

"On Being Called Into Something New"
The Third Sunday after The Epiphany
21 January 2024
Trinity+Saint Peter's Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California

Jonah 3:1-5, 10
Psalm 62:6-14
I Corinthians 7:29-31
Saint Mark 1:14-20

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First Idea: Might God have a different idea about what is to be?

There are many things that come to mind as we think of Jonah: the storm that causes the sinking of his ship, the repose in the body of a great fish, the reluctant trip to Nineveh, the powerful sermon that he preaches, the redemption of the people. Actually I could have stopped at the great fish (not a whale) and its use in countless cartoons and jokes. However the really startling part of the story, is Jonah's anger at God for redeeming Nineveh which is shown to us in his anger of the destruction of the vine that is shielding him from the hot sun. The trigger for this anger is the fact that God changed God's mind.

A related story just seen on FaceBook: An Evangelical Pastor share a story about a sermon that he preached on the Sermon on the Mount. You remember this, "Blessed are the meek, blessed are the poor, etc." At the end of the service the pastor was met at the doors of the church by a churchgoer who complained about the "liberal preaching points" of the sermon. The pastor defended himself by stating that he was just stating what Jesus first stated at the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's version. The churchgoer replied, "Weak!"

That, in summary is with which Jonah charges God – weakness. He should have condemned the people of Nineveh. That God redeemed them, and loved them, seems beyond Jonah, and beyond a lot of evangelical Christians in these days. God was calling Jonah and Nineveh, and us as well to some thing new. To a new understanding for who it is that is called into God's family. It calls us all to think through things in a new manner – something I'll talk about in the session of the Creeds, later this morning.

Idea Two: What might we see in our silence?

The psalm this morning begins with another startling idea: "For God alone my soul in silence waits." My soul in silence waits. It sounds like a left-over passage from Advent where we were called to wait upon the Coming One. The society around us was waiting for something else, but we were called to wait – in silence. In the rapidity of our conversations in this day and age, we become troubled and restless with silence. I experience it myself in the silence following the sermon. The silence becomes heavy,

and I am anxious to stand up and begin the liturgy that follows. What is the silence for? Again, from the psalm, "God has spoken once, twice have I heard it." I am reminded of the trip that Elijah makes to the Sinai, expecting to experience God in earthquake, noise or fire, and the voice of God. He is met with silence, with stillness and quiet. (Pause)

I have begun to wait in silence. At the Friday mass at Saint Mark's during the thirty or so minutes prior to the liturgy, I sit in silence, with any who will join me in meditation. We wait in silence, and listen for whatever God might tell us. That is the trick, taking our minds off of whatever concerns we brought with us, thoughts about this building, concerns about politics, whatever – we need to sit in silence and put much of life aside for a moment, and wait.

Waiting into our future

Paul introduces to the idea in the second reading for today. "For the present form of this world is passing away." That is a notion that is totally familiar to us. When I think of the world that my grandparents, or even my parents inhabited, the world that is familiar to me is a totally different entity to the world that they inhabited. What is made evident to us is that the church and our belief systems have changed. In addition the values of our time have changed as well, where the poor are forgotten and dismissed, where the prophets' call to care for the widow and the orphan is forgotten and ignored.

Paul asks us to wait in an absence of things. He advises us to forget marriage, and death, happiness, and possessions, to forget the world itself. So thus we are asked to sit in silence and listen for God's call to us. We are asked to be like Abraham and Sarah and to journey into a new world, a new land, a new reality.

Hearing God's call to us.

In our silence we need to ponder the disciples who hearing Jesus' call to them leave everything and follow. Mark differentiates the time, noting as we move beyond John the Baptist, to the ministry in Galilee. Jesus speaks his Gospel immediately, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.*" At this point Jesus moves from a person who is acted upon, baptism and temptation, to one who acts. He initiates ministry in the calls to the agents who will not only learn from him, but who will serve as sent ones in this ministry. There is the call, "*Follow me and I will make you fish for people.*" And there is the response, "*And immediately they left their nets and followed him.*" Mark clues us into change, "*The time is fulfilled.*" We are alerted to expect something different. It begins with the Kingdom of God, and we are met with a problem there, a problem that helps us wrap our minds around what Jesus is teaching here. Is the kingdom something territorial, or is it a dynamic distinction – as in rule or reign. We are asked to see where God has suasion, and if we look closely and listen carefully in the theology expressed in Jonah, that territory is limitless. The tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures was that the rule of God was God's alone, that it could be seen in the lives of individuals, and finally that it would be seen in the future in a form not formerly seen. It can be experienced in the silence.

Those whom Jesus calls are asked to step into this movement toward a Kingdom that is past, present, and future. They are asked to not only give up things and position (fishing and nets) but also their notion of God and God's intent. This is a preaching point that the readings seem to point to, what we really need to pursue and possess, and that which we might give up. So as you ponder all of this such as Mary did, expect something new and startling – something that speaks of the Kingdom of God.

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