

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B  
Jon 3:1-5, 10  
Ps 25:4-9  
1Cor 7:29-31  
Mk 1:14-20

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We're back in the green season, officially known as Ordinary Time. Like all the liturgical seasons, the green season has a theme running all through it, and that theme is discipleship. During the green season, including these few weeks that fall between the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Lent, we focus on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, what it means to follow Jesus.

For the past two weeks our Gospel readings – last week from St. John, this week from St. Mark – have been showing us the early days of Jesus's public ministry. They give us a glimpse of how Jesus set about forming his team of followers who came to be known as the apostles. This week St. Mark shows us Jesus calling two sets of brothers, all four of whom happen to be fishermen by trade. But before that he gives us a thumbnail sketch of Jesus's preaching. Jesus's core message is twofold. Number one: "The kingdom of God is at hand." And number two: "Repent and believe the good news."

The kingdom of God is not a place, not a country, not some physical locality with defined boundaries. The kingdom of God is more a set of circumstances. It's what the first chapters of the Book of Genesis describe as the Garden of Eden, the world when it existed in harmony and peace, in perfect balance. It's the world in perfect order, perfectly arranged with God at the center, where every decision is made and every step is taken for the greater honor and glory of God. That harmony and balance, that perfect order, was disrupted when human beings, whom God had appointed to take responsibility for the welfare of all creation – when human beings decided to go it alone. Adam and Eve said, in effect, "It's okay, God, we've got it handled. We'll take it from here. We'll call you when we decide we need you." That was the moment that is known as the Fall, when Eden collapsed and Adam and Eve and their descendants had to stumble around in the dark valley where hopes and dreams go to die. Jesus announced, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand." Something new, something wonderful is around the corner. The emptiness will be filled. Balance and harmony will be restored.

And what are we supposed to do in the meantime? Embrace the good news. But to do that, we must repent. Like the whole world, we are off kilter. The balance and harmony that God intends can be reestablished, but first we have to repent.

God appointed Jonah to be his prophet. God sent Jonah to Ninevah, the capital of the Assyrian empire. The Hebrew people hated and feared the Assyrians. They were a horrible, warlike people, the meanest, dirtiest fighters around. God sent Jonah to announce

to the Ninevites that God was going to destroy them. You can imagine Jonah's pleasure: [singsong voice] "God is gonna smash you!" But then (no doubt much to Jonah's dismay) Ninevah repented. They accepted the Lordship of the God of Israel.

St. Mark, like all the Gospel-writers, wrote his Gospel in Greek. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*. The literal meaning of *metanoia* is change of mind. "Change your mind" – we use it all the time. "I was going to go the movies tonight, but I changed my mind." That's a metaphor. I didn't literally swap out my old mind for a new mind. But that's the meaning of *metanoia*. "I used to think one way, but now I think in a different way. The mind and heart I used to operate with are not the mind and heart I have now."

If we repent, if we accept that God is God and we are not, we help God bring about the Kingdom of God. "Thy kingdom come." We pray it every time we say the Our Father. "Thy kingdom come." The coming of God's kingdom is momentous. In the coming of God's kingdom, we can't live our lives in the usual way. That's what St. Paul is telling the church in Corinth. The usual patterns of behavior, the usual ways of living, are no longer fitting for us who are waiting, expectantly, for the Kingdom of God.

In this season of Ordinary Time, this green season, we will look at what Jesus asks of us when he calls. And call he does; he calls us over and over again; he calls us to come follow him. When he called the four fishermen, they left their nets, the tools of their trade, on the beach. James and John left their father Zebedee, with the hired help, to run the business all by himself. As Jesus continually calls us to follow, he also calls us continually to repent.

In a few short weeks, we will enter into the season of Lent. During Lent we examine, each of us, how we are living our lives. During Lent we are called to take up certain practices of penitence: fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. Fasting is not just about what we eat and how much; it is about our patterns of consumption, how we use the things of this world. Lent will be a decision time. Ash Wednesday is 3½ weeks away. These 3½ weeks are the opportunity for each of us to look more closely at our lives and to question the ways in which and the degrees to which our minds and hearts must change. And for those of us in positions of authority and leadership, we need to assess how Jesus's call to repentance affects the groups and organizations we lead.

"This is the time of fulfillment," says the Lord Jesus. "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the good news."