have done some jumping jacks and push ups, drank a warm drink, got my heart pumping and blood flowing. The parable here is that you can't be a warm person or a warm community in a cold world unless your heart is pumping and your blood is flowing. And that takes doing the work. Getting your heart pumping and your blood flowing means *moving* and *trying* – it requires doing the right thing and the smart thing when the very air you breath makes you want to stop moving and stop trying. There's no amount of outside layers or external force that can warm up a person or community that is not willing to get their heart pumping and their blood moving.

Matthew says Jesus fulfills a prophecy for a small fishing area in ancient Judea, but he does it in a way that's like getting the heart and blood moving instead of bringing external layers of warmth. It 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." Note, for a second, the repetition of the theme of *sitting* rather than *walking* and *living*. Matthew changes Isaiah's words from *walking* and *living* in darkness to *sitting* in darkness. The story here is that Jesus decides to live in this area called Galilee, and the New Testament's favourite Old Testament prophet,

Isaiah, gave a prediction that one day that very region, which in the prophet's day lived in gloom and anguish, would have their oppression cease and their hope restored. Now, importantly, the earlier verses in Isaiah that weren't read today recount the people of this are being very religious but in the wrong way; they consult the spirits and gods and the dead through shamans and oracles who are described as muttering and chirping. Now, I don't want to shame paganism; but I do want to question the motivations and expectations that lead sometimes to it. The crazy thing is that people expect from magic the same thing we expect high-tech devices and scientific predictions. We want spirits and gods—or devices and predictions—to magically make our pain go away, or to magically put us in touch with the divine.

Jesus has a very special way of disappointing these expectations. He is indeed the light of the world; he is very God of very God, dwelling with us as one of us; and, specifically, he set up a tent somewhere in the fishing town of Capernaum. He preached there and the healed illness there. But he wasn't like a golden god, shining out with streams of glory, walking the earth as flowers pop up around his feet, and casting away the Roman soldiers and King with a flick of his divine wrist! Isn't that what we want God to do? Just make it all go away. It's like we're *sitting* in the deep-freeze cold of a Canadian winter and just want God to give us a warmer coat or snap a divine finger to make it summer. But hear again

what Jesus says to the people *sitting* instead of *walking* and *living* in the land of darkness and gloom. “Repent,” he says, “for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” It has? How many fisherman looked around and still saw Roman soldiers policing them with immoral and unjust laws?

Two things. First, Jesus saying “repent,” means “turn around and go the other way.” It’s effect is like saying, “Hey! Get up! Look alive! Move!” Stop *sitting* in the darkness and cold. Second, he says the kingdom of heaven has *come near*. Sometimes he describes the kingdom as being *within you* and *in your midst*. And I want to first acknowledge the valid disappointment with Jesus not removing injustice and pain from the face of the earth—at least not always and not entirely before the end of all things and his re-creation of the heavens and the earth. In the meantime, he leaves us still dealing with a lack of light and a lot of cold. But, in this meantime, he tells us to *move*, to get our hearts beating and our blood flowing. It takes a little work we might not want to do, but if we don’t do it we’ll just freeze. How often does it seem like God is dead and absent, and our lives are empty and unfair? But then if you take time to get your rest, say no to some of the busyness, give your attention to the present moment and creation rather than brain-rotting with TV and Internet, reach out to friends and family, talk to God, wait on God in silence, read the Bible or go to church, do something good for a neighbour, make something with your hands—how often when we do these things, it’s like our

hearts start pumping and our blood flowing, and, all the sudden, while the world is the same old cold place, we're warmer people nonetheless.

Don't just sit in the cold. You'll freeze. Move. Pray. Contemplate. Love. Take action. Be good. Get together. God will give you a beating heart and the warm blood of Jesus, poured out for us at his cross.

Thanks be to God. Amen.