

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Third Sunday after Pentecost - Year B
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Jonah 3:1-5, 10
Psalm 62:5-12
I Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20
01/21/2024

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." 16As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Called

Good morning! This experience left such a mark on my Sunday school childhood that when the call to the disciples texts come up, I basically give the same sermon every time. It's an experience I'm sure you're all familiar with, and it goes like this: You're a young child, woken up early against your will on a Sunday morning and told by your parents to get ready for worship. (Or church, which is what we often call it!) You put on your Sunday best and arrive bleary eyed to sit in class with other bleary eyed children. Now the poor Sunday school teacher, who is tasked with going over a story in the Bible that the kids most likely don't want to hear, always approaches the story the same way. "How would you answer if Jesus showed up and asked

you to drop everything and follow him?!” they ask. It is a question that only accomplishes one thing, good ol’ Christian Guilt. The assumption is that the disciples were these extraordinary human beings who saw something nobody else did, and aren’t we all bad people because we wouldn’t do the same. The Sunday school teacher often goes to great lengths to talk about the many things we own and have, asking us again if we could give it all up. This clearly left a mark on me, and while it’s up to my therapist to help me unravel what all that means, what frustrates me the most about that lesson is that it’s wrong.

Not only is guilt a poor educational technique, but pastors like Rob Bell have shown us that it’s incorrect. You see, being a rabbi was an extremely prestigious gig. The best teachers were basically the equivalent of modern day celebrities. They traveled the country, staying in the nicest homes while their hosts lavished them the very best life could afford. Every Jewish boy hoped to become one. The training started at a young age. This was a time before books and printed media, so EVERY boy trained to memorize the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. By the age of 12, which was roughly the age of adulthood, the “boys” were tested and the very best went on to learn/memorize more scripture. The best of the best rose to the top where they would try and find a rabbi willing to teach them, to become that rabbi’s disciples. The disciple was responsible for petitioning the rabbi. If they were lucky, the rabbi would say yes, inviting them to follow along and one day going off to teach their own disciples.

But what happened to the boys who didn’t make the cut? Well, they went back to their family to learn whatever trade they were known for providing. The further along in the process, the deeper the pain of rejection.

So, in typical Jesus fashion, he shows up and turns everything upside down. First, he approaches what was likely some adult men, the rejects who failed out of rabbi school. And then HE invites THEM! Right from the beginning of his ministry, Jesus changes the paradigm. These “disciples” have been given an opportunity they never expected... a second chance. You see, God’s always been in the habit of picking what we least expected to

accomplish God's will. As Jesus will say later in the Gospel of Mark "*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*"¹

It's a lesson that we NEED to remember. God will often pick what we least expect. Why is this important? Well, as we discussed last week, the Church is heading into uncharted territory, and it is important that we realize that the answer might come in the least likely of spaces. This is especially true for pastors, deacons, and other church leaders. We get so caught up in the "traditional" system that we forget that God is moving in strange and interesting ways.

Which brings us back to the Christian Guilt. No wonder people don't come to worship anymore. Now I'm not saying that guilt is a bad thing, or isn't an important part of confession, but when it's the primary tool? There are better ways. Especially when it comes to kids. Obligation and guilt are rarely the most successful approaches. And we see a better option in the lesson today: Invitation.

Jesus invites us to something better. Here we are, putting along thinking life will go a certain way, and all of the sudden Jesus shows up and says "hey, want to do something amazing?! Do you want to be a part of something that will literally change the world?" How different of an approach is that compared to the old Christian Guilt? Invitation puts us in a mindset that reminds us that the other may be new and unsure. Invitation reminds us that the way we do things might seem strange and new, and so maybe we should stop and take time to explain. Invitation allows us to see the joy of that new experience, it knocks us back, reminding us of what those experiences were like for us too. Remember when we first beheld the majesty of God! How good did that feel! Invitation forces us to be good hosts.

As we step into new and exciting places, we do so knowing that Jesus leads, walking ahead and inviting us to follow him. He proclaims that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." How amazing is that?! BELIEVE in the good news! It can be easy to slip into a fatalist sort of attitude when thinking of the future of the church, but Jesus calls on us to believe that God is doing something

¹ Mark 12:10b NRSV

new, something amazing, something that will once again turn the world upside down. Are you ready? Amen.