

21 January 2018

Jonah

Mark 1:16-20

In our OT reading we heard **the story of the Ninevites**, the people Jonah despised and the national enemy of the Jews of that day, they were seen as, 'the other', 'them', different and despised..

Brainstorm **lists of THEM**s for your congregation today: ¹

national enemies, the opposite political party, rival sports teams, certain people in your class/office/neighborhood who are just so out of it, even certain ethnic groups.

*(Involve worshipers by giving them small sheets of paper on which to write or draw pictures of some of their THEM*s.)

..God loves each of those people.

remind yourself of this by *drawing a heart* around each name or picture.

Just as Jonah would have had trouble drawing that heart around the Ninevites, we may struggle to draw hearts around our THEMs.

That is good discipleship work.

The Ninevites, hearing God's message, repented, and were saved by God. No one, especially Jonah, expected that – or even wanted it. **The clear message is that God loves and calls people we do not like, the people we often label as THEM... good thing to think about as we get near to the end of the school holidays.. and to australia day.**

What if we were to **compare Jonah's response to God with that of the people of Ninevah?...**

Jonah's story laughs at Jonah, but it also reassures us that **God doesn't punish Jonah as he deserves.** God doesn't let Jonah

¹ <http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.com.au/2011/12/year-b-3rd-sunday-after-epiphany-3rd.html>

drown in the sea and when he is spit up on the beach, God gives him a second chance. God even provides a vine in an attempt to get through to Jonah who still doesn't get it.

Jonah's actions are a good balance to the Ninevites and the fishing disciples who respond promptly and correctly.

So, we can hope that God will give us second chances when we need them too.

Today it is amusing and worthwhile to note that *the fishing disciples get up and follow in six verses. Jonah takes four chapters* and even then we are not sure he has really got it yet!

The urgency of the two texts echo Paul's concern for NOW..

<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkEpiphany3.htm>

It would have been possible for Mark to have missed this calling story, to go straight from Jesus' announcement of God's reign to an illustration of that reign in action, the expulsion of the demonic power from the man in the synagogue.

Instead Mark reports the call of two sets of disciples, Simon (Peter) and Andrew and James and John. This is surely no accident. Jesus was not a solo act, according to Mark. The 'good news of the kingdom' is about what happens to people and it is also about people, about community.² Them and us!

This does not stop Mark from exploiting the human frailty of the disciples to the limit as he uses them to expose value systems which conflict with those of Jesus. Nevertheless, the good news includes disciples. It is not just about Jesus. It includes in the broadest sense the Church. The Church performs about as well as the disciples in Mark, but it is still part of God's reign or can be. That is why Mark tells his story the way he does.³

When we look ahead through Mark's gospel, we see how Mark seems to remind us that disciples are needed. We belong!

Jesus goes up a high mountain and appoints the twelve. After that he sends out the twelve. He sends them out to do what he, himself,

² <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkEpiphany3.htm>

³ *ibid*

had been doing. We can scarcely miss the point here, too. Jesus is not a solo act!

‘Follow me and I will make you become fishers of people’ (1:17). When Jesus called these men to ‘follow me’, he meant literally - called them to be his disciples, his followers, students.. to live a peripatetic life, a life of wandering, listening, learning, telling, healing.. ‘repent and believe the good news, the kingdom of God comes near’

So follow they did, badly, at times, if you believe Mark.., but follow they did, leaving everything behind..

Jesus was a guest, a wanderer, a healer, a teacher,.. He invited his followers to be the same.. sure, that’s all very well in 1st century Palestine, but what about today, what about 21st century, Sale?

Loader writes ‘One of the problems of this passage is that people can access it only by treating it symbolically. In that sense we are all called ‘to follow’ Jesus and to become fishworkers. But the story, itself, should not be shorn too quickly of its literalness. It doubtless reflects the historical situation in Jesus’ ministry in which only some were called in this way.’⁴

By far the majority who believed in Jesus’ message stayed at home. He asked only a small number to join him on his meanderings.

Theirs became a particular role and they were being given a particular formation. They were not better than the rest, but simply given a special calling. Some are called to stay at home and some to wander...

We don’t need to put Zebedee down! Someone still needs to mend the nets and people will still need fish! It is interesting that Zebedee is even an employer with hired staff. Sometimes we idealise Jesus’ world and imagine his entourage is made up of destitute people. That is subtly comfortable to contemplate and makes us spectators. Instead, the movement was diverse, and as in most movements for change, it is often those who identify with the poor, but who have enough to eat and enough education to take initiatives, who exercise leadership. This will have been the case with many in the

⁴ Loader <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkEpiphany3.htm>

first movement and it remains the challenge for all who have resources today.⁵

The calling of James and John and Simon and Andrew and such other callings to leave all and follow function as a protest not against life at home, but more generally against societal structures which simply perpetuate the past and trap people into the service of the status quo and its gods.’⁶

If Jesus is calling **us** to follow him, who is the Jesus who is issuing the invitation? Jesus died 2000 years ago, and rose, and is not walking and talking in the same way. How can we literally follow him?

If we leave everything, where do we go?

I’ve recently returned from Northern NSW where people believe and follow all sorts of paths, but rarely Christianity- there are Buddhists, Hindus, many new age people, secular humanists, atheists.. while i was there I pondered, ‘who am i following?’ what do i believe?’

What does it look like to be a christian, a follower of Jesus in the 21st century?

Reflecting on our gospel passage, and on the gospels in general, i have gleaned a few hints.. in no particular order

Following Jesus means:

1. Relationship with Jesus, trust, placing myself in God’s hands, prayer.
2. Saying sorry, repent releasing all that gets in the way of love and truth.
3. Loving extravagantly – I think of Jesus story of the Prodigal son – overflowing love. I think of the woman caught in adultery – no judgement, love. I think of Jesus living until he died, and dying without anger, only forgiveness. I think of Jesus washing peoples feet and asking us to follow suit, To serve as he did. Service, ‘love as I have loved you’, receiving love then offering it, giving as I have received. loving extravagantly..
4. Being a healer, building relationships.. with them and us..
5. living simply, travelling lightly on the earth. Being a good steward of creation. We moved to Sale with So much stuff! It

⁵ <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkEpiphany3.htm>

⁶ *ibid*

weighs us down and we acquire more. How would it be, to let go of some of our stuff, to give it away to those who might need it? To live more simply?.. I've put alot of stuff in the Anglicare bin this weekend..!

And fishing?

The image of fishing often carries negative tones.

What does Jesus mean, 'fish for people'? There have been many answers. After all, this is a favourite verse for describing Christian mission.

At its crudest, such 'fishing' is akin to scalp hunting: getting as many people to join the movement as possible, with a focus on quantity. Where such thinking prevails, people too easily become the statistics of success.

The context does not suggest that the disciples went out in search of numbers, any more than Jesus did.

The clue to Jesus' meaning, at least in Mark, must be Mark's Jesus. **'Fishing' will mean reaching out and touching people, bringing healing, liberation, renewal. It will mean joining Jesus' 'act'.**

The immediate context would lead one to suspect this anyway: the good news of the kingdom is going to include the disciples. They are to be involved. This is why their calling comes precisely here in Mark's story.

But Jesus' socially disruptive call upset the system not only for those called but also for those left behind. It called for a new way of looking at life, wherever you are. There is a new set of priorities. This means changed values, but it is more than that. It means a new god, or better, a return to the God of compassion and justice. The God of the Ninevites. The God of Australia with debate around the date of Australia Day.. who are the 'them' in that debate- The ones Jesus loves like us....Following the God of compassion and justice will make a huge difference wherever we are⁷.

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⁷ <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkEpiphany3.htm>