

**Prayer:** God of the prophets, you call us from evil to serve you. Fulfill in us your commonwealth, your kingdom of justice and joy, that the light of your presence may be revealed to all nations, to the glory of Jesus' name. Amen.

**Jonah 3:1-5, 10**

3:1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying,  
3:2 "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you."  
3:3 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.  
3:4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"  
3:5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.  
3:10 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.

**Mark 1:14-20**

1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,  
1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."  
1:16 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.  
1:17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."  
1:18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.  
1:19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.  
1:20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

**Proclamation**

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Mark is in a big hurry! When I read the first chapter of Mark, I get the sense that something is urgent. There is no baby Jesus in swaddling clothes, no journey to the manger. He just wants to get to the point. And the point is according to Chapter 1 verse 1 is that this "the beginning of the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Mark then tells us about John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord and Jesus' baptism. The Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness and then 40 days later we pick up at Chapter 1 v. 14.

Jesus kicks off his campaign, if you will, with "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." This is what Mark is in a hurry to get to. The time is right. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translates this as "Time's up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message." Sound the alarm. I imagine a wild-eyed street preacher with a sandwich

board with the words “Repent or Burn!” or “The end is near.” I can imagine that is what the Ninevites heard when Jonah prophesied of their destruction.

We see destruction and antagonism around us. We are engaged in the war on terrorism, the war on drugs, and a war on the border. We see desperate people doing desperate things. Returning military men and women are left to wrestle with the demons and trauma of war. Folks are upside down in their mortgages. It is easy to disregard the care of God’s Creation for profit. On a personal level, kids are being cyber-bullied by peers. Our loved ones struggle with disease or disability. It is easy to find the destruction. And it looks like human beings are helping the end come near sometimes.

“Repent and believe the GOOD news,” says Jesus.

Jesus doesn’t stop at repent, though. Thank goodness he continues. He says God’s Kingdom is among us already...get on board. He says God is here among us. Turn your life over to God and God’s rule. This is not a human kingdom. This is God’s kingdom. This is not Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s kingdom, Congress’ kingdom or the president’s Kingdom. Jesus is inviting a response a response of trust and allegiance- a reorientation towards the Kingdom that trumps all other allegiances to political party, sports team, and even national agenda.

Jesus doesn’t just make an announcement, he gets busy. He goes to Galilee- a country village and as he goes, he finds some fishermen. This mission that Jesus is on takes him out into the world. He does not tweet his message and then see what happens if he gets a response. He goes out. He calls people to follow him. And Peter and Andrew, James and John are caught...caught up in the nets of Jesus. They are no longer company men, but Kingdom bearers.

It seems to happen so fast, but Mark is at a fast clip here leaving out details that we can imagine. Pause there with me a moment. What were they thinking? They left father Zebedee in the boat to run the business alone. What were they thinking? Didn’t their wives and mothers expect them home for dinner? They just got out of the boats and went.

We marvel at their commitment. We wonder at their passion for Jesus. We are amazed at their decision. “I have decided to follow Jesus.”

In those days especially, it would be normal for disciples to seek out a rabbi, but these guys are sought out. Rabbis would never recruit their students. It would be unusual which is a clue that there is something different going on here. While we marvel at their decision to follow Jesus, we have to be amazed at the power of God at work here.

I get caught up in the human response. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. I hope some day someone will say these words over my grave, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” But this is more than human volition and will. We cannot save ourselves or anyone else for that matter. This is the power of God to bring about the Kingdom which has come, will come, and is here!

We like to think this is about the disciples or Jonah or the people of Ninevah who turn and repent, then orient their lives towards God. But friends, I think this is about the work of God. God who created us, calls us to follow. God knows our rough edges, our selfishness, our lack of courage, and even so, Jesus calls us to drop our nets and get caught up in the kingdom of God business. The God who creates us knows that we need more than a daily wage. (Not that having a job doesn't matter especially to those who are unemployed.) God knows we long for and need real community based on real things that matter. We need forgiveness and fresh starts. We long to be made right. I can hear this longing in the song "A Gift for Melody Anne" by the Avett Brothers.

I want to get back  
I want to get square  
I want to get back all the hopes and the dreams that I had  
That the good lord above us can't spare  
Like that actor said I don't want to lose heart  
I don't want to get beat beat down by the big big world  
Of quit before I even start

Lord I just want my life to be true  
And I just want my heart to be true  
And I just want my words to be true  
I want my soul to feel brand new

I want to hold hands yeah  
Yeah and I want make love  
I want to keep running all day and all night  
Even when my mind tells my body that's enough

And I want to stand up yeah and I want to stand tall  
If I ever have a son, if I ever have a daughter  
I don't want to tell them that I didn't give my all

And I just want my life to be true  
I just want my heart to be true  
I just want my words to be true  
I want my soul to feel brand brand new  
Like a fresh coat of paint  
We can make it anything but blue  
Anything but blue

The voice cries out to be made new and to be in right relationship with oneself, with others and with God. Repent and believe. The world needs men, women and young people who share the kingdom values.

And God power works in and through human vessels. Just look at Peter and Andrew who once competed with James, John and the Zebedee family fishing business. But it leads them to do things

they never would have done and to see the world in a way they have not seen before. Now they are walking together behind Jesus. And they go places together they would never have gone, if Jesus was not leading them. If we read ahead they go with Jesus to Peter's mother-in-law's house and heals her. They go with Jesus who heals lepers and a paralytic. They keep step with Jesus and start to see what this Kingdom business is all about. Then of all things, Jesus calls a tax collector called Levi. James and John, Peter and Andrew had been gypped by a tax collector like him before, but now these men of different backgrounds are students and colleagues. When Jesus calls us to follow, we may see and do things we would never have done before. Jesus leads them to places they would never have gone and to eat with people they would never have sat down with.

What does he call these men to do? To FOLLOW Him.

We miss this in the English translation, but "follow me" means "come after me". To come after Jesus is to live as Jesus lives, to walk where Jesus would walk, to live the Kingdom dreams God has for us.

When Jesus says the "Time is fulfilled". He means the time is ripe, like a fully pregnant mother ready to birth new life. The Kingdom of God bends towards new life- new life for all God's creation. In the world we live bent on destruction, we are people who hope and believe in a ripe future, pregnant with new life.

We, the Jonahs, the Ninevites, the fisher folk, disciples, who follow and come after Jesus are Kingdom people. Jesus is on a mission and he invites us to "come after him"

Drop your nets, get caught by the compelling grace of God and you will see the Kingdom and the world in a new way.

**Prayer:** Perfect Light of revelation, as you shone in the life of Jesus, whose epiphany we celebrate, so shine in us and through us, that we may become beacons of truth and compassion, enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy. Amen.

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