

**Jonah 3:1-5, 10**

The world of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three day's walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. 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**

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

## Sermon

### Gone Fishing

Alex had a terrible day fishing on the lake, sitting in the blazing sun all day without catching a single one. On his way home, he stopped at the fishmonger and ordered four rainbow trout. He told the fishmonger, 'Pick four large ones out and throw them to me, will you?'

'Why do you want me to throw them at you?' Asked the salesman?' So that I am able to tell my wife, in all honesty, that I caught them' said Alex.

'Okay, but I suggest that you take the salmon.' Why's that? 'Because your wife came in earlier today and said if you came by, I should tell you to take salmon. That's what she'd like for supper tonight', replied the fishmonger with a grin.

Every fisherman has a fish tale, about the one that got away or the one the grizzly bear ate or the salmon that was in the lake. And every culture has its share of fish tales in the form of legends or myths. And when you think about it, what is the purpose of these so called tales? On one level, they are meant to entertain and make the story teller look good. But often the tales also have a lesson to teach to the listener, if they have ears to hear.

This is definitely true of the classic fish tale, Jonah. The story of a man who choose to ignore God's calling and attempt to hid from his purpose. That is when the storm comes, he chooses to go overboard and the giant fish, or was it a whale... whatever it was, it swallowed him whole. But, after a time out and time to pray, Jonah is "deposited" back on land and sent again to Nineveh to proclaim God's anger on the city.

So is Jonah's story a classic fish tale or a true story of the prophet? I wasn't there, but if it is a tale, that doesn't mean it is without truth. So what truth does Jonah share? Maybe the truth of God's power over creation - storms and fish, maybe even God's power to influence Jonah. The story declares the power of God over all creation, even over the destruction of Nineveh. But maybe the most important truth of Jonah's story is that the same God who is all powerful, is also a God of second chances. Jonah receives a second chance to do what is right. Nineveh is given a second chance to become a new, better people.

Second chances are a sign of grace. We don't get second chances when we do the right thing, only when we fail. But a second chance recognizes our failure, but chooses to withhold the consequence in-lue of the opportunity to learn from the mistake and live differently. This is why it is God's grace that gives us new life - it is God's gift of a second chance that allows us to grow and mature and change.

Jesus had a few fish tales as well, and today's text from Mark is the first of them. The story of calling his first four disciples, asking the fishermen to follow him and he will make them fishers of men.

So is that the way it really happened, Jesus walking along the beach and calling Simone and Andrew, then James and John a few moments later? Did he use that classic line and did the men truly leave their boats and nets and family immediately to follow him? Maybe, but even if it is a bit of a legend or story, what is the truth it has to tell? Maybe it is the truth that Jesus calls the everyday person, like fishermen, because his ministry isn't from the top down, but from the bottom up. Maybe the truth is a truth of Jesus' call at the right time to the right people that elicits an immediate response. Or maybe it is simply like many of us, Jesus likes to spend time on the beach - especially in winter.

But maybe the most important truth of both Jonah and of Jesus' call of the first disciples is this: It is not about the fish. Jonah is not a story about the giant fish nor is it really about Jonah. Jesus' story is not so much about the boats or nets or the fish or fishermen. No both of these stories are about who God is, and God's undying love for people fish. Jonah is all about God's hope and want for people to turn back to God, to listen and live a better life together by living for God. This was true for God's hope for Ninevah, and it was true for God's hope for Jonah. The big city that was too large to cross in only one or two days, and the individual flawed man, Jonah, whose pride and ego cause him to run and then in the end, to pout that God's mind was changed. That is a God who sees the big picture and connects with the personal story.

And Jesus called fishermen to become fishers of people. These first four disciples become the basis for the 12 apostles, disciples of Jesus who follow and spread the good news and share the message of grace and love that Jesus shares with them. But the story is not about Simone or Andrew, James or John - but about the people they are called to connect with. And that includes you and it includes me. We are products of the truth of Jesus' call. For the story has been passed down to us, the truth has been shared and we have been caught up in the nets of God's nets - nets of love and grace, of forgiveness and second chances. And so the fish become fishermen, and the net that has embraced us is the net that we now are called to cast on others. "Come and follow me, and I will make you fishers of people."