

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

January 25, 2015
Third Sunday after Epiphany, Year B

The readings this week:

- **Jonah 3:1-5, 10** ◦ **Psalm 62:5-12**
- **1 Corinthians 7:29-31** ◦ **Mark 1:14-20**



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

I marvel at how quickly they leave their nets, these fisherfolk who meet Jesus as they labor by the Sea of Galilee. What do Simon and Andrew hear in Jesus' voice as he calls; what do James and John see as Christ beckons them to cast aside all they have known?

Perhaps, listening to Jesus, they remember the story of Jonah. Perhaps they think of the first time God called that reluctant prophet, and what happens when we run in the opposite direction of God's call; how we are likely to wind up in a place that is dark and dank and lonely. A place that presses clarity upon us and inspires us to respond differently—as Jonah does—when the invitation comes again.

Get up, go
God says to Jonah.
So Jonah set out
and went.

Perhaps, encountering this man who immediately compels them, Simon and Andrew and James and John already know in their bones what Paul will later write about in his first letter to the Corinthians: how following Christ will mean letting go of what they have relied upon, will mean living without what they have become attached to.

And those who buy
as though they had no possessions,
Paul says to the church at Corinth;
and those who deal with the world
as though they had no dealings with it.

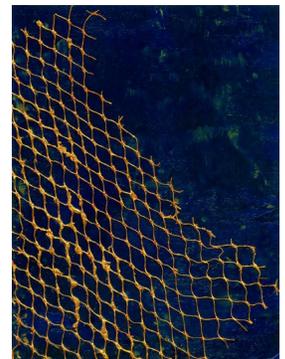
In the days, weeks, years to come, these four—and the eight soon to join them—will live into that initial burst of letting go. They will learn, and learn again, what it takes to follow Christ: how they will have to continually practice the art of leaving. And in their leaving, in their letting go, they will find their sustenance and their true home.

God alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken
sings the psalmist to the Holy One.
On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

Follow me
Jesus says to Simon—
whom he will name Peter,
the Rock,
infused with God's own being.

Follow me
he says to Andrew,
to James and to John.

Follow me
Jesus says to us.
What will we say in return?



Blessing the Nets

You could cast it
in your sleep,
its familiar arc
embedded in your
muscle memory
after months
years
a lifetime
of gathering in
what you thought
would sustain you
forever.

You would not
have imagined
it would be so easy
to cast aside,
would never have
believed
the immediacy
with which your hands
could release their
familiar grip,
could let it go,
could let it simply
continue
its arcing path
away from you.

But when the call came
you did not hesitate,
did not pause,
did not delay
to follow,

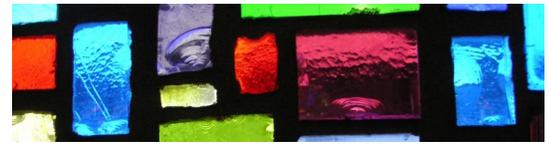
as if your body
had suddenly
remembered
the final curve
of the arc,

as if the release
begun in your hands
now passed through you
entirely
and you let go
of everything

to cast yourself
with abandon
upon the waiting
world.

Jan Richardson,
[The Painted Prayerbook](#)

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

How have you seen God's compassion expressed when you are obedient? If you were Jonah, how would you feel when the word of the Lord came to you a second time? Assyria was one of the most powerful nations on earth, known especially for its military might and brutality. How would this make it difficult for Jonah to proclaim: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned"? What evidence is there that the Ninevites were sincere in their repentance? How and why does the Lord respond to the Ninevites? If a genuine turning to God were to occur in this country, what results would you expect to see? Describe one area in your life where you feel a need for repentance? What actions can you take to demonstrate the sincerity of your repentance? [*Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press*](#)

Psalm Reading: Psalm 62:5-12

How does the writer contrast God and humanity? The psalmist talks about resting in God. What pictures come to your mind with these words? In verse 8, the psalmist draws a parallel between trusting in God and pouring out one's heart to God. How are these related? Verse 10 warns against trusting in material wealth. Why is this such a strong temptation? The last two verses depict God as strong and as loving. What images of a strong and loving God are presented in the psalm? Where else might you be tempted to place your trust, other than in God? How does seeing God as strong help you to trust him? How does seeing God as loving help you to trust him? [*Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press*](#)



When God intervenes dramatically in your life, he puts your whole life immediately at a major cross-road. You can either ignore him and continue stubbornly with your old life, as if God didn't really matter, or didn't really care what you did, or maybe didn't really exist at all. Or you can open yourself to God. You can respond to him with trust and a willingness to obey. But if you do this, you will be leaving your old life aside, for a new life that might well have been unimaginable to you beforehand. You won't be who you were before. You will be a new person, in him and for him. [*The Center for Liturgy*](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Gracious Christ,
you came to the fishermen.
Come to us now.
Grant us courage to cast aside
the nets that bind us,
to follow you into true freedom
and newness of life.
Help us to be faithful disciples,
that we might inspire others
to follow in your ways.
Amen.

B.J. Beu



3rd Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

What issue does Paul take up in verses 25-28 and how would you describe his advice? What important distinction does he make? In this context, then, what is the purpose of verses 29-31? What difference does it make to expect Jesus' return at any moment, as Paul did, and living now when we know Jesus' return is two millennia delayed? If you were absolutely convinced that Jesus would return by the end of this year (week, day....), how would it change your behavior? [*Light on the Lessons*](#)

4th Reading: Mark 1:14-20

What is the best piece of advice or information you've received lately? Who gave it to you? What did you do with it? Was the "doing" difficult, heavy, or burdensome? Do you think there is a difference between information and news? How do you describe the spiritual idea of "calling?" In what ways have you been called? In what ways has everyone been called? Is calling more about doing or being? When it comes to discipleship, what is the difference between being a verb or a noun? Which does your life reflect and why? How can we redefine discipleship? [*Cumberland Community Church*](#)