

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS
3RD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
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Jonah 3:1-5,10

In this reading from the end of the Book of Jonah, we see how a city which had been heading morally and spiritually in the wrong direction heeds the call of a prophet and turns toward the good. There is hope for all of us? We can listen to God's word, turn around and head in the right direction. The reading starts by saying that the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. You'll recall that when God first spoke to Jonah, through a series of Jonah's poor choices, things did not end well. Jonah ran from God. He went in the wrong direction. God caught up with him though, and after a period of time out in the belly of a fish, Jonah saw the error of his ways so that when God came to him a second time with a task to do, Jonah was ready to do what God asked. He went to Nineveh, the city that was headed in the wrong direction, without much of a plan other than that he would proclaim God's message. He perhaps didn't even know the message ahead of time but trusted that God would give it to him. Jonah was given a second chance, as was Nineveh, the city headed in the wrong direction. They heeded Jonah's voice, believed in God and were spared destruction.

How many times has God given us second chances? Can you think of times when you have understood God asking you to do something and you have avoided listening or even run from God's request? Sometimes God's call is a call to uncertainty. Jonah did not necessarily know what he was going to proclaim before he went to Nineveh but he went anyway. Does God sometimes call us to uncertainty? When Jonah ran at first, God provided a fish in which to contain Jonah so that he could think about. This wasn't necessarily a punishment, but an opportunity to center down and really listen to the voice of God. Does God provide such places for you? When you feel you are headed in the wrong direction do you have a place of "spiritual timeout" where you can regroup and then head in the right direction? How long has it taken for you to recognize God's claim on you?

Psalm 62:6-14

This Psalm reminds us that we must wait for God and only for God. There is no other, and the waiting for Him reminds us that we are not in control. We must simply be humble and wait. But this humility is not a bad place – it is not humiliating. It is a place of refuge, safety, honor...a rock, a stronghold. Coming to such a place of trust can make one vulnerable. When you come to such a place, you can pour your heart out but that can also leave you feeling stripped and naked. But since we are pouring our hearts out to God, there is no room for anxiety. God alone has the power to free us from all that enslaves our heart. His love is steadfast – never fails, always protects, always frees, always heals.

As a spiritual exercise, find a quiet place and sit with God. Open your heart to Him and confess everything that is in it – all the fears, all the anxieties, all the anger. Write it down in a letter to Him if that seems appropriate. Pay attention to how He will free you from the tyranny of all you write down or all that you confess. This is a right turning for you.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us of God's fundamental claim on us. God has imprinted our souls with his mark and has issued an invitation for us to step into a world that is different from the world in which we currently live. In fact, the current world is transitory and is passing away. We are called to step into something else. We belong completely to God and these worldly concerns do not have any claim on us. Our fundamental vocation is to belong to God. We follow that voice and that direction.

We live in a divided, troubling, challenging world. But we don't belong to this world. Because God has claimed us, we belong to a world of hope, unity and expectation of the good. How do we communicate this hope, love and good to a world that does not know it?

Mark 1:14-20

It's time! The Kingdom of God is here! Jesus has come to Galilee to proclaim just that. He expects a two-fold response: belief and repentance. The Gospel of Mark is compelling and moves quickly. Notice the number of times through this fast-paced Gospel that the author uses the word "immediately." In today's text, even, it appears twice. Jesus's words are compelling also. "Follow me," he says. Can you imagine? We are not told if Simon, Andrew, James and John knew Jesus before he issued this command. We are not told if they had spent nights together discussing the Kingdom of God before this. We are told only that Jesus commands them to follow and **immediately** they drop everything they do to go. Jesus's invitation must have been compelling indeed! My suspicion is that God must have already planted this invitation in their hearts and that Jesus's command was simply connecting with that invitation. And yet, these disciples surely were leaving a place of certainty, weren't they? They were leaving a profession they knew intimately. They were leaving father and home. Their response to this vocation issued by Jesus required them to leave security and certainty and, like Jonah in the Hebrew Scripture today, step into a plan without fully knowing what the plan was. Jesus's imperative invites us to turn away from prior loyalties and believe in the path he appoints. Jesus is the one who initiates the call. Even though the disciples are fishermen, Jesus has "fished" for them! They follow without question, caught in the net of Jesus's love.

God has made a claim on you. If you are reading these reflections, it is because God has planted an invitation in your heart and is now summoning you. The summons, perhaps, requires you to abandon self-interest and security, but respond you must! Just how strong is this summons? What would compel you to abandon the world as you know it and step into something new and exciting? Are you responding to the invitation of Christ?

COLLECT:

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.