

Epiphany 3b, January 22, 2012

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

Jonah is a bit of a character isn't he? How much do you know about him? His story is a book all of its own, full of his journey of faith but not of prophetic speeches. We might even consider putting him in the basket of flunking sainthood that we spoke about last week.

We know of his reluctance to be a prophet, to speak words of truth to those who needed to hear it for the sake of their lives. Instead we have an almost comedic adventure of running away, hopping a boat, getting thrown off, landing in another creature's stomach where he provoked a serious case of indigestion, picking himself up, delivering a few words which had an impact beyond his imagination, eventually feeling sorry for himself because God wasn't going to smite anyone and he wanted a front row seat for that. This week, Jonah reminds us of the captain of a certain Italian cruise ship, and how the impact of a few words can turn things around. What message or truth do you think we are meant to hear this morning? "The only way to avoid total catastrophe is to talk."

Jonah may have been afraid of the cost of confrontation. Many of us avoid it if we can, even if there are terrible things going on at work or at home, even if to keep the status quo means anxiety, depression, broken spirits, physical illness, emotional torment. We choose silence or living by denial (if I don't say anything it isn't really happening). Sometimes we become passive aggressive because we have become experts at coming at things sideways or we manipulate or manage to sabotage others. The cost of these behaviors is high. It is a Ninevah state and will likely lead to a complete coming apart. Without help there will be blood on the floor. God wants something else for these people and Jonah is meant to broker that help. Ninevah can (and will) turn around.

Very rarely do we speak of the cost of not confronting, of not telling the truth. What are the costs of that behavior? What would happen if we didn't tell the truth about finances, failures, significant health challenges, an impending catastrophe, the need for change, the reality at hand? What if there were never interventions or significant interruptions needed but not initiated? We end up watching someone, even people we love, throw away the only life that they have. It is tragic. And not what a loving God desires.

Jesus has a way of presenting what is at hand that doesn't blame or judge but opens up even painful situations so that others can live as fully as possible. He shows us what God intends, what was meant for the people of Ninevah, what is meant for us. "¹The healing ministry of Jesus should have made that crystal clear...if sin made God unhappy it was because God desires nothing more than our happiness, and wills the healing of our disease."

Sometimes, like in today's gospel, there is an invitation to go in a new direction. In Mark it will be a new purpose, new work, new family members. And it will be a path of new

¹ Rohr, Richard. *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps.*, p. xv

learnings, crossing into new territory: watching, listening, testing, changing, losing, finding, fear and faith.

In the beginning of that new adventure, that new way of life beyond the present what should we expect to take for that journey? Do we find any directions or maps or lists that would help? What is it that we need to face for the next stage of our lives? How about a little faith?

How about sitting with today's psalm? How about cultivating trust? "Most of us have a rug under the living room furniture. We do not look at it much but it is there; what is the underlying creed by which you live?" Does telling the truth or mending brokenness motivate you? Are you willing to behave in a way that is consistent with your interior creed? We need a destination; we need a focus for our lives.

The stories today remind us that we should probably not be surprised by a sudden change in direction. Jonah heads out for Tarshish and ends up in Ninevah. The disciples are happy in their day jobs, maybe.... The once powerful king of Ninevah repents. Even God changes. Jesus says that the kingdom is at hand; there are other ways to live. Have a little faith in the One who is calling you.

This invitation from Jesus is not about adding one more ministry task to your already overbooked schedule. We are all powerless about our lives and those who affect us. We need God's help. This invitation is about a new way of life. It would be a shame to miss that.

Amen.

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