



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. NANCY ROSS, ASSOCIATE TO THE RECTOR
THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY — JANUARY 21, 2018
JONAH 3:1-5, 10; PSALM 62:6-9, 13-14; 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31; MARK 1:14-20

JUST TELL ME

MARK 1:14-20: *[After John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.]

The attic bedroom cum office in a big old house on a shady street in Berkeley, California is where I had meetings with Sarah. It was quite a few years ago, and she was the first spiritual director I had ever gone to. The house was ramshackle and Sarah was quirky, but she had this very personal relationship with God that I was so drawn to. On one of our first meetings she straight up said to me as I talked about my conundrums, “Well, do you think you’re afraid of what Jesus might ask you to do?”

Huh. I thought about it for barely a beat, and answered, “No, I’m not! I WANT Jesus to tell me what I’m supposed to do, what I’m

supposed to become! So I can just do it and stop wondering and worrying about it!” And I really meant it, felt that, at that time. I did not think I was afraid of what Jesus might ask me to become; I wanted to know, and then up and DO it.

Looking back, or rather, looking deeper, I see what naivete – and hubris – was in that answer, heartfelt as it was.

Because, well... Jonah. Let’s start with the Hebrew Scripture. Today’s piece of text from Jonah is deceptively all sweetness and light. God did straight up tell Jonah what to do: go to Nineveh, and Jonah went, he told them God was mad, they repented, God relented.

Yeah! But we know there's more to this tale. The first time God had said, "Go," Jonah ran away, got sucked up by a whale, got spit out, and so it was when he was asked *again* that he went.

But then, what we don't read today, is that after he convinced the Ninevites to repent, Jonah was angry that God didn't smite them! Something NEW was happening, and he didn't like the outcome; it was happening outside of the "chosen" people. God was in relationship, listening to the hearts of *other* peoples, the despised Ninevites. Jonah didn't like that outcome; that's not the something new he was imagining. Hmm...

And Simon and Andrew and James and John, in today's Gospel? It seems like they weren't afraid, that they were ready. Jesus came by and told them, "Follow me," and they immediately did. No whales required. They were *ready* for something new to be happening, and I don't think it was because they were tired of being fishermen. When Jesus said, "Follow me," they knew *now* was the time for something new.

And we hear Jesus recognizing that his own time is now. In Mark's Gospel, up to this point, all we've known Jesus to do is get baptized and go into the desert for forty days. But when he came out, John the Baptist was arrested, and Jesus came preaching – but the first words we hear Jesus say in the Gospel of Mark are: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." Repent, in this

language, *metanoia*: not as beating your breast, but as change, leave something behind – believe and do something new, something that is good news.

And they needed good news. Simon and Andrew and James and John: what did they think they were following? The fulfilled time, the nearness of God, the *evangelion* – good news – which for Jews could mean the end of their oppression under the Romans.

In reality, we know the apostles had no idea what they would end up following Jesus into. They would have to *become* something they never imagined. That's the word used in the Greek: γενέσθαι – genesthai: I will make you to *become* fishers of people. It's a process.

It was a process that was harder and more dangerous and more heartbreaking – and more profound and wondrous and transforming – than they had any capacity to anticipate. What they were becoming was the evangelizers to a new world.

It's our world. And it's still becoming. And so are we, as the continuing evangelists. And we may have no idea of what kinds of transformation is along this path of following Jesus. Because this isn't a story about the past; it's about us, now, too.

Jesus had to start somewhere to call his disciples around him. So, we hear him start with these fishermen: Simon, Andrew, James, John. There were women, too, who join his inner circle, I need say out loud, especially on this weekend of the Women's March. Mark's Gospel names women who were there at the

crucifixion, saying among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome; in chapter 14 verse 41 that they “used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee, and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.”

But Jesus didn’t become God incarnate among us to call 12 men or a group of many women or even 5000 men and women to follow him. He came to call each and every one of us to participate in new life in the ever-present. He calls us by name.

When you hear those words in today’s Gospel, “Follow me,” add your name! Jesus is calling you and me to change the world and believe the good news.

Would I answer Sarah’s question differently today? Umm, YES. Because I hear it differently. It’s not all about me and my goals. What am I afraid Jesus is asking me to become? I’m afraid he’s asking me to become a peacemaker with people who vote across the aisle. I’m afraid he’s asking me to live more simply in this fragile world.

Are we afraid of what Jesus might ask us to do if we follow him? WE SHOULD BE! Because he asks us to live in a new world that is radically different from the present culture, to have priorities that are counter-cultural, to love our neighbor as much as ourselves, to

face difficult outcomes that we didn’t plan on in striving to live into radical love.

My friend The Rev. Terry Kylo wrote of the gospel today: “To fish people out of the water was to fish them out of the control of Caesar, out of the culture of domination that Caesar proposed and enforced. While culture powerfully forms us, we also have some capacity to resist it and choose allegiance to another culture, to another worldview.

We can be fished out of one culture, out of one story of what it means to be human, and into another. Jesus was not asking Simon and Andrew to get more people in church on Sunday, but to fish people out of a culture of domination – a culture in which we are human if we win over others. He was asking them to participate with him in liberating people from a culture of domination in which only a few win and most lose, to a culture of mutuality in which we learn to balance the needs of all.”¹

We are invited to be the same fish out of water, to choose another worldview, the Christian worldview, where Jesus says, “Follow me into changing the culture, changing the world into the Kingdom of God.” Because the time has come. And when we open up to this, our attitudes change, too.

We may realize we *are* afraid of what Jesus might ask us to do. And that’s okay, because

¹ Terry Kylo and Liz Culver, *Visions from The Catacombs, Week Before January 25, 2015*, Catacomb Churches, accessed January 19,

2018 at <http://catacombchurches.org/2015/01/19/visions-from-the-catacombs-week-before-january-25-2015/>

it means we recognize that this is sacred work, and it's hard work, both within ourselves and in carrying out our actions in the world.

I think that's why my spiritual director Sarah laughed right out loud when I said, "No, I'm not afraid. I want Jesus to come in and straight up tell me!"

She knew, and we know, that Jesus has already told us. And the good news is, he is already and always alongside us in the work. Right NOW.

There is an urgency in Mark's Gospel, an urgency in Jesus' call. In his Gospel, Mark uses the word "immediately" 40 times! For Mark, the message is the Kingdom of God in Jesus is new and is now. Even though Rome

rules, even though the U.S. government is shut down, even though the Temple is subject to Herod, even though Christianity is reduced to nationalism, the fishers of people are WE who follow Christ and live into *his* Kingdom. When we recognize this call in our everyday lives, and it is the most significant thing in our lives, we co-create a new reality for the world.

We are becoming Christ's followers, becoming Christ's kingdom, becoming who we are called to be as individuals and as a community – even as we already follow Christ, already love each other, are already beloved in God's sight. That's why Jesus calls.



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!