

Worship for January 28, 2024

Prelude

*Call to Worship

Mark 1:15

The time is fulfilled

and the kingdom of God is at hand;

repent, and believe the good news.

*Hymn 611 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

Prayer of Confession

Loving God,

through your Son you have called us to repent of our sin,

to believe the good news,

and to celebrate the coming of your kingdom.

Like Christ's first apostles,

may we hear his call to discipleship,

and, forsaking old ways,

proclaim the gospel of new life to a broken world;

through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me as I Am

Assurance of Pardon

Whenever a people humble themselves,

turn from their evil ways,

and put their hope and trust in divine mercy,

God forgives their sin

and enfolds them in the strength and love of Christ.

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel.

Your sins are forgiven. Be at peace. Amen.

First Reading Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Matthew 4:12-23

The Morning Message

Immediately. When was the last time you were required to act immediately?

This was a recent experience of mine:

My mom had an unexpected dental problem. She called her dentist's office for an appointment and was told it would probably be weeks before they could work her in. But then on Thursday morning, they called saying there was a cancellation and she could come that afternoon. "Great! I'll take it." Was her *immediate* response.

Then she texted both my sister and me and *immediately* we both reacted. I texted a reply and my sister called her. "No way, Mom. The roads are in bad shape and there's ice on the sidewalks and parking lots. Call them back and cancel."

You have probably noticed by now that I have some mobility issues these days. I had walked to the mailbox that morning on a sheet of ice. I wasn't leaving the house again without help. And I hated having to tell her that.

She cancelled the appointment-immediately- so someone else could benefit from it and they re-scheduled her for another day.

Immediately. It implies a sense of urgency. Immediate action is required at times of distress and emergency. Sometimes we act immediately to some great opportunity, like when the teacher says the first person finished with this test gets a candy bar.

Sometimes it's a mixed bag like the time I went to see one of our homebound members at another church. I had made an appointment and arrived on time. I rang the bell and got no response. I knocked on the door and the same thing happened-nothing. Finally, the door flew open and I hear, "Cinda, come on in. I just caught the kitchen on fire and I'm naked. Mom's in the living room."

I flew through that door and ran to the kitchen. I saw smoky streaks on the wall paper and could smell the fire though it had been extinguished. I ran back to where my elderly church lady was sitting in her recliner. She was ok, but was very concerned about all the activity. She said, "Girls, what is going on?"

What had happened was that the daughter had mopped the kitchen floor with an ammonia-based product. In order to cover up the odor, she lit a decorative candle, the kind that had fruit imbedded in it. Well, the fruit caught on fire and sent up a tall flame which caught a grapevine wreath that was just above it on fire. And it spread some from there.

I think the take away from that incident is that urgency can sometimes prompt an impulsive response and that can get us in trouble.

And I think that's what happened with Jonah.

The back story is that God tells Jonah to go to preach in a very powerful, important city, Ninevah. It is the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. The people of Ninevah were in dire need of a change of heart, what we would call repentance.

"Heck, no! I'm not going there, that wicked city. Those people are not my kind. Ninevites are of a different race and religion from Jonah. He had no business going there. So immediately Jonah takes off in the opposite direction, as if he could outrun God. He boards a ship to Tarshish.

A storm blows up and threatens to swamp the ship. All the sailors pray to their own gods for help. Then, being a superstitious bunch, they cast lots to see who on board might be responsible for their situation by committing some terrible act.

Jonah fesses up that he is running from his God, and that the storm is probably his fault. The only way to save the ship was for him to be thrown overboard. The other passengers were reluctant to do that. They kept trying to save the ship, but eventually agree to toss Jonah overboard.

Immediately-the sea is still and the grateful sailors make a sacrifice to Jonah's God.

Now, according to the story, Jonah is swallowed by a huge fish, some versions call it a whale. Being in the belly of the fish for three days, Jonah has come around. He will go to Ninevah and preach to the rebellious people there about the God of Israel, the One, true, holy God.

By this time, the fish is sick of Jonah and he spits him out on the beach.

Jonah fulfills his promise to go to the people of Ninevah and preach about changing their hearts, turning from false gods and turning toward Yahweh, his God. And, low and behold, they respond by repenting of their foolish ways and God changes his mind about them and does not destroy the city.

Mission accomplished. You would think Jonah would be elated by that, but, no. Jonah was angry. He hadn't wanted to go there in the first place because they weren't "his kind" and he didn't want them to find favor with God. He didn't want the people to have a change of heart and turn to God. He wanted God to destroy them.

Jonah is so brazen that he complained to God, “I know you are merciful and you might really save them from destruction. I wanted no part of that.”

No kidding. Jonah was a prophet, just not a very good one. The story ends with God’s rebuke of Jonah.

When Jesus called the fishermen in the text we read this morning, they *immediately* followed him. Did they run by the bank, get their affairs in order, pack a bag and kiss their wives and kids first?

No. Jesus called them and they left their work and followed him.

I learned this week that in that day, people would often seek out particular rabbis to study with, to explore the faith. Maybe they had sat for some of Jesus’ teaching already. We don’t know, but, Jesus saw something in them and invited them to join him in his work.

“I’ll show you how to fish for people.” That must have been a really compelling offer because they did go.

Maybe they were enthused about the prospect of travel, or being part of a movement. Maybe this would be like a pilgrimage, a spiritual adventure. They experienced all these things while traveling with Jesus, but not in the ways they probably initially expected. Sometimes their food came from gleaning the fields or relying on strangers for meals and a place to sleep.

Those deep theological discussions they longed for probably challenged the faith they were raised in. I can’t tell you how many times that happened in seminary. Some students became so uncomfortable in that setting that they dropped out.

The first disciples met lots of new people, but not always the kind of people they would normally hang out with. Eventually they would learn that often the people we have trouble with are the very ones God seeks out. And, let’s try this idea on: maybe we are the ones who need to change and these newcomers are our teachers.

Sounds a little like Jonah and the stiff-necked people of Ninevah, doesn’t it?

As we make our way toward Lent, we will hear many stories of call. Some people are called for great works and we read about them in scripture or history books.

But, what about the ones that aren’t called for some special work? What about the father of those fishermen? Does God like him less? Does he have a lesser place in the kingdom?

Not at all.

God calls all of us to respond with whatever gifts we have been given. If you can't figure out what your gifts are, ask a friend, ask me. I see gifts in all of you. They differ from one person to the next and I love it. That's what makes the church so strong and interesting.

My husband and children all felt the call to participate in a medical mission work in Peru. Each of them describes it in their own way. It was life-changing. I am so thankful they had the opportunity. They will all tell you they went with the mindset to minister to those in need.

But, what they discovered was that they were the ones in need. Each one of them, in their own ways, had a deep spiritual need of which they weren't even aware.

And I am the only one in our family who has not been on one of these trips. I was not called to the place or the work. My call has been to stay at home base, to pray without ceasing, to relay messages back and forth between people on the trip and family members state-side. And I was called to welcome them home, wash their clothes, and deal with their travel sickness.

You may think the days for God to awaken you to some spiritual purpose are over. Not so. Inspiration comes from so many places, people and circumstances. You may be someone else's inspiration or their hope or a source of courage. Maybe someone will be those things for you.

*Hymn 175 Seek Ye First

*Affirmation of Faith Apostles' Creed p. 35

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

*Hymn 607 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

*Hymn 744 Arise, Your Light Is Come!

*Blessing

Go now, follow where Christ calls you
and proclaim the message God gives you.

Wait in hope for God.

Avoid becoming bound up in the business of the world,
but live in readiness for the Kingdom.

And may God be your haven and your glory;
may Christ Jesus give you courage for his mission;
and may the Spirit enfold you in love. Amen.

*Postlude