

## WHEN GOD CALLS

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Mark 1: 14-20

By: Rev. Patrick D. Cherry

## ~Call and Response~

I don't believe that I fully appreciated the weight and impact of this story until I had a job, mortgage, and family to feed. The responsibilities of adulthood abound and tether us to our labor. I wonder how often we ponder the depth of sacrifice these four fishermen took. The "*I will make you fishers of men*"..."*I will make you fishers of people*" has a nice ring to it. It's an interesting image. Yet, there is more going on here than the shortest job interview ever! Simon & Andrew, James & John all answer the call of Jesus and walk away from their life as they know it. They have responsibilities. They have mouths to feed. Each of their life's work is wrapped up in the fish industry. It is not work they stumbled upon. It is work they were bred to do, following the tutelage of their fathers. It's all they know; yet, with a few words from an itinerant preacher, they immediately stand and walk away from their security, safe comfort, and responsibilities to embark upon a new, exciting, and dangerous journey that will forever change the course of history. But of course, they don't quite understand that now. They leave it all behind to answer this call.

There is a certain humor in placing this account of God's call in contrast with the story of Jonah. The portion of Jonah we read is the second call to come to Jonah. Immediately prior to this call is Jonah's response to the first. Upon receiving a call from God to go to Nineveh, he runs and jumps on a ship heading in a different direction. In contrast with our other passage, it would be as if Peter, Andrew, James, and John, upon encountering Jesus, jumped into their fishing boats and rowed like madmen for the opposite shore, as far away from this dangerous preacher as they could. That's a humorous image, but is exactly what Jonah does. Jonah is trying to get away from the LORD and these reprehensible instructions to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. This was the very empire that destroyed Israel and occupied their land. Jonah cannot imagine taking the message of God to the very people he likely hates most...so he runs. Do you think running from God is a wise move?

Jonah has been used as the example on many occasions of the consequences of running. The story gets real interesting once the ship Jonah embarked upon experiences rough weather. It gets so bad that they throw cargo overboard to lighten their load. Yet, no matter what they do, they cannot make it back to dry land. After wondering who has angered the god's, they cast lots and the lots point to Jonah. In a moment of true honesty, Jonah comes clean. He is so honest; that he declares the sailors throw him overboard, for surely the seas would calm once this happens. After a bit more prodding, they do exactly that and toss Jonah overboard. This would mark a tragic end in most cases, but this isn't most cases and the LORD still has a job to do. Here is the most memorable part; Jonah is swallowed up by an enormous fish. Again, this would likely be a tragic end in most cases, but this isn't most cases. The LORD still has a job to do. While sitting in the belly of the fish Jonah begins to consider his plan and begins to pray and sing to God.

I like the way writer and poet Aldous Huxley imagines the scene:

*Seated upon the convex mound  
Of one vast kidney, Jonah prays  
And sings his canticles and hymns.  
Making the hollow vault resound  
God's goodness and mysterious ways,  
Till the great fish spouts music as he swims.*

God indeed hears the prayer and instructs the great fish to deposit poor Jonah on dry land. This is exactly where we met Jonah in this morning's passage. Still covered in fish vomit and water-logged, Jonah ventures into enemy territory to share the word of God and after preaching what is likely the shortest sermon any evangelist has ever spoken, Nineveh turns to God.

Commentator and Old Testament Professor at Luther Seminary, Kathryn Schifferdecker sums it up this way:

"Here's the thing, you see, here's the thing all of us have found out about following the call of God in and through the waters: God is God and does not act as we think the Almighty should act. In good faith, we follow where we hear God's call, we go to the city, or the suburb, or to small town and rural America, and we are prepared to bring God's word to that place, and what we find is that *God is already there before us*. We find that no people, and no place, not even Nineveh, can properly be called God-forsaken."

This morning we have two distinct stories of call. The biggest difference is the reaction of those called. Four fishermen drop their nets and follow. Another jumps aboard a ship and winds up in a fish, before he follows. These tales seem to beg the question. How do you answer the call of God? Certainly you have never run from God?

We may not find our escape upon a ship, but we certainly escape in other ways. Our escape is found in excuses of overburdened schedules, worries of safety and security, and hidden in the line items of budgets. Our running may seem a little more subdued, but is ridiculous nonetheless. For beyond the differences of our stories this morning is a common thread. Beyond the reactions of those called is A CALL.

When God calls, God calls with a purpose! God has a particular purpose in mind for Jonah, for Simon, for Andrew, for James, and for John. When God calls, God calls with a purpose! The purpose of each call was to follow and share the news of God so that others might know God. When Jonah finally follows his call, a miraculous thing happens, Nineveh turns to God! Much to Jonah's chagrin, his hated enemies become followers of God.

And when we consider the disciples, we stand as living proof to the effect of their answered call. We worship the one true God because somewhere along the way that life-giving message was shared.

We all can be reluctant messengers, but we would do well to remember that God does not call to meaningless work. God calls with a purpose. So that others might know God!

Friends, it is not a matter of when God calls, will you answer? It is now that God is calling you, will you answer? The world is ready to hear the message of God!

**~Works Cited~**

Schifferdecker, Kathryn. "Commentary on Jonah 3:1-5, 10." *Working Preacher*. Luther Seminary, n.d. Web. 22 Jan. 2015. <[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2347](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2347)>.