

Stretching Toward Sunday

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

January 24, 2021
Third Sunday After the 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](#)

Time Fulfilled

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

In the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus immediately (ahem...) says four quite amazing things. The first two are statements—about how things are going to be as Jesus begins his ministry.

Time (kairos) is fulfilled. God's Kingdom has come, and it is near.

Imagine living in Jesus' day. The Roman Empire has taken over everything. The emperor's hands are into every aspect of society. Herod, the “King of the Jews,” is a hateful man who might kill anyone at anytime. The Temple authorities are in cahoots with the Empire.

And along comes a rabbi who proclaims that the time (kairos) is fulfilled. And, in God's good time, God's Kingdom—NOT Rome's Kingdom—has come near.

Eggizo, to come near, can also mean to join one thing to another. Heaven and Earth are about to be joined together. Everything is about to change. And, the change won't be a rearranging. It's soup-to-nuts.

Change for a people hungry for it. Desperate for it.

And then, Jesus has two directions as this new kairos is being ushered in: repent, and believe in the good news.

Readers of this blog will be familiar with my opinion that the word “repent” needs some convalescence. We've made it be a scary word. Something that resembles “feeling bad.” And, probably, the worse you feel, the better.

But, that is not what “repent” means. It means, quite literally to turn around.

When you're alone and walking down a dark and scary road, turning around is not a bad thing. You turn and run as quick as you can in the opposite direction.

It's a welcome thing.

“Repent” is part of the poetry of exile, something that the

Israelites knew a lot about. Repenting, when in exile, meant going home.

I think if we in the church talked more about “going home” than “feeling bad,” the church would be a healthier and holier place.

And, Jesus telling us that we can go home, and that God will welcome us back, and throw His arms around us is such good news.

And, that's what Jesus tells us to believe in.

At the beginning of the Gospel of Mark Jesus tells his listeners something wonderful. When we're able to take-in the fact that Mark is a wartime Gospel—written either in the lead-up-to or in-the-wake-of the destruction of the Jerusalem and the Temple...Jesus' words are also balm to souls who were frightened for their lives decades after his death and resurrection.

And if those words could speak to Jesus' audience, and Mark's audience...can't they be good news for us to?

It IS time...and it's time to go Home.

~ rick morley. [a garden path](#)



The followers of Christ have been called to peace. ... And they must not only have peace but also make it. And to that end they renounce all violence and tumult. In the cause of Christ nothing is to be gained by such methods. ... His disciples keep the peace by choosing to endure suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others. They maintain fellowship where others would break it off. They renounce hatred and wrong. In so doing they overcome evil with good, and establish the peace of God in the midst of a world of war and hate.

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Jonah 3:1-5, 10](#)

Has God ever called you to serve someone you didn't like? Why did Jonah disobey God's call? What did God want? What did Jonah want? Were the Assyrians deserving of God's mercy? Was Jonah? Why do you think Jonah was so upset that God would forgive them? What was Jonah's message, and how does its simplicity show Jonah's feelings about his task? What other information might he have given in his "sermon?" Despite this, what is the response of the Ninevites? Is there anyone you, your church, or the Christian church tends to exclude? The difference might not be racial – it might be based on social status, employment, religious beliefs, or even different Christian practices. How do you think God might be calling you, today, to serve them?

Faith Element

The Sacred Call is transformative. It is an invitation to our souls, a mysterious voice reverberating within, a tug on our hearts that can neither be ignored nor denied. It contains, by definition, the purest message and promise of essential freedom. It touches us at the center of our awareness. When such a call occurs and we hear it – really hear it – our shift to higher consciousness is assured.

~ David A. Cooper, Parabola, Volume XIX, Number 1, February, 1994, The Call p.11 via Suzanne Guthrie, *At the Edge of Enclosure*

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 62:5-12](#)

How difficult is the first line of verse 5 for you to practice? How difficult are the other lines for you to believe? Notice that verses 5-6 are identical to verses 1-2? Why do you think David, the writer of this psalm, repeated himself? Considering what's happening in the first part of this psalm (enemies trying to kill him, others spreading lies and plotting to betray him), how does verse 7 work? In verse 8, to whom does David shift his attention? Why would this be important to him? From what David has experienced, what teaching does he want people will learn in verses 9-12? *Ken Castor*



Praying Toward Sunday

You call us,
Wanderer of seashores and sidewalks,
inviting us to sail out of our smug harbors
into the uncharted waters of faith
to wander off from our predictable paths to follow
You
into the unpredictable footsteps of the kingdom;
to leave the comfort of our homes and accompany
You into the uncomfortable neighborhoods we
usually avoid.

As we wait,
in our simple, sometimes crazy,
constantly uncertain lives,
speak to us, Spirit of Grace:
of that hope which is our anchor;
of that peace which is our rock;
of that grace which is our refuge.

~ Bob Gibson, *London Conference, United Church of Canada*

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](#)

Are there different "levels" of following Jesus? Mark is very intentional in the things he includes in his narrative. Why would he connect John's arrest so closely with Jesus' proclamation? What similarities are there between John's message (v. 4-8) and Jesus' (v. 15)? What was the relationship between their messages? Is it surprising to learn that these first four disciples might have been men with a lot to lose? What was Jesus calling them to give up? Was their sacrifice only physical and financial? What more did they leave behind? What do you think was so attractive in Jesus' calling that they would immediately leave their lives behind? What does this response say about these men? How was Jesus' calling of these men a reworking of their original profession? The calling itself was simple – "follow me." From your knowledge of these men's lives, what would that calling eventually mean? These men left their nets and lives behind... but in a way, they took up "new nets." In what ways can Jesus transform our own skills and professions to be useful in the kingdom?

Faith Element

