

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

As we gather in the name of Jesus we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather.

➤ *Rise up, rise up*

130 MV (repeat)

Call to Worship *Psalm 62: 5-8*

For God alone my soul waits in silence, from whom comes my hope.

God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

On God rests my deliverance and my honour; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

Trust in God at all times, O people; pour out your heart before God who is our refuge.

Let us worship God together – our rock and our salvation. Let us pray...

† Prayer

God of mercy, in each second of time you are with us: you call us to discipleship; you invite us into relationship with one another and with you, our Creator. In the moments of this worship may we experience your call, your community, your grace – and may we be led to respond.

Forgive us, O God of mercy, for the times we have run the other way rather than enter into the territory of those we do not like, whose who have hurt us, those we consider our enemy.

Forgive us for the times we have resented your forgiveness of those we consider not worthy. Forgive us for the times we have wallowed in anger and self-pity rather than rejoice in the bounty of your love for all people.

Sometimes, we want you to punish our enemies and confirm our prejudices. Forgive us for putting boundaries around your mercy and borders on your forgiveness. Help us to truly forgive those who sin against us ...even as we are forgiven in Jesus' name. Amen

Words of Hope

In the mercy of God, we are forgiven. In the compassion of God, we are set free to begin anew. In the wisdom of God, we are strengthened for new life in Christ. Thanks be to God!

➤ *Will you come and follow me*

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† Prayer for Understanding

Holy God open our eyes to your Presence. Open our minds to your grace. Open our lips to your praises. Open our hearts to your love. Open our lives to your healing and be found among us today as we seek the wisdom of your Word. Amen

Scripture

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.

Mark 1: 14-20

Now 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.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

On the face of it, our two readings this morning are about being called and responding. In the Hebrew Bible text Jonah hears a word from God about going to Nineveh to preach a message of repentance – and off he goes to do it. God calls and Jonah responds. Likewise, in Mark’s gospel

Jesus shows up out of Galilee, wanders along the sea, calls the fishermen to follow him and they do – immediately! So, the message for today must simply be – listen for God’s call and follow.

But it is never that simple, is it?

Most of us know the whole story of Jonah and because we do, we know that it is not a matter of Jonah hearing God’s call and then doing what God expects. Not even close! When God first speaks to Jonah telling him to go to Nineveh to encourage the people to change their ways and be saved, Jonah refuses. He heads off in another direction entirely. He sails off into the sunset because he does not want to be a prophet to the people of Nineveh. He would rather they all perish.

The ship Jonah is on is beset by storms – so much so that the sailors are certain someone is responsible for angering the gods. Jonah finally admits that he has ignored God’s call and is thrown overboard so that the storm ceases and the sailors continue their journey in peace. Jonah however is swallowed by a big fish – gets a time-out in a whale – and has an opportunity to rethink what he has done.

Eventually Jonah agrees to go to Nineveh to preach to the people – they repent and are saved. That’s the part of the story we read today. You would think the story ended here but wait – there’s more! The next part of the story shows Jonah sulking under a tree because the people repented, and God spared them, and this makes Jonah crazy. He wanted them all to suffer and die but they were saved.

Jonah’s problem is that he is a racist and a nationalist. My people don’t like Ninevites or any Assyrians. We have long been enemies. They have a different religion. They are of a different race. They are not Hebrews. And since they are not my people, they cannot possibly be God’s people.

That is where we all go wrong. We’re all the same people. There is one human family, period. The people of Israel, the sailors on that ship with their various religions, the mean people of Nineveh, even Jonah, lousy prophet though he may be.

Not such a simple – God calls, and we respond – message after all. No, this is more a message about overcoming our own prejudices to act in ways that seem difficult and counter-intuitive to us. So often we condemn those who are not like us – those who may have different goals and different histories – those from away. Too often we don’t like them. We want God to have nothing to do with them. We want them to stay where they are, far from us.

God calls and Jonah – eventually – responds but he isn’t happy about it. And what about those fishermen in Mark’s story – is it as straightforward as we thought? Perhaps not...

This abrupt call narrative has always been a problem because the decision of the four fishermen seems so irrational. The call of the four and their instantaneous response was intended – not to report an historical event, but to encourage faith and to set an example for others to follow. In

this sense it is very like the Jonah account which is a cautionary tale rather than a news report. Still, we can wonder what Simon, Andrew, James, and John saw or heard in Jesus that motivated them to drop their nets – leave all that was familiar – leave behind even a presumably beloved father and just start trotting along behind a man they had apparently never before seen?

One answer is that the Holy Spirit moved their hearts – and who would want to argue with the Spirit? But even the Spirit works on the human level and utilizes our own emotions, thoughts, circumstances, and so on to accomplish divine purposes – to encourage us to take a proverbial leap of faith. Those first four disciples did not stand bolt upright from their nets and lurch, robot-like, toward Jesus with blank stares and empty eyes as though unwilling puppets at the end of some strings being compelled along by a force not their own.

It is possible that Jesus had been speaking in the region for a while. It's possible that these four had heard Jesus preach and teach at least once before. And so, it's possible that the seeds of their interest in Jesus had already been planted well before Jesus formally invites them to join him as followers. Maybe that seems less dramatic than picturing this as some instantaneous inrushing of the Holy Spirit as Jesus called these guys cold. But the story is no less dramatic – the Spirit's role in it no less vital and powerful.

There is no doubt that we love stories of instant transformations – Damascus Road conversion experiences shot-through with the spectacle of a person's life turning around on a dime. But in most of our experience it is just as often – perhaps more often – true that people come to faith when the Spirit of God has been cultivating that faith for years or decades. Is it any less wonderful to see someone follow Jesus as a result of having been raised in a Christian household than to see someone converted on the spot at some evangelistic crusade? Is the Spirit any less involved in someone's becoming a disciple of Jesus if that person comes to faith across a long season of spiritual seeking as opposed to a moment of epiphany?

Maybe the story is more about God than the newly minted disciples – about God's miracle of *creating faith where there was no faith – creating disciples where there were none just a moment before.*¹ That may give us pause since it suggests that they had no control – no choice but to follow Jesus along that shoreline. It makes me wonder if Jonah ever really had a choice in the face of God's call – do we?

We live in a culture that emphasizes choice and independence – our ability to shape our lives and determine our destinies. We can do whatever needs to be done – it's within our power. We can fix and improve everything – we can take hold of the future and make it what we want it to be. The better we are – the more saintly and sacrificing – the better disciples we are, right?

Perhaps not, because being a disciple is much more about living thankfully in God's grace. We follow God's call – deserving or not – reluctantly or willingly – instantly or over the long haul.

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor

Maybe we have lost a full sense of the power of God – to recruit anyone – even people who have made terrible choices – to invade the most hapless lives and fill them with light – to sneak up on people who are thinking about something else entirely and draw them into grace and glory. And yet we do have the freedom to respond to God’s grace and God’s call! Jonah comes to that choice the hard way – in the belly of a fish – and is never content because his racist heart continues to battle with what he knows is right. Jesus doesn’t ask the overburdened fishermen to add one more task to their busy lives. He calls them into a whole new way of being.

In fact, although they do not hesitate when Jesus calls, later in the gospel you see that their enthusiasm wavers. They are more often negative examples in chapters to come showing how the inspiration of the moment is easily stifled and a sense of spiritual boredom can overwhelm. Think of the parable of the sower and seed or a modern experience of the thousands who respond to altar-calls or revivals and fail to maintain their initial commitment. Mark is reminding us just how difficult discipleship is in the real world.

Discipleship is about changing ourselves and participating in God’s desire to change the world in such a way that it will cease to be the hostile place it is. Not quite so simple as listening for God’s call and following – not quite so simple at all.

It can be a call to repentance as was God’s call to Jonah. In fact, it is the Ninevites who listen and change but Jonah is still a racist and a nationalist at the end of the story. His heart is not changed even though he went through the motions of following God’s call. I wonder if we are just going through the motions too sometimes. We need to change our hearts and minds – to repent – of racism and judgmental attitudes.

Discipleship is a call to change the direction of our lives. It may happen in a flash – or over a lifetime. Whether we are eager or reluctant, discipleship is about hearing the call of God’s grace and responding. It is about making a preferential option for the poor – the dispossessed, the excluded, and those who because of gender, sexual orientation, race, or class have been rendered invisible. Discipleship requires that we courageously denounce the evils of our society.

Not quite so simple as it may have appeared at first blush. We need to resist that romantic view of discipleship in favour of recognizing that responding to God’s call will challenge us to change our hearts and minds over and over again as we seek to reflect God’s heart – one that is open wide to all people. Not just hearing God’s call and following but a lifetime of grace as the Spirit of God continually works within us. Amen

➤ *I rest in God alone*

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† Prayer

Loving God, we live in a world that is ever-changing – yet your love remains constant. Sometimes we give up on you and on ourselves – but you do not give up on us. We thank you for calling us

to be prophets, disciples – leaders and followers in your name. Sometimes we answer quickly, and sometimes slowly, yet in all times, you accept us. We pray this day for all who hear your call and who respond.

Help us to embody your compassion for all of creation in all we do. When we say “yes” quickly, channel our enthusiasm to do your work. When we say “no,” don’t give up on us, but guide us back to you and to your way. When we give up, get overwhelmed, burnt out and discouraged, give us rest and energy to carry on.

We pray for people in the world who are lonely, that they may know that you are with them – for those who are depressed, that you will comfort and encourage them – for those who are frightened or despairing, that your perfect love will give them strength to resist fear – for those who are sick, that you will bring them healing. We ask that you help each one worshipping today to be willing to be used by you in responding to our prayers for others.

We pray for ourselves and for our families, that we may grow in faith and understanding – that we would cease to criticize and judge others – that we might know true contentment with all your blessings and for your peace which passes all understanding. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may speak your word – love your people – and care for your creation. We boldly pray in Jesus’ name... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

➤ *You walk along our shoreline*

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† Offering and Prayer

Jesus asked his first disciples to answer his call with their lives. Our offering is one way we answer his call and carry forward his ministry in the world. Consider what Christ will accomplish through the gifts you offer today.

Loving Jesus, you called ordinary people to follow you and join in the work of God’s reign on earth. We offer you our gifts to share in the work you began through them. Bless our gifts we pray and continue to work through us, that the world may know your love and grace active among us. Amen

Blessing

May your soul find rest in God alone – your salvation – your fortress. Do not be shaken. Go from this time together secure in the steadfast love of God – rejoicing in the call of Jesus Christ – strong in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the grace and love of the Holy One embrace us all. Amen

➤ *We will go out with joy*

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