

## **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B – January 24, 2021**

*If you are using this as part of a home worship service on Sundays, it is suggested that you read and reflect on this at the time indicated for a sermon.*

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

The shortest prophecy of the Bible and the most effective. One sentence and the whole great city repents! We see in this text that Jonah does not want to do this, and he puts in the barest minimum effort to honor his commission as a prophet to this city that he hates. And yet the Ninevites hear what he is saying and they immediately start their fast and don the sackcloth. Even the cattle!

Our plans are not God's plans and we are foolish to believe that God would not offer salvation even to people we despise. Our judgment is not the judgment of God and we are not as capable of mercy as God is. But sometimes, we find ourselves desiring God's mercy for ourselves and God's judgment for others.

- *How would you react if you had to bring the Good News of Jesus to the people you despise the most?*
- *Have you ever been upset about someone receiving forgiveness when it seemed to you that they did not deserve it?*

### **Psalm 62:6-14**

The psalmist is devoted to searching for God – waiting for God – and knows not to put his trust in people. He says, “God has spoken once, twice have I heard it, that power belongs to God.” God's meanings are manifold, his truth pliable to the diversity of our modes of existence. There are many legitimate ways to interpret God's words. Believing that only one interpretation is correct is quite limiting and does not allow for us to see the many meanings that God is sending us. Interpreting the Bible is not an easy task and we must keep an open mind, especially if we do believe that God reveals Godself in every generation. God has something to say, and it might sound different to me than it does to you.

- *Have you found yourself relying on only one interpretation of a Biblical text?*
- *Do you see any value in having more than one legitimate interpretation?*

### **1 Corinthians 7:29-31**

Here, Paul is assuming that all unmarried men and women are only preoccupied with the Lord's business. And since Jesus is returning any day now, that is what we should do – we should all act as if the only worthwhile thing to do is what is pleasant to the Lord. “For the present form of this world is passing away.” The values of this world are not the same as the values of the next; perhaps the highest achievement for us now is a good social status, a spouse, 2.4 children, a house in the suburbs. But that is not what we should be striving for once the kingdom of God is getting close. What we should be focusing on are the values of the kingdom. We should not let ourselves be swept up by wealth and earthly joys, we should be seeking the Lord. If we seek to please other people, even our spouses, we might be feeling torn. But one idea that might not occur to Paul is that both spouses might be devoted to the Lord and to a life of seeking what is right, to discerning God's will together. And if not spouses, maybe groups of friends. Together, we can support each other and work together at being a faithful community of shared values.

Almost two thousand years have passed since Paul gave us this warning. With that perspective in mind, perhaps it is safe to assume that it might not be so soon that the Messiah will return to us. Perhaps then we can find a middle ground between fostering earthly relationships, finding joy, dismantling unjust systems, keeping the values of the kingdom in mind, and working to please the Lord.

- *How can you build a support group to assist you in your spiritual journey?*
- *What do you feel you would have to give up if Jesus were to return next week?*

## **Mark 1:14-20**

The fishermen of ancient Palestine were not middle-class entrepreneurs that made a comfortable living for themselves and their families. In that time, under Roman rule, there were only the exploited and the ones exploiting. The fishermen, the carpenters, the day-laborers were all heavily taxed and underpaid so that they barely made it from day to day. The fisherman's life was hard, the nights were spent fishing and the days preparing the fish to be sold and mending the nets. And then Jesus comes to them and says, "Give up this life of exploitation, come with me so together we can tell people there is a different way, that there is a justice they can dream of and work toward."

- *What are some systems of our time that prevent a life of dignity and justice for all people?*
- *How would Jesus address these systems today?*

*This Bible study, written by Daniela Lee, is provided through "Sermons That Work," at [episcopalchurch.org](http://episcopalchurch.org), which offers sermons, bible studies, a lectionary calendar, and links to bulletins and podcasts.*