

Answering the Call
[Jonah 3:1-10](#), [Mark 1:21-28](#)

Our scripture lesson today depicts two scenes where people are called to the ministry, per se. The scripture read for us from the book of Jonah is probably not as familiar as the scripture that leads us into this portion of the story. We can all probably recite portions of the story of Jonah and the whale. Here is the synopsis: God calls Jonah to go to Ninevah and share God's word with a sinful nation. Jonah doesn't want to go. In fact, Jonah takes off in the opposite direction thinking he could outrun God. While Jonah's ship was sailing for Tarshish, God sent a violent storm putting everyone in danger. Jonah showed a little humanity and told the crew to throw him overboard as he was the reason for their peril. The crew eventually does this and God sends an all expense paid, air-conditioned ride for

Jonah, a.k.a. a large whale. Ironically, the whale spits Jonah out on the shores of Ninevah three days later. Here is where our scripture for today picks up. God calls Jonah a second time and apparently God got Jonah's full attention. The people of Ninevah turned from their sinful ways and God spared the city from destruction.

In the gospel lesson from the book of Mark, we see another call story. Jesus calls Simon Peter and Andrew to follow him and without hesitation both simply dropped what they were doing and willingly followed Jesus. In the same manner, Jesus called James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They too left their work and their father without hesitation. This is a very different scenario than we see with Jonah. The disciples were eager to follow Christ, yet Jonah was entirely reluctant to follow God's call.

Dr. Paul Humphrey shares this story concerning the famous author Mark Twain. Apparently Mr. Twain loved to go fishing, but he hated to catch fish. The problem was he went fishing to relax, and catching fish ruined the relaxation, since he had to take the fish off the hook and do something with it. When he wanted to relax by doing nothing, people thought he was lazy, but if he went fishing he could relax all he wanted. People would see him sitting by the riverbank and they would say, 'Look, he's fishing, don't bother him.' So Mark Twain had the perfect solution: he would take a fishing pole, line, and a bobber but he wouldn't put a hook on the end. He would cast the bobber in the water and lay back on the bank, that way he could relax all he wanted and he wouldn't be bothered by man nor fish.

What kind of fishers are we? Perhaps at times we could be any one of these. At times we may rebel against God's call like Jonah. Jonah's big issue appeared to be that he was a prophet. He had prophesied to the people of Ninevah about their destruction. His big argument to God was this: Jonah knew if God sent him to Ninevah to preach repentance, they would repent and God would forgive them. Hence his prophesy would not come true. Jonah was being a bit self-centered, wanting to save face. But God needed the message to go to the people of Ninevah and God wanted Jonah to be the messenger. Finally, after facing his own reluctance and the power of God, Jonah does a great deal of effective evangelism and sees an entire nation turn to God. God will use the reluctant fisher.

Peter, Andrew, James and John had a very different response to their call to follow Jesus. They were eager to

go. They did not look for reasons to stay even though there were many. Their fathers needed them to help with the family trade. King Herod had placed such pressure on the local population, an enormous amount of fish had to be pulled from the sea daily in order for families to survive. Every able-bodied male in the household was needed to support the family, yet these men willingly devoted themselves to following Jesus. God will use an enthusiastic fisher.

Mark Twain's idea of fishing seems to be completely counter to either of these. Mr. Twain has no opinion on fishing. He has no interest whatsoever in the process or the potential outcome of fishing. Mark Twain doesn't want to fish, he wants to relax. What will it take for God to be able to use the disinterested fisher?

All of us are at different phases in our Christian walk. Some are just beginning. They have only recently experienced God's call in their lives. It is all new, fresh and different. There is a great relief in accepting God's help in our lives. We know that no matter how we have been in the past, we are forgiven. The slate is wiped clean and today is another day. Perhaps we are like the eager fishermen on the shore who willingly go where God has called us to go.

Perhaps we have been following God's will for some time. We feel good about where we are and our relationship with God, yet God calls us to do something else. This is similar to my own call story. I was perfectly fine with serving in three choirs and helping out with the youth group. I saw no need to do anything else, yet God called me to the ministry. I truly believe God has an

interesting sense of humor! Yet in spite of my reluctance, God continued to call me to preach. I am now able to embrace this calling but I was very much like Jonah trying to get away from God's call. Yet there is something about the leap of faith and reaping the benefits. When we trust God with our most challenging situations, we can experience the rewards of our faith on so many levels. We may not see the entire picture. We may not know what God has in mind for us. But we can trust God to choose the right path for us that will lead to many rewards in this world and the world beyond.

So what kind of fisher are you? Whether we are eager to share God's love with others or reluctant to trust God, God will make a way for us to find fulfillment if we put out trust in our Maker. Regardless of the kind of fisher we are, God calls us to be fishers. We are called to share God's

love with our neighbors. We are called to extend the hand of God to those who are hurting or in need. We cannot sit on the shore with a fishing pole and just relax. Our purpose is clear – we are to share God’s wonderful gift of love and grace to those who are searching for peace and comfort.

Life will be difficult, even for fishers. But we can rest assured that God is watching over us, serving as our guiding beacon and our strength in times of trouble.

Thanks be to God for God’s everlasting love and care for all of God’s people. Amen.