

Sermon for 7th November 2021 (Trinity 23) Can we drop everything? From Fr. Mike

- **Jonah 3. 1-5, 10 (please read this short book. It is only 4 chapters!)**
- **Mark 1. 14-20**

In a nutshell:

1. Mark explains how Jesus begins his Ministry and calls the first disciples.

Some people abandon their own 'nets' because they hear good news worthy of our lives. Sensing God's kingdom drawing near, they reshape their own lives in response to God's call. In effect, they drop everything and go another way...

Q/ **Can we do that too?**

2. Grace is the major theme of Jonah 3.

First is **God's** grace, shown to His prophet, Jonah, by extending him a second chance after his flagrant rebellion in chapter 1. So, when the people responded to God's warning and turned to Him, God let go of His anger and chose to forgive.

Second is human grace; Jonah, however, never really repented, he just went through the motions ...

Q/ **Is this the same for us?**

The story of Jonah is a moral tale (much like Aesop's fables) and is designed to teach the audience something about themselves. Some brief background, however, is necessary for a modern audience to understand the conflict within Jonah's heart and soul.

God's instruction in both 1:1 and 3:1 is "to **go to Nineveh**, the great city." To an Israelite like Jonah, this would be equivalent to announcing today, "Go to the most extreme Taliban compound, and tell them what they are doing wrong!"

The Book of Jonah is read in the Jewish calendar on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, when Jews confess their sins against God and neighbour. Offering Jonah to the congregation yields the same type of contemplation on God's attributes that Christians depend on for salvation. Which begs the key question:

How willing are we to forfeit our own agenda and let God be God?

Salvation is pure gift, and grace. Jonah's story reminds us that we do not own that grace, nor is it ours to give out as we wish. God will be forgiving because **that is the very heart** of God. Consequently, the story of this old prophet Jonah is much more than a whale tale. The message is meant for those mature enough to understand the ways of God, and to then truly face the ways we sometimes try to lay exclusive claim to God and God's gift of grace.

A wise old monk always told me that if I did not believe that God would ultimately save the most foul of humans, then I did not *really* believe in God's power to save my own soul! The book of Jonah prompts us to put these wise monastic words into action - demanding that everyone who hears the Jonah story contemplates God's attributes, and in so doing, realises the true meaning and power of Salvation.

So, when Mark refuses to tell us just *why* Simon and his colleagues abandon their former lives to follow Jesus, we (frustratingly) hold our questions for later. *But we do not forget them.* If we choose to see it, Mark may provide one clue. Jesus' encounter with his future disciples represents Mark's first report of an act in Jesus' ministry. Marching into Galilee, Jesus preaches a single distinctive message, the Gospel of God: **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye, and believe the Gospel!"** Jesus is saying something like, "God has broken into the world" -- that's good news -- "you'd better sort yourself out and believe it, starting right NOW!"

'Repent' being simply a Hebrew word calling us to re-shape or **'turn'** from all that is negative and obstructive to that which is good, wholesome, right (righteous) and true.

I am sure that many of us can relate to Simon, Andrew, James and John.

In the most extreme form, their decision to enter full-time preparation for (public) ministry may stretch out over decades, but the actual transition from professional or domestic life to full-time study usually comes as a shock. Seminary students/ordinands vary in age from 21 to 71, and have included lawyers, nurses, laborers, professors and administrators. Sensing that God has indeed broken into their world, they put many things on hold, a decision that often stresses spouses, partners and children. And they set off, seeking something different, something compelling, a path worthy of their lives and faith. However, for the majority of

people, full-time public ministry is not their calling – nevertheless, the holy Gospel still speaks to all who seek to follow Christ with the same injunction: ‘Follow Me, and – do it NOW!’

If Simon and his colleagues know what we know, they are aware that Jesus is calling *everybody* to :

- Acknowledge their tendency for stubbornness/*rebellion*, and
- Honestly examine their priorities to "reshape" (*repent*) their whole lives.

The first disciples in today’s Gospel are just receiving special attention. We, on the other hand, by God’s pure grace, are actually given a second chance to become the people God created us to be.



Will we truly ‘drop everything’ and respond?

Fr. Mike (Trinity 23) 7th November 2021