

## Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 and Mark 1:14-20

In this gospel, Mark chooses Jesus' first words for us to hear. No sassing his parents in the Temple. No conversation over his baptism. No inviting questions for potential disciples. With laser-focus, Mark places upfront a radical encounter with God in the words and person of Jesus. Jesus says, "The time has been fulfilled." In Greek, the word translated as *time* is *kairos*, a way of perceiving time as circular, with all events occurring simultaneously and all pervaded by God. This is not *chronos*, or linear time, which runs out or reaches an end once requirements are fulfilled. *Kairos* tunes us into our present, face-to-face encounter with God. Likewise, space reveals a new reality: "the Kingdom of God has drawn near." Gaze on this new landscape and enter. Live in a new way, with a new leader and a new society.

This brief but potent announcement is meant to evoke a response that is also radical. Jesus commands us to "*be repenting and be believing.*" In other words, the appropriate response is to make a change, and make it ongoing, permanent. Mark presents the call of Peter, Andrew, James and John as an example. The four of them *aphentes* (*let go of*) nets and father to abruptly follow Jesus. They let go of their jobs and their responsibilities to their families, as well as their relationship with those families and all they had known. Yes, it sounds unfathomable; it is supposed to. When we meet God, our whole life should immediately become different.

Ah, but we are old-timers in the faith, who do not need any radical changes. It is unrealistic to expect a big change; maybe something smaller will do. Maybe next week we will think about this. After all, this week is very busy. It would be irresponsible of us, right? Mediocrity is a tempting little imp.

Actually, this little imp is a huge spiritual temptation because through it we keep God small. We limit God so that we can maintain control of our lives. Yes, change is hard! New routines and relationships take effort. Uncertainty is uncomfortable. We will have to grieve; we are afraid of the unknown. If we are honest, our resistance can also be fed by something darker: we want to control our lives; we do not trust God to make decisions; we do not want to make sacrifices for others or give up comfortable, although hurtful behaviors. Ego roves about our hearts.

Is keeping God small really working for us? What might happen if we let God really touch us? Maybe our wounds would heal. Maybe we would be able to see the beauty of every living thing and reverence it all. Maybe we could move passed suffering, alienation and bullying to a lasting and just peace and bounty for everyone. These will be the qualities of the Kingdom of God Jesus enacts throughout Mark's gospel. Why do we doubt that this possible, when our doubt prevents this from happening?

Jonah is the poster child for spiritual resistance. In the brief book of Jonah, God tells him to go to the capital city of Israel's enemy and announce God's message of repentance. Jonah does not think that the Ninevites deserve the opportunity to repent; God's mercy is meant for Israel alone. As a response to God's upthrust in his life, Jonah heads off in the opposite direction. But God insists and after three days in the belly of a whale, Jonah goes to Nineveh. This Sunday we read the immediate, radical and appropriate response of the Ninevites to God's call. Yet Jonah still does not want God to be fully God, the one who revokes punishment and shows mercy to a multitude of non-Israelites. Jonah announces his anger and displeasure, "Is this not what I said when I was in my own country? That is why I fled... I know that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jon 4:2b-3). Jonah's declaration is almost comical in its realism. Too frequently, we reject the emerging goodness before us, either individually or collectively. The time for change is now; the place for change is here. What will we do?

- ❖ Recall a time you had trouble accepting the path God was calling you to walk. How did you come around to being open to it?
- ❖ Where has God surprised you by appearing this week? Was your response all it could have been?

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