

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Third Ordinary Sunday

First reading:

(Jonah 3.1-5, 10)

Nineveh Changes its Ways

The story of Jonah (whale and all) does not even pretend to be historical. For one thing, it takes about 10 minutes to walk across the ruins of Nineveh.

The story is a joke by Jews against Jews who think they alone can be saved: Jonah the Jew tries to run away from God, whereas the gentiles at Nineveh repent as soon as they hear God's message - even the animals wear sackcloth!

Like the story about St Peter showing Protestants round heaven: he points to a high wall: 'Hush! The Catholics are behind there. They think they are the only people here.'

The reason why this reading is chosen to pair with the call of the disciples is the immediacy of their response. They take the message to heart without hesitation.

Question:

Why is the message of Christ so neglected in the world today?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 7.29-31)

This Passing World

The earliest Christians were very aware that the Resurrection of Christ ushered in the last period of the world. With the fulfilment of God's promises in Jesus' death and Resurrection, everything important had happened. The end was imminent, and it was urgent for everyone to get ready.

What must we think of this attitude 2,000 years later? Yes, it is urgent for every individual to respond to God's call, and there is no time to lose. Every decision counts; every step along the path leads in one direction or the other.

However, this is an instance where the message of the Bible must be seen as a whole, one teaching balancing another. 'The Kingdom of God is upon you!' does not mean that the world will end tomorrow. Matthew's gospel is quite clear that there is time before the last judgment to practise good works of prayer and generosity. At the last supper, Jesus teaches that his disciples have a task to do in the world, guided by the Holy Spirit. So Paul is not teaching here that Christians should 'down tools' and sit waiting for the end, but that we must not absorb the values of those around us who think that the supermarket, the sports centre and the holiday cottage are the only realities worth thinking about.

Question:

Can I do anything to live the gospel more fully?

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Gospel:

(Mark 1.14-20)

The Call of the Disciples

What is going on? Last Sunday we had the story of the first two disciples joining Jesus. One of them was Andrew, the other unnamed. Now we get another story, in another place, of other first disciples being called. So the Church underlines, two weeks running, the importance of Jesus' new community.

The first thing he does is call disciples. He can't do every-thing on his own, and that is the point of the Church. He calls disciples to make a new people, a new Israel. We all have our part to fill in Jesus' drama: old, young, middle aged. Tired old people, busy parents, lively youngsters, each of us can make a unique contribution, especially since Jesus has chosen us himself. An odd choice, some of us! What did he want me to do in the new family of Jesus?

The two different places show that at least two different people told the story. When two people tell the same story, there are bound to be variations. The place didn't matter, or the order in which they were called. The point of the story was the call, the response and the companionship, working together.

Question:

To whom would you point as having left everything to follow Jesus?
