

REFLECTION

Today's readings¹ give us instances of God's call of Jonah and the call of his followers, the disciples. The two readings reveal God's intention and willingness to work with everyone —his invitation to all willing to come. More importantly, they are ready to repent and to be faithful to God, who has always remained faithful to his people. The readings admonish us that we are responsible for telling others about God, the good news, the news that saves people from judgement, encourages, challenges, liberates, and allows God's spirit to work within. God calls us individually for his mission- to save all from the impending destruction. We heard Jonah, a prophet whose duty is to be God's mouthpiece, initially trying to run away from God.

Jonah thought the Assyrian city of Nineveh had no part in listening to God's words; they didn't deserve to be spoken to. He initially resisted and rebelled against God's call. Jonah heads out for Tarshish to run away from the divine assignment but ends up in Nineveh.

I wonder how many times we have run to Tarshish instead of Nineveh, how many times we have resisted God's call to run away, to avoid what God's spirit is encouraging us to do. How many times have we chosen to travel to "Tarshish" instead of Nineveh? Our Tarshish may reflect in how we participate in God's mission. A mission which, deep down within us, we know that he is calling us to act on it but persistently resist.

Even though Jonah obeyed, it is important to understand that he is still unsure whether God will spare the city. Many times, we read God's word, and like Jonah, we seem not to have faith in the words ourselves; we don't even believe in it, let alone share it with others. God's words are a message of grace; he is our compassionate Father. Our loving God knows our concerns, doubts, wonders, and faith. It is interesting to note that, Jonah may be hoping that even though God rescued him from death, he would not so rescue the Ninevites.² If God has accepted us into this family of God's people, this privilege is given to all; believe and pray for others in our

¹ Jonah 3:1-5, 10 and Mark 1:14-20.

²Douglas Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary*.

community, too, to experience our God's love and come to faith. We live in a society where God has been misrepresented as a "prosecutor", "a judge of sinners", and "a wicked old man sitting up there." We know this is not true of our Jesus, the Holy Spirit. Who is God to you, personally? What is your encounter with our Savior Jesus?

When Jonah obeyed:

Even the pagan king calls for fasting in the sackcloth. The once proud and powerful king removes the royal robe and puts on sackcloth. Even when God changes God's mind about the city's fate, everyone experiences a surprising change of direction. Jonah's obedience led to the total salvation of the whole city, which was initially meant to be destroyed. For Jonah, these Ninevites are corrupt people who don't deserve to be saved; they should be condemned, and possibly he thought they would be destroyed anyway. He might be thinking, as a chosen prophet for "*Chosen People*", the *unchosen people* don't even have to hear that God is speaking to them and that God has a plan for them, too. Who qualifies the "*chosen*" – our God does. If we are privileged to be called people of God, who are we to judge others? I believe, ours is to speak God's words of salvation to them and trust the Holy Spirit to do the transformation in prayer. We may have our plans, but God's plan is what prevails. This passage brings to mind the Jewish proverbs. "*Whenever someone says, 'I have a plan, God laughs.'*"³

Again, Jonah's reading reminds us of God's persistent intervention to reconcile people to Godself.

Jonah was probably afraid to initially go because the Assyrian city of Nineveh was known for their wickedness. This wasn't the most desirable assignment, but God told him to go. We, too, shouldn't think all will be smooth; we will face struggles and challenges, but we should stand on our feet to share God's love story. Those who preach God's word to others should not let social

³ Donna Shaper, *Feasting on the Word*.

pressures or fear of people dictate their words. We are called to share God's message and his truth, no matter how unpopular it may be.

In Mark's gospel, the story begins with the note, "John was arrested;"⁴ we need no further explanation or elaboration - Mark assumes that his readers know the risk involved with giving yourself over to a new vision that challenges the status quo.

Mark wants us to know that the journey as God's people would not always be as smooth as we anticipate; John was beheaded for standing up for the truth and telling people to repent. Today, the word "repent" seems to be abominable and forbidden. We feel reluctant to encourage people to turn away from the old life to enter God's Kingdom's new reign. When John died, Jesus came to step in to call Simon, Andrew, James and John to drop everything and become part of his disciples, just like that, "immediately." But again, this is not the end of the story. This is just the beginning of the "beginning" (v.1). Ahead, for them and us, there is much to learn: stumbling, misunderstanding, and backsliding. Becoming Jesus' disciple takes both a moment and a lifetime. It takes a moment to respond and a lifetime journey. We don't need to be perfect; the holy spirit will perfect us.

I wonder, what keeps people today from responding to God's invitation as the Ninevites and the disciples did?

We are encouraged to be willing to give up something to bring the good news to others.

I wonder, what is it that you need and know you must give it up?⁵

⁴ Mark 1:14

⁵ Pheme Perkins, The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary.

God's words are for everyone. Despite the wickedness of the Ninevite people, they were open to God's message and repented immediately. If we proclaim what we know about God, we may be surprised at how many people will listen.

Mark is hinting that the old family business of the people of God is being left behind. God wants new poetry or stories and calls new people to write them. The name of the poem or story is "*The Kingdom of God*."⁶

When John the Baptist was beheaded, Jesus began his ministry; when Jesus died, resurrected, and went to the Father, we, too, are empowered by God's Spirit to continue sharing this message of love. This message of reconciliation is a word of salvation.

What is my response to my call as Jesus' disciple?

By

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⁶ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone*.