

Epiphany 3B, January 25, 2009

Lections: Jonah 3: 1-5, 10; Ps. 62: 6-14; I Corin. 7: 29-31; Mark 1:14-20

His name was Adrien Caceres and he was the Bishop of Ecuador. His diocese was in a companion relationship with the diocese of Connecticut, my ordaining diocese. I had just been ordained a deacon and he was telling me about his intention to ordain the first woman priest in Latin America. He invited me to preach at her ordination which would mean tutoring in Spanish and being priested more speedily than I had anticipated; the diaconate usually lasted a year. Bishop Caceres had a reputation for gathering expensive donations like trucks or tractors when he came calling in Connecticut. I remember him saying that those in North America had too much stuff; we lived like kings in comparison to the poor of the mountains in his country. I was not prepared for the invitation he issued at the end of coffee hour. "I want you to come to Ecuador for three years and work for me," he said. "Do you love me? Am I not also your bishop?" Whoa. My mind was reeling. "I have a husband (and three children)" I stammered. "He can be your driver," was the response. Where was it written in my baptismal or ordination vows that such an adventure would come to me?

The disciples Jesus gathered initially show none of my hesitation. Jesus comes, extends an invitation to them to change their vocations and off they go, leaving home and family for the in-breaking of God's reign. As we move through Mark's story the disciples will show more of their struggle between living on God's terms or living on human terms. They are clearly able to take risks and they are also preoccupied with their own security, status and power. "What the disciples *do* reveals their faith and loyalty to Jesus as followers and helpers...and what they *say* expresses their difficulty in following...What the rule of God presents to them is far beyond and far different from what they expected."¹

I think that is why they are paired with Jonah who you will remember as a reluctant prophet and resistant to the call to go to Ninevah. The Ninevites were foreigners and he had no love for them. There was an interlude with a ship and a whale with indigestion before Jonah gave what is probably the shortest sermon – a one sentence wonder - to which the whole town responded immediately and sincerely. Jonah had misjudged who they were. Where was it written that faithless foreigners would welcome the God of Israel's initiative toward them?

For two weeks we've been concentrating on 'call and response,' for Jesus and for those who will follow him. How do we know that God is calling? How do we respond? What if the job description offered is as enigmatic as "fishers of men"? Does God's call emerge in a budget process such as our own? In a mission statement? In a diocesan strategy? Do we hear a call in the midst of our settled lives? For me, discerning that a call comes from God has at least one hallmark; it involves risk.

I received a call from the bishop's office yesterday. As we end the week of Christian unity we are asked to join all faith traditions at City Hall plaza tomorrow at 12:30 to urge

¹ Mark as Story, Choadis, Dewey, Michie, p. 123

a settlement of the bus strike. Faith communities advocate for the common good and for those who have little voice in the corridors of power. Many of us have been inconvenienced by the strike; others are suffering. I am sure you have read the stories of people walking for hours to maintain their jobs. I am hoping that those of you who work downtown will use your lunch time to make a witness with our bishop.

The call to go to New Orleans to help those who are still suffering from the devastating hurricane three years ago is an initiative of the diocese of Louisiana called the Jeremiah project. It is based on what is written in the 29th chapter of Jeremiah to those in exile, to those who are suffering and need a faith response. Certainly the local and national governments have failed these people and so the witness of faith and a building up of hope and solidarity are urgent. This is not a sight seeing trip although I am sure that some of the sights we see will stay with us. This is not an excuse to escape the bitter cold of a typical Ottawa winter. This will be a housing build and we will be doing some heavy lifting of bricks and mortar and heavy hearts and spirits. This is mission and ministry in the path and pattern of Jesus. This is a call of service to 'foreigners,' and is undertaken as a response to need. Two of our parish university age students will leave their jobs, forgo studies and a winter break of downtime to serve the world God loves. Representatives from this parish make up one quarter of the team. There is another build invitation for later this year that has no age restriction. I will speak more about that later.

“It is written” is a tag line for the main character in Paulo Coelho’s popular book, The Alchemist, which we read and discussed in Advent. It is also a statement used at the beginning and ending of the movie “Slumdog Millionaire” about a young man who emerged from the slums of Mumbai. For these characters it means destiny or the hand of God on their lives. It is written in scripture that God calls people to a variety of vocations. Not all are prophets, not all work downtown, not all are fishermen or acquainted with the ways of animals, not all are of university age, not all are in this parish or in a faith community we would recognize. It is written that God calls are going out continuously. What is yet to be written is our response. Amen+

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