

Sermon: Epiphany III

The Rev. Mike Wernick

January 25, 2015

Year B

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Psalm 62: 6-14

1 Corinthians 7: 29-31

Mark 1:14-20

So... did any of you go home last Sunday... and while you were lying in bed... or maybe snoozing on the couch... did you hear a voice... or something that made your ears tingle... and just to hedge your bets... just to be on the safe side... did you say: *Speak Lord... for your servant is listening*... did you think about our reading from 1 Samuel... and wonder whether... and how... God might be calling you too...

Last week's reading from 1 Samuel was about being called... and today's readings are too... God calls Jonah to go to the Ninevites... and through Jonah... calls them to turn from their ways... and turn back to God...

In the Epistle... Paul calls the Corinthians to be ready for the Second Coming... he believed it was imminent... and called them to turn from their attachments to marriage... mourning... rejoicing... shopping... and the world... he wanted them to be ready... because he thought things were about to change more than they could imagine...

And Mark's Gospel doesn't beat around the bush... Mark doesn't give us the genealogy of Jesus... and the longer introductions that Matthew and Luke do... he doesn't describe Jesus' childhood... he charges ahead with a sense of urgency... in just thirteen short verses... he tells us about the proclamation of John the Baptist... preparing the way for the Lord... with people being baptized by him... and a description of what he was wearing... about self-worth and tying sandal thongs... about the baptism of Jesus and how Jesus will baptize... and about the temptation of Christ...

And then boom... today we hear that John is arrested... there's a change in leadership... and Jesus proclaims the Good News...

Mark's sense of urgency reflects Paul's sense of urgency... and immediately... Simon and Andrew left their nets... their vocation... and their family... immediately... James and his brother John... left their father Zebedee and the hired men in the boat... and followed Jesus...

Now... John the Baptist being arrested is bad news... we know what's going to happen to him... but let's not get stuck there... because when Jesus shares the Good News... when Jesus says: *The time is fulfilled... and the kingdom of God has come near...* he also calls the first disciples... begins to form them... begins a priesthood of all believers...

John Shea writes: *obviously... these two terse encounters are not an actual reporting of events... real life accounts would demand conversation... argument... hand-wringing... and that greatest of human pastimes... the weighing of options... but the Gospel rendition bypasses the dynamics of decision making... in favor of a symbolic statement of essentials...*

Professor Ted Smith wrote... this sense of urgency comes... this invitation comes... in response to the fullness of time made present in Jesus... the fruit is ripe... the harvest has come... don't waste time...

And the text says: *I will make you fish for people ...* but a literal translation might read: *I will make you to become fishers for people...* the first translation is task oriented... the second promises a new way of being... and so we're left with a question: does Jesus really want to give us one more thing to do... or does Jesus want to change who we are...

Theologian Marcus J. Borg... whose passing we mourn... wrote: "The Christian life is not about pleasing God... the finger-shaker and judge... it is not about believing now... or being good now... for the sake of heaven later... it is about entering a relationship in the present... that begins to change everything now... spirituality is about this process... the opening of the heart to the God who is already here."

This I think... is the true call to discipleship... like the first disciples... we realize that we're no longer *bound* by the actions or decisions of the past... there may be consequences that we have to deal with... that come out of the choices we've made... but the resurrected state of being to which we have access... gives us new life in each and every moment... gives us the freedom in each and every moment to choose something different for ourselves...

When I explored a call to the priesthood... I didn't have \$40,000 dollars in the bank to pay for seminary... I didn't have a clue about how all of this would work out... didn't know whether the bishop would send me far away... and I thought I must be crazy for going back to graduate school thirty years after college... but those were the things that I turned over to God... I believed in just about every fibre of my being... that God could... and would... fill in those gaps... and realized that I wasn't responsible for having it all mapped out in advance...

The disciples heard a call... left what they knew... and followed Jesus... they had a long adventure that they did not expect... it was a following filled with misunderstandings... failures... suffering... but finally hope...

You are all... each one of you... called to a place and a purpose in life... playing... school... work... study... recreation... ministry of many kinds... and roles that will change... and I think it is the same for us... when we hear the call and leave all things... we embark on the following of God's kingdom... that Jesus revealed...

We are all called to worship here today... to serve in various ways... there are those who are newly called to serve on Council and those who will be to serve on Vestry... we sometimes joke about how we volunteer because no one else will... but it remains one of those *free will* choices... with consequences of its own...

You see... the reign of God is not the product of discipleship... but the pre-condition for it... Jesus came and proclaimed that the time IS fulfilled... not would be... maybe... later on... didn't tell Simon and Andrew and James and John to just stand by... that he'd get back to them once he had it all wrapped up... he said it's here now... and when those men followed Jesus immediately... we realize that God doesn't call the qualified... but that God qualifies the called...

The Kingdom is already here... like the disciples...we're being invited over and over again to follow Jesus... but since repentance means re-establishing our priorities... we don't have to leave home... we can still live with our families and engage in our work in such a way that God's creation will be restored... we can still say: *Speak Lord... for your Servant is listening*... and we can persevere in our call and steadily integrate God's mission into human systems...

And ours too... will be a following that ends in hope...

Mike+