

Called to Be

By: Meagan McLaughlin

January 24, 2021. What has happened for you this week? What if you were asked what happened in the realm of God this week? These feel like very different questions. Today's sermon is on our readings: Jonah being called to travel to Nineveh, and the disciples who are called to leave everything behind and follow Christ. How are we being called to live into the people God created us to be?

Readings: [Jonah 3:1-5, 10](#), [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](#), [Mark 1:14-20](#)

*** Transcript ***

Jonah had quite a week, right? If I asked you to tell me what had happened in your life this week, what would you say? Things that stick out for me would be watching the inauguration, celebrating my one-year anniversary of my ordination, writing a sermon, Facetiming with my parents, cleaning the house, Karen starting a new job and school, and watching a new garage go up in our back yard. In the larger world, there is the continual news on the virus and the vaccine, and this week the devastating news of the suicide bombings in Baghdad. What has happened for you this week?

Now, what if I asked you what happened in the realm of God this week? That feels like a really different question, doesn't it? I hold the grief of 400,000 beloveds who have died of COVID in the US as of this week, and their loved ones and their friends, and I think of the country coming together to pray in our grief in front of the Lincoln Memorial on Tuesday evening. I think of Worship last Sunday, as we heard the Word of God, and as Jesse reminded us, the invitation to put on our spiritual headphones so that we can hear God's call in our lives. And prayer all over our country as we witnessed the inauguration of President Biden and Vice President Harris — prayers of hope, fear, joy, anger, and disappointment, prayers for peace, justice, healing, and transformation. And I think of the inspiration and challenge of the example of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King and the justice-seekers of today to follow every day the call of God, especially when it's most difficult. Especially when we might be having, as Jonah did, a really bad day.

It does feel like a very different question, doesn't it? It leads to quite different answers, asking us to shift our view from the events of this world, to the movement of the realm of God. And as I look at our readings today, it seems as if all of them are calling for this kind of turning, this kind of change of perspective. The disciples, and Jonah, and Paul's readers, are called to see not so much the future, as what God is already doing right in front of them.

Jonah is called to leave his home and travel to Nineveh, and preach God's word to a people that have lost their way, to call them to repentance, so they have the opportunity to change and turn back to God. Jonah wrestles with this, feeling that they don't deserve that chance. In the process, Jonah is challenged to recognize that God doesn't see things as we do, in neat black and white categories, but meets all of us where we are, constantly offering us the chance to let go of our sin and brokenness and follow God's call. Constantly responding to us and where we are, even if it means changing God's mind, as Mr. Roger pointed out.

The disciples leave behind their homes, their families, their livelihood, to follow Christ who calls them to be fishers of people instead. And as they leave their nets, they also leave the debt and corruption that ensnared them — the fishing industry was controlled by the government, and they barely made a living after the taxes were paid. The word *aphiēmi* that is used for "leaving" their nets can be translated as

letting go of sin and debt, entering into a new freedom, and it is sometimes even called the jubilee verb.

The disciples are called to leave behind the systems that have them bound up, and see what God is up to, as what doesn't matter so much falls away. They leave behind their blood family, create a chosen family around this new mission and vision of God's realm, and they continue to widen the circle as they invite others — including their blood family — to follow as well.

And, Jesus promises to make them fishers of people. Fishermen like the disciples were in that time rather unremarkable, holding little notice and claiming little attention from those around them. So calling these people was an interesting choice for Jesus, but not so surprising as God often calls the least expected. And as Jesus called the disciples, he called them not only to leave behind that which bound them, but also called them into freedom, and says he will make them fishers of people. Jesus is promising to transform these unremarkable fishers so they could become their truer selves, the beloveds that God created them to be.

As Paul writes to the Corinthians, he is inviting them to do the same — to let go of being dependent on the things of this world, to leave behind that which binds us, and trust in the God who will always be faithful no matter what is happening in this world.

And we are each called today, as Mr. Jesse said. As Jonah, and Paul's listeners, and the disciples were called to leave what was comfortable and familiar, to turn away from empire and seek God's realm, we are called to do the same. We know when Jonah is called, he runs! He doesn't want to let go of his perhaps comfortable judgement of those he sees as less than, and we don't actually know if he ever really does. He struggles, as we often do. The disciples in contrast are said to follow Jesus immediately. And that for me begs the question: what was it about Jesus that they were drawn to? What did he reveal to them? Why do we follow Jesus today? Why do we resist, and what do we find ourselves running from?

In the end, from all these stories we see that the core of the call is to understand that God is present in it all: the garage, the new job, anniversary, housecleaning, and tragedy and joy of world events — and Worship, prayer, and the call to justice. Because ultimately the call we hear in all of our scriptures today is a call to see all things in this world with God's eyes and heart. To open our heart and align our spirits to the vision God has for us and for creation.

We are called to live into the people God created us to be, to be transformed by knowing the presence of God in our lives. There is so much about our world that is broken today, so much that binds us, so much that blinds us from seeing God at work. And there is profound hope in the promise that the realm of God is growing, transforming, and bringing life all around us every day.

National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman shared on Wednesday a poem for our times that speaks to this promise, and our call. I leave you with some of the words from her poem, "The Hill We Climb."

*"When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry,
a sea we must wade
We've braved the belly of the beast
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace
And the norms and notions*

*of what just is
Isn't always just-ice
And yet the dawn is ours
before we knew it
Somehow we do it
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed
a nation that isn't broken
but simply unfinished"*

She ends with this line:

*"When day comes and we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it."*

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

2021, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, YouTube, video, Pastor Meagan McLaughlin, Jonah 3:1-5, 10, Psalm 62:5-12, 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, Mark 1:14-20, COVID-19, coronavirus, pandemic, Jesse Helton, Roger Rose, Amanda Gorman, The Hill We Climb