

## Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 23-24, 2021

Readings: Jonah 3:1-5,10; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

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There is an urgency in all of our readings today, isn't there? Jonah preaches "Forty days more and Nineveh will be destroyed." Paul writes "the time is running out...the world in its present form is passing away." And, just before calling his first disciples, Jesus cries, "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

What are we to make of all that urgency? There is a lot to unpack here, right? And it's challenging! Themes of repentance and God's call jump out at me.

Jonah, at first, refuses God's call. But God gives this repentant prophet a second chance to convert a traditional enemy of his people. In Jonah's time, the Jewish community cultivated a narrow and intolerant nationalism that limited God's mercy to their own people. But, surprise! The Ninevites accept the invitation! (A still narrow-minded Jonah yelled bitterly at God for that.)

Then St. Paul writes to a troublesome community to prepare them for what they expect will be Jesus' imminent return. He wants them to focus on that. To be ready for the new world order. Not to get distracted. Does it seem that our world in its present form is also passing away? We long for a return to normal, but can it be—does it need to be—a new normal? What might that look like? Is a conversion from a profit-centered society to a life-sustaining one possible? One committed to the healing of our world? What choices might we need to make differently?

In the Gospel, Jesus invites people to repent and believe that "The Kingdom of God has come near." The good news of the Kingdom demands immediate attention. Urgent attention. Peter and his companions got it, didn't they? Do we?

Jesus' invitation to them is also his invitation to us. To be his disciples. Willing to follow wherever he leads. Willing to share his mission. Regardless of the cost. Discipleship involves a change in our values until they measure up to the values Jesus lived by. To be a disciple is to allow oneself to be shaped by Christ's dying and rising in our daily lives. Ah, so this is where that call to repentance might come in?

We are living in an incredibly dark and seemingly hopeless time. Delusion. Polarization. Violence. Is there even a way forward? Yes, if we are willing to be honest and humble. If we can confess the ways in which we have contributed to the divisiveness and enmity infecting our nation. Even the little ways. I admit that I have trouble remembering that God loves certain policy makers as much as God loves me. But demonizing, as tempting as it is, makes things worse.

Have we been silent or failed to act in the face of injustice, as last Sunday's homily asked? What about snarky comments on social media? Has anger at a politician or political party morphed into a desire to see them harmed? Are we willing to have an honest reckoning with the roots of white supremacy? Do we do the work of anti-racism every day? Are we afraid that becoming a minority means losing our power? Our little daily choices confirm our life's true direction.

Are our choices truly aligned with the Spirit of Jesus? The Spirit with whom we were baptized? The Spirit who enables us to respond to Jesus' mission? To be good news for the poor, the outcast, sinners, those on the margins of society? Jesus preached God's message of love, compassion and forgiveness. Do our choices reflect those values?

Knowing that God loves us cannot be only an intellectual exercise. God's love has been poured out on us so that we will pour it out into our troubled world. We need to create a force field of that love. Prayerfully. Urgently.

Recently, we marked the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. His insights are just as appropriate now as in his own time of darkness. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Evil is not the end. Sin does not have the last word. We are graced with God's unconditional love and forgiveness. And roused by Jesus' call to repentance. As Christians and as Americans, we are faced with the question of whom and what shall we follow to heal. To move into a place of light and hope.

What will we choose?