

"Gone Fishing?!"

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Mark 1:14-20
Jan. 21, 2017

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, {2} "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." {3} So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. {4} Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" {5} And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, {15} and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." {16} As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen. {17} And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." {18} And immediately they left their nets and followed him. {19} As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. {20} Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

So, Jesus is walking down the beach beside the sea of Galilee, he sees fishermen, Peter and Andrew casting their nets into the sea, and James and John mending nets with Zebedee, and he calls out to them and says, "Hey guys, Follow me and I will make you fish for people." In the succinct manner of the gospel of Mark, we read, that they follow – immediately. Because Mark doesn't have time for details we don't get the befuddled looks at each other or the 'should we?' or the nagging feeling of leaving good old Dad with the nets in his hands, They just go. Kind of makes you wonder if Jesus was singing or whistling that catchy little tune:

Well, now, take down your fishin' pole and meet me at The Fishin' Hole,
We may not get a bite all day, but don't you rush away.

What a great place to rest your bones and mighty fine for skippin' stones,
You'll feel fresh as a lemonade, a-settin' in the shade.

Whether it's hot, whether it's cool, oh what a spot for whistlin' like a fool.

(Whistle) Probably not. But they go. Immediately.

Amazement that these guys just up and follow Jesus has always been the normative way of viewing this scripture. But who knows, maybe they jumped at the chance. Fishing is a hard life. Hauling nets. Trawling. They risk their lives doing what they do.

This is no doubt the reality of fishing in Jesus' time. James, John, Simon Peter and Andrew weren't regularly shooting the breeze on a sunny day over a couple of beers while waiting blissfully for something to catch and release. They were living on 20 foot open boats, watching the skies and the currents for the next

back breaking catch to haul in so that they could pay the bills. Sometimes business was good; far too many days it probably wasn't.

Maybe that, in truth, is why when the stranger comes by and with his most beguiling manner says, "Follow me and I'll teach you another kind of fishing altogether." – they have a conversation, Mark doesn't have time for, about being business being slow anyway so why not have a little adventure, so they stand up, stretch their aching muscles, step out of the boats and follow. Maybe walking away **isn't** so hard to believe. But when they did what they did next, which as Mark tells the story was to waste no time in disciple training but to head off to Capernaum and watch him get shouted at by a guy who had demons and watch him stand the demons down by saying 'be silent and come out of him....,' what's amazing is when they heard what they heard, and saw what they saw, they didn't go running back to the seashore, to the safety of the boats and their fisher lives.

Now in the season of calling, Epiphany, the question the day poses for us is what would we do? Or perhaps more to the point what do we do? What do we do when, in faith, the calling comes to us? Mark makes it sound so easy.

So maybe in faith, we need to ask one of those annoying difficult faith questions: is it the boat, that represents what we have and are, that needs holding, or is the boat and all the stuff it carries, holding us? When around us people seem to have some definite sense of calling, some plan for what do to with their lives, some way that is for them a precise commission from God, don't we wonder at how definite they are -- when in our lives we allow so many things to keep us from

going, from following when the time comes to follow, from living our lives with a sacrificial edge? From saying, 'yes', when God calls in ways we find uncomfortable.

The truth may **also** be that we are mostly like good old Jonah. Now here is someone we can relate too. A prophet who is so upset by the abhorrent behavior of those God wants him to minister to, that he refuses to go. If there were Patriot fans that God said needed to be ministered to today, not tomorrow, today – well, what do you think? Jonah has no taste for Ninevites. They had won enough. And they were, they were, well, so different, so smug about it. Jonah was an Israelite. They hadn't won anything in a long, long..... long time. He wasn't about to go.

Seems like we allow so many things that are differences get in the way of what we are supposed to do. First of all, we're not too fond of considering changing to a different lifestyle, or at least a lifestyle that might mean we have less, or live on less. Change frightens us. Being called to change and follow men's having to relate to people look different, talk different, have different ideals, different mannerisms and different beliefs. People who eat different food, dress differently, pray in different ways and call God by different names. Far too often, rather than learn from differences we tend to keep them at arms length. We forget that we are supposed to follow, and that along the way, in the toils, conflicts and suffering of our lives we will learn, who is leading, we will find Jesus revealed to us. It's really that simple. We choose rather to hold fast to the familiar, to hang onto things like doctrine and liturgy and a philosophy of faithfulness and think if it's

not our way, it's not the legitimate way. The truth is in this world there are of wonderful things being done by a lot of wonderful people who are vastly different and ALL being used by God. All have heard God's call and have been hooked for service.

People not much different than us, who were fishing by the sea or mending their nets or teaching in a class room, or doing business, or practicing law in a courtroom, or nursing and doctoring in a hospital or preaching in a pulpit like this, when one day when Jesus happened by and in his most winsome voice says, "Follow me", and it seems like they did just that, even though common sense says that even these called had doubts and second thoughts. But they were called and went.

Even Jonah, when finally persuaded by God through a day stay in the whale to go to Ninevah has such a powerful hate brewing for the people that he blows away the populace with his fiery deliverance of the promise of God's fury. So much so that they repent and return to God. So God repents and spares them. So Jonah sulks. Jonah doesn't get it. He is not familiar with the concept of Grace, although lying on the beach earlier thanks to some gastronomic upheaval from the mighty fish, he is a true recipient of just that – God's amazing grace. We can hope that after the story, when Jonah's righteous indignation has abated by the heat of the day burning down on his head, we hope that he got the message. God is a God of love who can use us even when we are not at our best to do what needs to be done.

Jesus, who we think we know, at least well enough to put on our bumper stickers, comes to us and says, 'follow me,' right from where we are for many reasons, with many purposes for us in mind. Jesus Christ calls us to do what he does, to go where he goes, to be for him a serving people. . . even if we stay right where we are.

One of the main problems of the church and church people is **knowing** what it takes to serve Christ, to do what Christ did. We just need to do it. Like these good folks in our midst this morning. From Fayette PC in Fayetteville, Ga. who have dropped what they are doing to follow Jesus down here to Jacksonville, Fl. Not exactly the third world. But for far too many, far too close to us, not exactly paradise either. Jesus has work for disciples to do – everywhere.

Jesus calls us to do what Jesus did. He washed dirty feet, fed hungry mouths, healed sick limbs, opened blind eyes, cleansed leprous skin, exorcised demonized bodies. Jesus taught countless lessons on the faith, he held and blessed children, he told stories, he laughed and loved and challenged people to live a different way. **And Jesus said**, "Follow me." Jesus called us to do the same, and even greater things.

In our world it is no longer business as usual or politics as usual or economics as usual because it is no longer life as usual. In fact, life 'as usual' has become a big part of our problem. It's hard to worry about the 'other' when I'm feeling threatened. We become afraid. We start to live in fear. What if those Ninevites invade? What'll we do? I hear they want to take our jobs. and someone

comes along and says to us, 'I've got my eye on what threatens us. I'm going to protect your ease and your money. I'm going to do away with anything and anybody that threatens the status quo. Don't worry. You're going to keep yours. It's gonna' be great – again.'" But nothings that good. Nothing comes so easy. Jesus still calls.

What do you think Jesus sees and knows as he approaches the seashore of our living today. Don't you think Jesus sees the whole world changing -- its ways of doing business, its ways of doing politics, it's ways of treating people. Don't you think Jesus listens to news, and knows we do far too much of that – that everyday there are new horror stories because horror stories sell. Don't you know Jesus knows about the nations that have something we want or need that are in desperate turmoil that garner vast amounts of our resources. Don't you think Jesus is more than concerned that we hear less and less from those other nations that have so little and whose need is so great. Those _____ nations. And don't you hear Jesus calling people, "Jonah people," "James, John, Peter and Andrew people" to serve there, to answer Christ's call to follow, to help instill an amazing hope in those places, so that in spite of need, in spite of poverty and political unrest, the church is moving and growing and serving God's people in the name of Jesus Christ in the world's poorest places.

For the church, in all its diversity, called by Jesus Christ, it is time to embrace our unity and get on with the task of being the church. And the same is true for each and every one of us. We may not be called to Nineveh, or like the

*disciples to leave our homes to become fishers of men. But we are called in the deepest sense to **leave everything** behind. The preconceptions, the narrow field of vision, the deepest habits of the heart, no longer expecting or demanding life to be as it always has been, but trusting that whatever befalls us, whatever becomes of us, whatever depths of pleasure or pain we feel, what ever we are called to be and to do, as God is love, we are not alone. That in the very toil, conflicts and sufferings we endure – in the fellowship we come to know in being with him in our calling, we will find out who he is...even as he already knows us. For it is our willingness to answer his call, that we truly come to know, to embrace, to be captured by his grace....*

Jesus Christ is calling us, he has work for us to do -- everywhere -- it is time to go. . . Immediately, if not sooner.