



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, YEAR B, JANUARY 21, 2024
JONAH 3:1-5, 10; PSALM 62:6-14; 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31; MARK 1:14-20

APRICATING TO JESUS IN THESE URGENT TIMES



Do you recall early last week, after the polar vortex's hold on our region broke a bit, and before the rains resumed, there was a day when the sun shone brightly in the winter sky? I found myself orienting to the warmth of the sun, even while the ambient

temperature lingered about the freezing point. It was a gift.

The verb for such basking in the winter sunshine is to *apricate*, from the Latin *apricus*, to be warmed by the sun. A few

weeks ago I heard someone using the word “*apricity*,” which is the noun meaning the warmth of winter sun, and then it was used in a movie I watched a few days later. I took it as a sign...what a gift *apricity* is; what a joy it is to *apricate*. I invite you to resurrect these late medieval words in your own right.

This week, as I was *apricating* before the rains came again, and pondering these scriptures for today, it gave me pause to wonder what sort of analogous experience did these first disciples enjoy as Jesus passed by their boats that fateful morning?

After a night of fishing in the chilled air, returning at daybreak to mend their nets, likely still shivering a bit on the seashore, what were they hoping for that day?

I’ve stood there by the Sea of Galilee on several occasions as the sun rose in the east, across the lake, and it is cold—finger-tingling cold, even as the water glistens with the new dawn. In time the sun greets the west bank with its warmth to which one orients. *Apricity*.

Were Peter and Andrew and James and John waiting for the sun’s *apricity* that morning? What was it about Jesus’ countenance that had them orienting to him instead of the sun? What weight of glory shone on Jesus’ face that prompted them to leave their boats and

follow him. Immediately they left and followed him. Was it the invitation to become fishers of people, whatever that might mean? What is the rumble of hope that was pervading their seaside villages as Jesus declared: The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of heaven has come near...?

There is a sense of urgency pervading our scriptures this morning: Jonah heads to the imperial city with a message of resolute urgency—repent or the city will be destroyed in forty days. For the record, they do.

The second lesson is lifted from Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, a motley crew whom Paul would have known personally. The passage today, if taken out of context, is little more than a trifling admonition that makes little sense to us today, but set within the rest of the letter, which is exhorting them to come together and plot a faithful course of following Jesus, is an earnest appeal with a sense of urgency, too. The appointed time has grown short.

And the gospel’s speed clips along with an immediacy that orients to the rising of the Son of God who has come to heal and make whole.

And so the question for us is can we situate ourselves in this biblical urgency in ways that

make sense as people of faith today? What are we to do with these readings?

I suppose we could focus on the gloom of opaque uncertainty that besets us in our own time:

Do you remember in 2020 at the height of the pandemic when grocery shelves were bare, hospitals were overwhelmed, morgues were overflowing, and many prophesied the end of the world as we know it?

Or do you follow the climate change messaging that declares we are well beyond the pinch point of global heating, the point of no return, and the cataclysm of ecological collapse has been set in motion?

Or the nuclear time clock was updated this week to 90 seconds before midnight, the closest to global nuclear catastrophe we have ever been.

Or the political landscape in our nation that teeters on half-truths, a fulcrum of fear, and a zero sum game that would seemingly rather kill our democracy than find a way to live together in a deeply wounded one.

It's a lot to hold... but I trust you get the point: there is a sense of urgency in our own time, and I am willing to bet nearly every generation has felt it in some way—war,

famine, pestilence, pandemic. How we frame our reality matters.

My friends, I know this is the news that sells, and it is really difficult not to orient to it in increasingly neurotic ways, but we are being invited to live another way. Not to put our heads in the sand—the existential threats are very real, but as followers of Christ, the Paschal Mystery invites us to hold these threats within the framework of hope that resurrection is the true reality of God's design, if we will lean into that. Apricate to that resurrection hope that says there is more to this life than just “this” life.

So how do we do this? Well, show up in a community like this that is striving mightily to live along such a narrative of hope while resolving to work for the reign of God to break in here and now—in creation, in global conflicts, in national political landscapes. We do our small part in this corner of the world, on the banks of the sea where we look for Jesus to pass by.

It doesn't require us to solve it all. The little things matter. Here's an example of what I mean: Last month, Kathy and I took our two-year-old grandchild to the library in her hometown in California. After checking out a few books with her, we noticed a seed library housed in an old library card catalog box. Flowering plants and vegetables—take a

packet and plant them was the invitation. It warmed my heart to see this—free and uncommodified, a witness to hope and good will in the bleak midwinter.

I mentioned this to a few folks, pondering how we might do something like it here at this cathedral. A seed library. It is going to happen, and if you want to be a part of this new ministry, talk to Emily Meeks or me.

Harvesting seeds is an ancient practice that enjoyed a renaissance during the pandemic. What I would suggest is that the purpose for such a library here is not principally to save seeds; it is to encourage us all to plant seeds

and watch the tender plants and flowers apricate to the sun and count it as a sign that the reign of God has come near.

We will know it by the marks of peace and justice.

We will see it on the faces of others who have gazed upon the glory of God made manifest in our time by people like you and me who hold fiercely to a hope that resurrection is real, if we will only orient to it.

So apricate, my friends, and feel the warmth on your face as Jesus is speaking to you: Follow me.

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 [*The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.]*

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 [*I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.]*

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.]*