

The readings for this third Sunday in Epiphany are about a call to repentance, and a call to follow the way of God. Let's take a peek.

In the first reading Jonah delivers his one-sentence message to the people of Nineveh, ***Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*** And, much to his amazement, the people heard the message and did repent; they turned away from their harmful behavior and toward the way of God. Would that all the "Ninevehs" of our day do the same!

In the reading from Corinthians, Paul writes that ***the present form of this world is passing away***. So in his rather *provocative* use of husband/wife imagery, he is making the point that God's future has dawned in Christ Jesus, and therefore everything is changed.

Then we come to the Gospel text for this day. Equally brief and strikingly stark. ***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.*** (There's the call to repentance)

Then, in Mark's staccato style, he goes on to another idea altogether, ***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..."*** (There's the call to discipleship)

Questions arise here. Why did Simon and Andrew, and the Zebedee brothers, James and John, follow him? From Mark's narrative we can't tell if they'd heard of or seen Jesus before this moment. Were they bored with fishing? Were they curious and adventurous enough to leave a fairly lucrative business?

And, what is the good news that Jesus has proclaimed? When I'm asked that, I typically would say, the good news was, and is, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection to save humanity from its sin and reconcile creation to the Creator. Certainly that is true. But as I reread this passage again this time, vs. 14 and 15 stuck out.

Jesus comes to Galilee proclaiming the good news. If **he** is proclaiming the good news, it is obviously not his death and resurrection. It appears as if it must be something that is available or accessible right then and there.

Jesus says, ***the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news.*** So, is the good news the coming near of the kingdom of God? and is that distinct from the cross and resurrection?

Is that Mark's point of view? Jesus, in this gospel account, seems to be saying that something that has been far away, not present or accessible, is just now coming nearer, that he, Jesus, is bringing it nearer.

And what exactly is the kingdom of God? What makes one drop what one is doing and turn away from that direction and toward the direction that is embodied in the way and words of Jesus of Nazareth?

I think the German mystic Meister Eckhart's insight on this text, gives a clue. He imagines God as a fisherman and writes,

"God lies in wait for us with nothing so much as love, and love is like a fisherman's hook: without it he could never catch a fish, but once the hook is taken the fisherman is sure of the fish. Even though the fish twists higher and yon, the fisherman is sure of the fish."

There was something that compelled those men at the seashore. There was something in the invitation that went to the heart of them, and it can in us as well.

Eckhart concludes, *"When one has found this way, he looks for no other. To hang on to this hook is to be so completely captured that feet and hands, and mouth and eyes, the heart, and all a man is and has, become God's own. . . Whatever he does, who is caught by this hook, love does it, and love alone."**

The kingdom of God is nearer to us every time we repent, that is, yield to grace and forgiveness in daily life. It comes near as we repent, that is, give in to the lure of discovering a new direction for our lives, yielding to God's way of love, forgiveness, justice, and peace.

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.

* Meister Eckhart, in David J. Duncan, *The River Why*, pg. 279.