

A little history before we reflect on this Sunday's Epiphany story. How do we have a story from the Old Testament about Jonah and the call of Jesus's disciples in the Gospel of Mark? During Epiphany, this year, year B, the Old Testament and Gospel are linked by a theme suggested by the Revised Common



*Jonah at the wall of Nineveh, Rembrandt*

Lectionary (1992) approved 2006 by the ecumenical group, The Consultation on Common Texts. The 3-year cycle of reading scripture and two alternatives during the Season after Pentecost means that we hear more Scripture in church on Sundays, primarily from a Synoptic Gospel, Matthew, Mark, then Luke. (The 1928 Prayerbook printed the lessons for every Sunday in the Prayer Book—meaning that we did not hear many of the Bible narratives we now read.) During the Season of Epiphany, the Old Testament Lesson and the Gospel are paired in theme—in contrast to the Easter Season when hear the story of the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel, instead of an Old Testament Reading. The Gospel of John is read throughout, in all 3 years, A, B, and C, especially during Lent. There is more about lectionaries, but that is for another time.

This third Sunday of Epiphany we can discern the theme of call, yet the story and even hear it in the Collect for this Sunday. The Jonah passage we read on Sunday isn't even the whole book of Jonah. I invite you to reread this fun book in the Old Testament remembering that it is meant to be a little bit of an outrageous, but serious story—and it is a call narrative after the model of the prophets. We begin with Jonah who is called a second time, after he ran away from prophesying, was thrown overboard, swallowed by a fish, rethinks his relationship to God in prayer, spat out onto shore, and sent a second time to Ninevah—the city which would be seen as an enemy of Israel. Who wants to preach to their hated enemy? Yet, Jonah does go to Nineveh, preaches (barely), “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people repent. The next part of the story of Jonah continues when he is home, angry because God did not destroy the city and Jonah quotes words from scripture “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” wondering perhaps why he had to preach at all... God loves even the people of Ninevah. God saves the people.

This Sunday we hear only the middle part of the Jonah story, the strange looking repentance of Ninevah, all the people and even the animals covered in sack cloth and ashes. We are asked to reflect on this passage and the call of Jesus to fisherman, literally as the fisherman are casting their nets into the sea. Before we can turn our attention to the action of the call, Mark tells us that John is arrested. Jesus has left John who was preaching a baptism of repentance, been recognized as God's beloved Son, and fled into the wilderness. Why is this important? Everything has changed; something is happening in the realm of God. When John was arrested, Jesus ushers in something new. “The kingdom of God has come near, repent, believe in the good news.” In this context we are not in Nineva. Mark will use the word “immediately” frequently to give us a sense of urgency and tell us something has happening--Jesus' presence is changing thing the order of things. We may wonder if these fishermen heard John the Baptist preach in the wilderness, perhaps re-entered their work lives enlivened and prepared, but if so, Mark is short on details. Instead, we hear nearly the opposite of the Jonah narrative: Jesus sees them, asks them to follow him and they do.

Simon and Andrew leave the tools of their profession behind, nets, and are promised another trade. When Jesus “sees” James and John, Mark wants us to notice that they are called “immediately” and they respond, not only abandoning their trade, but family too--leaving, I suspect, Zebedee confused and dumbfounded. Mark is inviting



us to follow also. We are to change our perspectives and find that everything in our world has changed. The “good news” is both here and unfolds as Mark continues the narrative of Jesus in the world.

Susan+

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To Live is to Change

...Richard Rohr preached on the biblical call to change:

The Greek word for “repent” (*metanoia*) means to change your mind. I’d like to emphasize change, because that’s *not* something we humans as a species are attracted to. We’re much like animals in this regard. Animals are creatures of habit. Those of us with a dog or a cat know their behavior is predictable. If we change some daily routine, they’ll get upset. I’m afraid to say that we’re much the same. We like things the way we like things. And yet the first words out of Jesus’ mouth tell us that he’s come to give us a philosophy of change: “Repent,” —*change your mind*—“for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2).

Psychologist Robert Wicks suggests part of resilience is making a decision to remain open to ongoing growth and change:

Each of us has a range of resilience (the ability to meet, learn from, and not be crushed by the challenges and stresses of life)...Of even more import than the different resiliency ranges people have is their conscious decision to maximize the ways in which they can become as hardy as possible. They may not call this resilience, but it is their ability to be open to life’s experiences, and so to learn. [1]

Richard continues:

St. John Henry Newman (1801–1890) said, “Here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” [2] That’s a very different philosophy than most of us have. Our natural approach is to keep in cruise control. The way we do it is the way we do it, and any change is considered dangerous, heretical, and new. But here in this Gospel we were given a program of change and growth from the beginning. If we don’t grow, if we don’t change, we end up the same at 70 as we were at 17. We all know people like that, and we may even be one of them. Such people aren’t very fun to live with. They want to pick and win fights. It’s what a lot of politics is today. The important thing is not the truth or what’s good for the whole, but what’s good for the small part of which I’m a part.

If people refuse to change, what my mother used to call “bull-headedness,” the world will only get worse. We have to learn how to dialogue, how to forgive, and how to trust, and how to give people the benefit of the doubt. In the United States, our country has become very cynical about truth and love. We hear politicians take oaths to be fair and just leaders and we all know it doesn’t mean anything. We expect everybody to be for the truth of their group and their “kingdoms.” But Jesus tells us to change our minds and accept the kingdom of God, which is what’s good for the whole.

Monday, January 1, 2024 Christian Contemplation and Action **References:** [1] Robert J. Wicks, *Bounce: Living the Resilient Life*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 5. [2] John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989, 2015), 40.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, [\*The Mind Does Not Like to Change\*](#), homily, January 1, 2020