

## **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2021 - Third Sunday before Advent – Rev'd Martin Booth**

In our readings this morning we heard of two separate moments when God calls humanity to act. To act as agents of God's mission to God's world. The world God created. The world of which we are part. The world that we have been invited to value and protect. By God. Not just by COP 26, Prince William, David Attenborough or Greta Thunberg. Though, whether they know it or not, by answering the call which they understand innately, they are doing this work for God too. God loves God's creation. God loves the people God created as part of that creation. God calls us all - all - to make a difference.

The same God who called Jonah. The same God, in earthly form, Jesus, called the disciples. We are part of that same, unbroken, chain as them. We are Jonah and the disciples' descendants. We have inherited their work and need to continue it.

But let's look at the way our predecessors reacted to that call. Our passage finds Jonah answering God's call at the second time of asking.

The first time he refused, got washed overboard in a storm, ingested by some sea creature - not necessarily a whale, by the way - and, to put it politely, 'disingested' onto some distant shore. Where, in our reading today, we see that he does indeed then pursue his original calling.

The disciples, on the other hand, offer no hesitation. They follow Jesus' call 'immediately'. We'll look at that word 'Immediately' in a moment.

The sequence in both passages is similar:

Jonah was encouraged to Arise, Go and Call Nineveh.

Call Nineveh? To what? Essentially to wake up and recognise that there is indeed a God. A Creator. That this is God's world and God has a mission to value and protect God's creation. Both the world about us, and the people who dwell within that world.

Meanwhile, Jesus calls the disciples to arise from their work and leave their nets. Go into the world. And proclaim the same revelation. That is to say: call others to hear and understand that this is unequivocally: God's world, God's Mission, God's love for creation.

In both cases, the way God the Father and God the Son call Jonah and the disciples is clearly with divine authority. Divine authority. Not a suggestion.

Not a 'would you mind awfully if you would?'

Not a 'if you've got better things to do, that's fine,' or

'if you get a chance maybe you'll get on to it when you have a moment'.

Jonah did it after a little piscatorial persuasion. And, even then, reading further on in the passage, he doesn't really want to. 'Why should I, God?' He moans. You'll only go and save the people of Nineveh. And they really don't deserve it."

Although, frankly, who is he to judge? But that's another matter.

It's also interesting to note that after he does, eventually, do as God called him to do, and Nineveh does, indeed, change its ways and recognises God as creator, Jonah goes into this almighty sulk. Even then, though, God still loves and protects him. Jonah is, after all, only human.

Meanwhile, the Disciples, as we have noted, respond to Jesus' call. Immediately.

That's an interesting word. Immediately.

Broken down it means, actually, unmediated.

With nothing in between. No middle man. No intervention by anything. No pause or hesitation between message and action.

In other words, there was no distance between Jesus and his Disciples. Call and action were one and the same.

When one abides in Christ, one responds to Christ. Nothing gets in the way. If one allows something to get between oneself and Christ, the message gets blurred or delayed or even corrupted by human values.

So - why these passages on the 3rd Sunday before Advent?

Well, they act as a call to prepare ourselves. To get ready for the unmediated call on our own lives up to, during and through Advent and the Christmas Season.

In Advent, the divine imperative becomes our privilege also to respond to. We, too, during this season will be called to Arise, Go and Call others to recognising and celebrating God's Love for God's creation.

God so loved the world that God sent God's only son to be with us: Emmanuel. The arrival of whom, we anticipate through Advent and celebrate at Christmas.

The question is: how will we respond to that divine imperative?

Will we respond like Jonah did?

Refusing?

Or arising and going eventually?

Or proclaiming the Good News to others reluctantly?

Or resenting them as undeserving?

After all, God loves everything that God has made. Whether they believe in Christmas or don't.

I daresay the people of Nineveh, had Jesus been around at that time, would have fallen into the latter category.

Or will we respond like the disciples did? Immediately? Becoming so prepared, and at one with Jesus through our advent preparations, that we respond with joy to the Good News of his birth. And proclaim that joy with such immediacy that all those we encounter cannot help but see the true Christ through everything we say and do this Christmastide?

Jesus does indeed call us. It is indeed a divine imperative. We are asked to respond with immediacy. No pause or hesitation between message and action: This Advent, we are called to leave behind our worldly concerns and preoccupations. Go and do the work Jesus calls us to do. Calls the world to do.

God's work for God's mission to God's world. Whoever we are. Whatever our beliefs.

Amen