

January, 2021
Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam
Jonah 3:1-5, 10

In our readings today, we heard God calling men into the Holy Ministry. Jonah was called to minister to the people of Nineveh. In the Gospel we have the account of Jesus calling four fishermen to become “fishers of men”.

Jonah was a reluctant prophet. When God first called Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah decided to go, in the opposite direction, toward Spain. Why would he disobey God? You see, Israel and Assyria were bitter enemies and Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. Jonah did not want the people of Nineveh to hear the Word of God. He was afraid the Assyrians would repent and be saved. God's Word had said that Israel would be destroyed by Assyria. Jonah hated the Assyrians. He didn't want Nineveh to be saved. He wanted Nineveh destroyed.

But God wanted Nineveh to hear His Word. God wants all people to be saved. God's will is to be respected. What God wants, we should do. But Jonah thought that God was wrong and Jonah decided to take matters into his own hands and do what he thought was right.

Jonah was sailing westward toward Spain when God sent a major storm into the ship's path. The sailors feared for their lives. God showed them that it was Jonah's fault. Jonah knew that God was angry with him and told the sailors if they threw him into the sea, they would be safe. That's what the sailors did. They threw Jonah into the raging water and the sea became calm. The ship continued on its way – but without Jonah.

When Jonah was thrown into the sea, he began to sink into the depths. But God sent a great fish to swallow Jonah and he was in the stomach of the great fish for three days! Eventually the fish vomited Jonah onto the shore!

Then God told Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and preach to the people there. What did this stubborn, disobedient and angry prophet do? How can you fight against God who can send a giant fish after you? Jonah went to Nineveh and preached God's Word to them. The Holy Spirit worked among those people and the city of Nineveh repented and God forgave the people! This was a city of at least half a million people!

Jonah betrayed God! Jonah's actions don't make much sense. Did Jonah repent? It appears so. Why would Jonah have made a confession of his sin if he was not repentant? It seemed that Jonah wanted others to learn from his sin.

There are several things we can learn from Jonah. First, God's prophets, apostles, pastors and teachers are sinners like everyone else. Secondly, the worst thing a servant of God can do is to not share the gospel with others. Finally, God's Word is a blessing even if the messenger isn't.

God called Jonah to proclaim His Word. Jesus also called men to proclaim His Word. In the gospel, Jesus saw Peter and Andrew fishing and called them to be “fishers of men.” A little while later, Jesus saw James and John mending a fishing net and Jesus called them to follow Him.

These four men and the others Jesus called were not filled with hatred as Jonah was, but they all had their weaknesses. Jesus would teach them, but the disciples failed to understand, or they would argue among themselves, or they wanted to do something that was not Christlike. But the followers of Jesus went into the world with the gospel after Jesus ascended into heaven!

Jesus even called Saul, a persecutor of the Church, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Remember: It's the message, not the messenger who is important. About 1,400 years later, Martin Luther, after the Reformation was under way said, “I did nothing; the Word did everything.” God still calls unlikely people to proclaim the Word of God.

When Jesus lived among us He said, The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God has come near! Repent, and believe in the gospel. The message was simple: Jesus was born! Jesus died. Jesus is alive! Jesus is the Savior! Listen to Him, repent and believe!

Friends, have you been crushed with the guilt and sorrow of your sins? Look to Jesus. He loves you. He bore the guilt and sorrow of sin for us. Jesus gives the church pastors. Your pastor is human just like you and he speaks for the One who redeemed us!

Listen to God's Word. It speaks of our Savior and His great love for us! Read the Word. You will like it! God's Word is a treasure that He wants us to mine every day. In that Word we see Jesus dying on the cross for us! We see Jesus rise from the dead. We look forward to heaven.

Freedom from sin, death and hell was given to you when a pastor sprinkled water upon you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at your baptism and you became a member of God's family by faith!

Come to the altar where the pastor offers you the body and blood of your Savior, given and shed for you. At the altar you receive a meal of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Here is the Kingdom of God, not far away but here, and now, for you!

God called Jonah to minister to people that Jonah hated. In spite of Jonah, God worked repentance in Nineveh and the Assyrians enjoyed forgiveness.

Jesus sent his followers to proclaim the good news that all people have a Savior. In spite of their shortcomings, the Word went out and the Church grew. Jesus changes people into "fishers of men."

God still calls sinful men into the preaching ministry and women

and men into the teaching ministry. In spite of their short-comings, they teach and preach that Jesus is the world's only Savior. Pastors baptize children and adults who become members of God's family by faith. Pastors offer the Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith.

The message of Jesus is most important. The words of Jesus still hold true: The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.

Amen

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