

## **“It’s God!”**

### **Jonah 3:1-5, 10**

#### **Intro**

The story of Jonah is one that is known in the midst of the culture and that stands whether or not the person is religious or attends church. The whole Pinocchio imagery of a person inside a giant fish is one that stands out regardless of its feasibility.

But that is not the portion of the story that we are going to hear.

No, this morning we are going to read a portion of what happens after the fish (because there is more to the story than just the fish!). Jonah hears the voice of God again, and this time...he actually does what God has told him to do. Jonah didn’t want to (read the end of the book of Jonah if you are looking for a reminder of how badly he didn’t want to), but he did.

Jonah: not a willing disciple.

God: able to work through all those who serve, regardless of their willingness, and do so in amazing and even miraculous ways.

Yup, it is like that...even today. The scripture reads this way.

### **Jonah 3:1-5, 10**

<sup>3</sup>The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” <sup>3</sup>So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. <sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” <sup>5</sup>And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. <sup>10</sup>When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

### **Mark 1:14-20**

#### **Intro**

So we have been reminded of what can be done through an unwilling disciple.

What we are about to hear now are the first steps of the complete opposite. What it speaks to is Mark’s rendition of the calling of Jesus’ first disciples. In a writing style that is particular to Mark (as opposed to Matthew, or Luke, let alone John), the details of what happened are few and far between. This sparseness leads to a feeling that seems completely foreign to our experience: Jesus walked up to these four,...called them to follow,...and they did. Regardless of what may have happened in between the words that are written, what cannot be argued with is their result: in no uncertain terms, the transformation of the entire world, all because people, hard-working people, gave of themselves. The willing disciple allows the Spirit of God to transform the world. The scripture reads this way.

## **Mark 1:14-20**

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup>As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

### **“It’s God!”**

Isn’t God amazing? I mean that with all sincerity: isn’t God amazing?

Think about the how we are even here today. The Christian faith started out as the backwater off shoot of Judaism; it survived through times of great turmoil in the world when the Christian religion was used as a political weapon; it survived a great schism that we know as the Reformation when people of faith spoke out against the religion (of this separation, we are heirs); it survived rulers who tried to wipe it out or use it for their own desires; the Christian faith has been sharpened in times of war and poverty and has been able to reach out in times of peace and prosperity. The history of this church is one that is filled with periods of trial and times of growth and through it all, if we are able to look at it with eyes of faith, yes we are able to see the individuals through which the work was accomplished, but more than that we are able to see the presence of God at work through the movement of the Holy Spirit.

That is what I hope that you are able to recognize in the midst of the two passages that we have been able to hear this morning. Because it can be real easy to focus on the people through which God moves and works.

Sometimes the person of faith is a willing participant (clearly the disciples leap into that category).

There are other times when the person of faith is anything but willing (triathlon wannabe Jonah, anyone? Seriously, all he needed was a bike.).

But whatever the case may be, when that person follows the leading that is within them (and we recognize that leading as being from God’s Holy Spirit) then amazing things being to happen.

As I’ve already mentioned, in the case of Jonah, God worked through him to save the people of Ninevah.

In the case of the disciples, God worked through them to share the Good News of Jesus Christ: we are heirs of that movement of God.

But please remember, in every uplifting action that we read about, that power that is manifesting itself, is God.

Now reading it in the scriptures or history books is one thing, but the truth of the matter is, God is very much at work in the world today; God is very much at work in our church right now; God is absolutely at work in our lives, maybe at this very moment.

God is at work when there is a disaster in some far flung (at least for us) corner of the world, and people of God from around the world respond immediately, with no real thought for themselves beyond the fact that they know that they have been led to help in some way; in any way. It was a little over eight years ago that a devastating earthquake struck Haiti, leveling much of what they knew as normal. To that point, at least 100,000 people died (there are some estimates that put that toll higher than 300,000), and 250,000 residences and 30,000 businesses were severely damaged. But the reality is, and we know this not only from the effects of Sandy just a few years later, not to mention the various hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires, and economic downturns that we feel the effects of in various ways, there are needs that are everywhere, and some of the most dedicated to finding ways to care for those who are in need are people of faith.

Now, I'm not just saying that because of the commissioning that has just taken place (even in the reality that it certainly doesn't hurt to support my point).

No, going to serve those in need is a part of how Christians have been following God throughout the millennia. But that doesn't make it any less confounding for so many people who look at those who are giving of themselves in some way, if not many ways. So many can't figure it out: it's because of God.

Every time I have gone on a mission trip there has invariably been someone in the community that we are serving who has asked the question, "Why are you here? Is somebody paying you? Are you on a work release program working off community service hours? Do you feel guilty about some previous wrong?", and yes, I have personally heard every one of those questions asked, but boiling it down to its simplest form, "Why are you here?"

The best answers to that question start by reassuring the person who asked the question that they are not being paid, they are not receiving any community service hours, nor do they feel guilty about anything: they are there (wherever there may be!) because they feel that God has called them to serve in some way, serve in any way. Most times, the look that is returned is a mixture of confusion and doubt.

There are so many people who ask those questions who can't accept the fact that the reason that anything was being done was because of God.

My hunch is that some variation of that experience, of those questions, will take place for the mission team that is heading off here in a few days.

But God does move in and through people...a lot.

Think about it: how many times have you experienced the grace and graciousness of people ...for what feels like no reason at all? I know I have in a multitude of ways.

But the reality is that there have been times when I have looked at that helping hand with some variation of skepticism. My hunch is, I'm not alone in that feeling.

But should that be some variation of our normal reaction?

Or should we instead begin to trust that when God is involved, when God is at work, then the things that are of God will begin to flow? Sometimes it will be through who people who are willing to give

everything; for most it will be through people who are willing to give something, because even that something can be just the right thing.

Are you starting to get where I'm going here? It's God! When Jonah was willing to give something...God. When the disciples were able to give everything...God. When people serve others, caring for them, lifting them up...God.

And it isn't just out there! When people give of themselves and help out with Sunday School, Music and More, or VBS...God moves. When a variety of folks are willing to 'lead' various Bible studies, book groups, and small groups ...God heals. When this community reaches out and serves in places like the soup kitchen, the food pantry, just down the street, or down in the Virgin Islands...God begins to be known.

Very simply, I look out at our congregation and what I see are blessings: abundant blessings.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise Him all creatures here below; praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Praise God from who all blessings flow.

All!

It's all from God!

The big stuff, the small stuff, the mundane stuff, and the unbelievable stuff. It's God! All of it! Whenever we are willing to give everything, and even when we only feel like we can give the smallest of somethings...God!

So here's the short of what today's sermon is about: each of us have been called by God, and when we respond to that leading, whether it be fervently with everything, reluctantly with only something, or anywhere in the middle, God will bless it.

It's God! Give of yourself in any way and be ready to behold what will take place.

#### **After Sermon Prayer**

God, You have Called us to serve, to become disciples in our own time. Part of that discipleship is being with You in prayer. It is with this knowledge that we come to You now. We pray that Your Spirit sweep throughout this place and fill us with a passion for each other and for the world. Strengthen us so that we might be able to head out into the world and do as You would have us do, by doing everything that we can, or as the case may be doing that something. It's You God. It's You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.