

21 January 2024

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

□ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary*

Call to Worship

God our rock and our salvation.

We will not be shaken!

Trust in God at all times, O people.

We will pour out our hearts to God, our refuge.

Today, let us turn to God and accept the good news.

We will listen for Christ's call and follow him.

Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Lord Jesus Christ, you have called us together as your people, and invited us to follow you. Your church has grown from scattered homes in ancient times – to a worldwide community, embracing men and women, young and old, from many nations and cultures. We marvel at the miracle of your church, and praise you for our place among your people. Your love keeps drawing us to you and to each other, and so we offer you our wonder and praise with millions of those who also gather in your name this day, our Saviour and our Lord. God of mercy and mystery, we confess your mercy can disturb us. We sit in judgment on what we hear, and cannot imagine offering forgiveness for dreadful actions. We prefer to think that your judgment matches ours. Forgive us for presuming we see as you see, and understand all that you understand. Have mercy upon us, O God, when we give up on the power of mercy.

Assurance of Pardon

The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting. Friends, hear the good news of the Gospel. In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and set free to begin again. Let us give thanks for God's most generous love.

□ *We are one in the Spirit*

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Prayer for Understanding

God of new life, your Word can change lives with mercy and purpose. Send your Holy Spirit to help us hear your Word with its potential to change our lives as we follow Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

Scripture

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 Page 859 OT

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” 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. 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!" ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

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 Page 35 NT

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news^[a] of^[b] God ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;^[c] repent, and believe in the good news."^[d]

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 fishers. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 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. ²⁰ 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: The Caller and the Calling

This morning, we look at two more callings of God. Last week, Laura preached about the calling of Phillip and Nathaniel and also of the calling of Samuel many generations earlier. Today, we read Mark's version of the calling of Simon and Andrew and then James and John as well as Jonah's calling.

Peter and Andrew were fishing at the time, while James and John seemed to have been done fishing for the day and were mending nets. Mark says they immediately left their boats and nets and went with Jesus on both occasions. In James and John's case, they left their father, Zebedee, and the other workers behind. You can imagine there might have been questions about where they were going. I have a lot of questions about the abruptness of it all. Who would do that? But we can appreciate their actions even if we don't understand everything. We must consider who it is calling.

Jonah first. Here is the story in brief. God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh and proclaim God's judgment. Still, Jonah refuses and heads for Tarshish in the opposite direction. On board his getaway ship, the sailors throw Jonah into the ocean where he is swallowed by a big fish—one that God had provided for the occasion. In the belly of the fish, Jonah repented, and God had the fish spit him up onto the beach.

Off to Nineveh, a changed man, right? Not so much, but he did go to Nineveh and preach, and we are told the people of Nineveh repent and are spared. Instead of being pleased, Jonah feels betrayed.

A bit of background. Nineveh is in present-day Syria and was Israel's sworn enemy and invaded Israel and Judah in the time of Hezekiah. From Johah's point of view, going to Nineveh was akin to Frodo going to Mordor. Remember how we cheered when Frodo destroyed the ring and Sauron with it? Imagine how Jonah felt when God spared Nineveh? There was no joy for Jonah. In fact, he got into a horrible funk, and that's how the book concludes, with God trying to reason with Jonah about why he should be happy that God spared all the residents of Nineveh and their livestock.

What's interesting is what God did not say to Jonah. God didn't remind Jonah that he'd been given a second chance as well. He had received God's mercy but didn't think Ninevites were worth it. The other thing God didn't say that he was done with Jonah and his miserable hateful attitude. Jonah receives mercy once more, though he can't see it. So, why would God call Jonah of all people in the first place? God didn't need Jonah. But God chose Jonah anyway. Because Jonah needed Nineveh. Funny how that works.

And Jesus didn't need Peter and Andrew, or James and John. It's easier for us to see that they needed Jesus than it is for us to see that Jonah needed Nineveh. The God that is beyond our comprehension is like that. One of my favorite authors, Norm Wright, a pastor in England reflected on the names of God in the Bible. Jahweh, Elohim, The Ancient of Days, El Shaddai and so on. But Norman Wright thinks a good name would be "The Jesus Sender." God is the One who, when the exact right time came, sent Jesus to reconcile us to God. In other words, to call us all into a relationship and a peace which, in the words of Paul, surpasses all understanding. Still we are invited to understand the purposes of God's heart.

Why did the fishermen respond immediately to Jesus? I think you have to experience the love of Jesus first to understand the why of it. But once you are loved, nothing seems more natural.

Leif Peterson revealed that he used to joke with his father Eugene Peterson, author of The Message Bible and Presbyterian church pastor, and tell him that he "only had one sermon, one message" despite decades of creativity in sharing the Bible with people in new ways. "It's almost laughable how you fooled them, how for 30 years every week you made them think you were saying something new," he said as part of a poem addressed to his father. "They thought you were a magician in your long black robe hiding so much in your ample sleeves, always pulling something fresh and making them think it was just for them," he continued. "They didn't know how simple it all was. They were blind to your secret." Leif Peterson said that he knew his father's secret,

however, as he had been telling him for 50 years. "For years you steal into my room at night and whispered softly to my sleeping head. It's the same message over and over: 'God loves you. He's on your side. He's coming after you. He's relentless.'"

And Jesus walks into our lives and calls us—often at inconvenient moments—to what? To be fishers and evangelists? Maybe. But always to see how much we are loved and that We are invited to walk this amazing road of adventure. And why would we do that? When you see how God is on your side and loves you and simply refuses to give up on you, how can you not follow that kind of love to wherever the road leads?

□ *Thou didst leave thy throne* 204

Offering and Prayer

Lord Jesus, you called ordinary men and women 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 and work through us, that the world may know your love is still active among us all. Amen.

□ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

...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

□ *I'm gonna live so God can use me* 648

Blessing

□ *Send me, Lord / Thuma mina* 777