

Sunday, January 21, 2018

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

I Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

Understanding our Vocation

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” asked the man to the little boy.

“I want to be taller and smarter and wiser and rich and I know when I’ll know when I get there.”

“How will you know?”

“No one will ask me what I want to be when I grow up!”

For just a moment do you recall what you wanted to be when you were a child? Was it a teacher, firefighter, nurse, or in business for yourself? Maybe it was something not so traditional- like an astronaut or judge? At some point in your life there was a change in focus for what you wanted to do to make a living, to work at with your hands or use your gifts or training to help others or even to satisfy yourself as you had questions to answer and discoveries to make. But there might also have been something else-the Spirit of God calling you to serve and do something a little different and maybe not exactly what you wanted to do nor even where you wanted to go! But you answered the nudge of the Spirit and you worked and/or continue to work at what you do. Yet the question I ask is – do you understand your vocation as a way of reaching out to others, that is, whatever you do/ did/ or continue to do is your ministry?

Jonah’s story has been debated as long as the written text of the Bible has been reproduced. Whether Jonah got swallowed by a whale—a mammal or a big fish is what some would call the fantasy part of the story, but the teaching of God in this story is not the fish, but the fact that God called Jonah to teach the message of repentance to Nineveh. Jonah however refused and even tried running away at sea, hiding in a boat. But God knew where he was and sent a great wind on the sea to the point a violent storm arose and the ship almost broke up. The sailors were afraid and they threw their cargo into the sea to lighten the ship and they cried out to their own gods for help. But Jonah was asleep below deck. The captain and crew found him asleep and questioned him. Jonah told them his story and why he was running away. They talked some more and then threw him overboard. The sea grew calm and at once the crew offered a sacrifice to God and made vows to him. Meanwhile God provided this large fish to swallow Jonah whole and he was inside there for 3 days.

While inside the fish, Jonah prays to God and seeks repentance. God commands the fish to vomit and Jonah lands on dry land. God spoke to Jonah again and this time, Jonah obeyed and went to Nineveh knowing that many people there were sinful. On Jonah's first day he proclaimed that the city would be overturned and many believed. A fast was declared and all wore sackcloth as a symbol of repentance. Even when the king heard this news, he too put on sackcloth and sat in the dust. He decreed that everyone should call on God and give up their evil ways and their violence. God could still relent and turn his anger to compassion. We read then that God saw what they did by turning from their evil ways and he did have compassion on them. He did not destroy them. Jonah's mission to Nineveh was successful- the people returned to living as God taught.

Jonah's purpose in Nineveh was to reach the people for God to get them to repent and live good lives, according to God's laws and the teachings. Didn't this sound easy for Jonah? Or was it? What role did Jonah have in Nineveh? He was the hands and feet of God who talked, turned and enveloped those who fell to evil ways. His voice was heard in the streets and it was heard by the king. It was the king who called everyone to fast and then to rejoice because of God's compassion. They knew they had done wrong and wanted to turn their lives around and to love God even more!

But look at what Jonah had done—he experienced an amazing over the top fish story—who would believe this? And then after this, he did what God had called him to do and enabled a whole kingdom and king to repent from their evil ways. And he did this even though he fought against that call to serve.

How many of us resist doing tasks we don't like, or want to do, or want someone else to do? Often it is because we are too tired, or that the task demands too much time and effort. For many people, complacency has taken over willingness. Short term involvement looking for long term gain.

Yet when we heard Mark's version of Jesus calling the first disciples, we sense an urgency, excitement and immediate action. Jesus goes into Galilee and he is preaching the message, the good news of God- The time has come. The kingdom of God is near- Repent and believe the good news. He walks on the shore, sees Simon Peter and Andrew working- casting nets into the lake. He calls to them as they are out on the water—come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men." At once- they left their nets and followed him. They dropped the nets and ran. Going along the beach even further he sees James and John in their boat- doing the

same thing- preparing their nets. Without delay- he calls them, and they left Zebedee their dad, along with the hired men and followed Jesus. How did they know Jesus? Or did they just want a change? They were raised on the fishing boats, they knew their future would be on the fishing boats as this was the family business. James and John's business was fairly large as they had hired hands but what do they do immediately? They dropped their nets and followed. They were moved by Jesus' presence to act right away. They were moved and intrigued and ready to do what he was going to lead them to do. They had heard him speak, they heard the call and now they were ready to go.

God's Spirit still moves around and amidst people, but nothing will happen until and unless your heart is open to receive. This means you are willing to hear and feel and listen to what God wants to share with you. It also means that the Spirit will guide your next move and all of what you do next. You may not even realize what this is—all you need to do is say, yes and listen and let the spirit guide you to what is to come. But what does this mean? You have opened your heart and have asked that the Spirit guide you and lead you to what you are called to do and be. This is also known as invoking the Spirit by praying for this in faith. And when the spirit comes- you know it and you want to follow Christ's way. You are renewed and excited and willing to serve Him according to your gifts, talents, abilities and willingness to learn and listen and share of your ideas and experiences.

A hymn from the 1980's declares that when we hear your call we will know what we are to do: we are to live according to your word, daily learn, refresh, restore and that you will not let us fall for you are with us always. If what we do is hard, you will help us. And we will remember those who went before us whose lives seemed perfect, yet they too were human. Whether we are alone or with others, in our regular routines or doing something new, we can never forget that you hung on the cross for us all. You did it all for us. ("How Clear is our Vocation, Lord" 504 VU.) This is what is meant by our vocation—how the spirit guides our life- no matter what we do in life, our purpose our task is to follow Jesus' teachings, and to tell others. This includes:

- 1) Meeting people where they are.
- 2) Personalizing our approach and
- 3) Finding our calling.

Are you willing to share of yourself in whatever situation you find yourself or are willing to do will you act as Christ and love others, listen to others so that they in turn know that they are loved? This is what is meant by understanding our vocation and enabling again the spirit to move us. Let us pray.

O Holy Spirit come to us and be with us in these moments when we know you are with you. Help us to discern who you are in our lives. Enable us to reach out to tell others of Christ's love as we continue to grow in faith and with hope. Speak to us we pray. Amen.