

Epiphany 3, Year B, RCL
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Jonah 3:1-5, 10 Psalm 62:6-14 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 Mark 1:14-20

Jonah is a reluctant prophet. Not for Jonah are the words, “Here I am Lord,” or “your servant is listening.” When God calls Jonah and tells him to travel East to Nineveh, Jonah runs to the West, where, as we know, he ends up in the belly of a whale. The story of Jonah is meant to be a funny story. Its hyperbole brings us closer to the utter ridiculousness of the lengths that God will go to help God’s children. God talks not only to willing apostles, but to reluctant ones and to creatures of the sea so that God’s purpose can be done. After Jonah is spewn onto the beach, he hears God’s call a second time. At this call, initiated by God, Jonah sets off - without a word - to the city of Nineveh.

Now Nineveh is the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, the capital of a huge and brutal military empire. One of their greatest rulers wrote a description of his military victory with these words: “I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool.” In walks the prophet Jonah on his mission from God.

To this fierce and bellicose people, our prophet Jonah delivers a powerful sermon: “Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” That’s it, folks. In eight words, Jonah convinces this people to turn their lives around, to repent and to turn to the Lord so completely that God will not destroy the city. The people’s response is over the top (more hyperbole). Even the cows wear sackcloth ...

The exaggeration of the reluctant prophet and the total, instantaneous turnaround is intentional. At its root the exaggeration shows us a wholehearted, complete response to the word of God.

So it is with today’s gospel. Jesus says, “Come, follow me;” Simon and Andrew immediately leave their fishing nets and go with Jesus. Theirs is a wholehearted, complete response to the word of God.

Paul writes to the people of Corinth that we must be ready for God to show up; surely Jesus’ return is imminent. Jesus’ is coming so soon that there is not time to be anxious about earthly matters. What is important is to turn our minds and ways

of living immediately toward God, toward God coming to us again. “For God alone my soul in silence waits...He alone is my rock and my salvation.”

We are learning about God.

God is tenacious: four times God called out to Samuel in one night. Twice God called Jonah, and in-between calling, waited through Jonah’s escapades, saved his life; and still called him out of a tangled mess. From that far away time to the time of the calling of Jesus’ disciples to the present day, God calls us from wherever we are. None of us make our living fishing, nor have we been rescued (I think) from the belly of a biblical fish. God still pulls us out of tangled messes, out of our everyday life ... God waits for us to hear and to respond to God’s way of life, doing anything to get our attention.

God is merciful. God saved an entire city, the bloody capital of the Assyrian Empire, because its people show their change of heart and their turn to God in their behavior. God is loving. God calls simple people, average, everyday folks to speak God’s word, to walk with Jesus.

God will go to astounding, even ridiculous lengths, to seek us, find us, and wait for us to say “yes” in our words and in our actions.

You and I have the opportunity in every moment to say “yes” to God. That one little word, yes, can be the “immediate” part of our lives. Most of us are not called to walk away from our current livelihoods to follow Jesus, but to follow Jesus in the context, the totality, of our lives. Here are immediate actions that we can do – and that we are doing:

We worship and pray

We stay at a job that we love and thereby spread joy to others;

We stay at a job that we detest in order to provide for ourselves and our family; we exhibit faithfulness and perseverance.

We pray for ourselves and for others.

We are generous with our time and wealth; we recognize that there is joy in giving.

We care for others ...

How is it that you respond with immediacy in response to Jesus?

There is an opportunity for this week. Reflect on how your life/actions and the ways in which you follow Jesus, turn to God and away from other voices that clamor for our attention.

And they left their nets and followed him.