

Third Sunday after Epiphany
Year B

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Psalm 62:6-14

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

In the readings last week, we find a variety of ways God uses to call people to service. In 1 Samuel, God calls the boy Samuel even before he knew God. Yet, with the encouragement of the priest Eli, Samuel responds and begins a great career as Israel's first judge. In the Gospel reading, John presents his version of the calling of Andrew and Philip, who both go on to call others to discover Jesus. Nathanael's response might be similar to how we might react - with skepticism. However, even Nathanael becomes quickly won over by the insights Jesus shows.

Today's Gospel reading gives us the very familiar story of Jesus walking beside the Sea of Galilee and calling Peter and Andrew and James and John from their occupation as fishermen to become fishers of men. Much has been made of their willingness to abandon everything they knew to follow Jesus. Why were they so willing? Some suggest that they might have already been familiar with Jesus' teachings, since He was there in Capernaum where they worked, or because they had already known Jesus through the ministry of John the Baptizer, as we see in the Gospel of John. For whatever reason, these four men dropped everything and followed Jesus.

Our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures hits close to home for me. Jonah is called by God to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, to call the inhabitants to repentance. We all know the story of how Jonah not only refused to go to Nineveh, but went the opposite direction - he boarded a boat to run away from God. However, God finally got Jonah's attention in a storm and caused the great fish to spit Jonah out on the shore. Having gotten his attention, God repeats the call for Jonah to go to Nineveh, which he does.

What happens? Against Jonah's expectations, the people and the king respond to Jonah's message, repent of their ways, and seek God's forgiveness. Poor Jonah is disheartened because I think he was looking forward to watching the destruction of this great city. When the Ninevites repented, all Jonah could do is lament that he knew God was merciful and would, of course, relent of the punishment Jonah had been preaching and spare the city. Thus, we see Jonah sulk off.

The reason I say this story hits close to home for me is that I ran from God for some forty years before God got my attention. What I have learned from this is that God is patient, persistent, and never forgets the call placed on our lives. We may try to run away and hide, but God always finds us eventually - even in the belly of a great fish, and renews the call as before.

God has called each of us to some form of ministry. Some of you have responded quickly - like the four fishermen - and some of us needed more prodding. However we may have reacted to God's call, here we are, a group of people trying to do God's will in Christian County, Missouri. For some, the message and the direction of that call is clear - we know what God wants us to do.

For others, the discernment is not so clear and we are still trying to figure it all out. There is one thing all of us can do to help clarify God's call for us as individuals and as a congregation - PRAY. God hears our prayer and, as we listen to, and for, the answer, we will come to understand God's call on our lives.

In all of our efforts to minister to our neighbors, God does see what we are doing and does use us for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God.