



Sermon for the Third Sunday after Epiphany, Jan. 2021

Your Call

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

[Jonah 3:1-5, 10](#), [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](#), [Mark 1:14-20](#), [Psalm 62:6-14](#)

Let us walk in love and answer the call to follow Jesus, each in our own way and each of us to the best of our abilities.

Our Old Testament reading today is part of the familiar story of Jonah and the big fish. This reading comes after Jonah's disobedience to God, which is why he experienced three days and nights in the belly of that fish, fervently praying, pleading his case, and promising God to do what he was supposed to do.

The verses left out of today's reading go into great detail about how seriously the people of Nineveh responded to Jonah's preaching of repentance. "By the decree of the king and his nobles" even the animals wore sackcloth. Everyone fasted and prayed that "God may change his mind ... and we do not perish."

I've always wondered why, in chapter 4, after such highly successful preaching, Jonah was angry when God spared Nineveh. Was it because he objected to God saving non-Israelites from a punishment Jonah believed they deserved? Or perhaps, having prophesied destruction that did not happen, Jonah felt as though God made him look like a fool. Maybe a bit of both, or perhaps something completely different. My Annotated Oxford Bible [NRSV] says that the theme in Jonah is to proclaim the breadth of God's mercy and love for all people, in opposition to Israel's "narrow sectarianism and exclusivism."

It is interesting to me that this week's lectionary combines the after-story of Jonah and the "large fish" with Jesus' calling four fishermen to quit their jobs and follow him. Jonah [2Kings 14:25] was an "obscure Galilean prophet who counseled Jeroboam II in a successful conflict with the Assyrians." In today's Gospel reading, still early in his ministry, Jesus was also an obscure Galilean; known but not yet acknowledged beyond an intimate circle. Jesus first called Philip. Philip told Nathanael, and when Nathanael asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip replied, "Come and see."

We are told that Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, had been arrested, but we are not told why. If you are curious, it was because of John's insistence on following Jewish law about marriage and divorce, even as it applied to Israel's ruler. Herod

was in a very difficult situation and his 'illegitimate' wife was homicidal toward John. Stay tuned.

Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

There are two fishing activities in this Sunday's gospel reading. Simon [who will be renamed Peter] and his brother Andrew are casting their nets. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, the sons of thunder, are mending their nets. All four men dropped everything, left their jobs and their families to follow Jesus. To where ... into what? They couldn't have known for certain. Maybe it was something they knew from their gut that this would be more than an adventurous spree. Jesus was the one!

As followers of Jesus, let us also look to the work we are called to do. Casting our nets and reaching out to help the people like those Jesus loved: the poor, homeless, hungry and helpless, the foreigners and refugees, the sick and vulnerable, the prisoners. There are so many ways for people to be disenfranchised, pushed to the edge, to be looked upon as 'other.' Let us take our blinders off and adjust our vision to see in each human being, in every face, the person of Jesus.

Let us mend our nets, bring the frayed pieces together, tie the knots of love and friendship with the people like those Jesus loved. Let us recognize the humanity in all of our neighbors, have the difficult conversations, reconcile differences and become beloved community. Echoing the Latin phrase on the U.S. seal – E Pluribus Unum (from many, one), and following in the footsteps of Jesus, we trust that the spiritual practice of conversation across differences can help to knit us all into a diverse, more perfect union. [<https://episcopalchurch.org/from-many-one>]

Let us also restore our connections to the earth; understanding that everything we do affects every other thing. This is not an 'afterthought.' When we care for creation, we are caring for each other. We are God-appointed stewards of this planet, our island home. Creation care is an awesome responsibility that calls us to action, for our own benefit, and on behalf of generations to come. As we say when we renew our baptismal vows let us declare, "I will with God's help."

May we always proclaim the Way of Love - with our lips and in our lives. Amen.