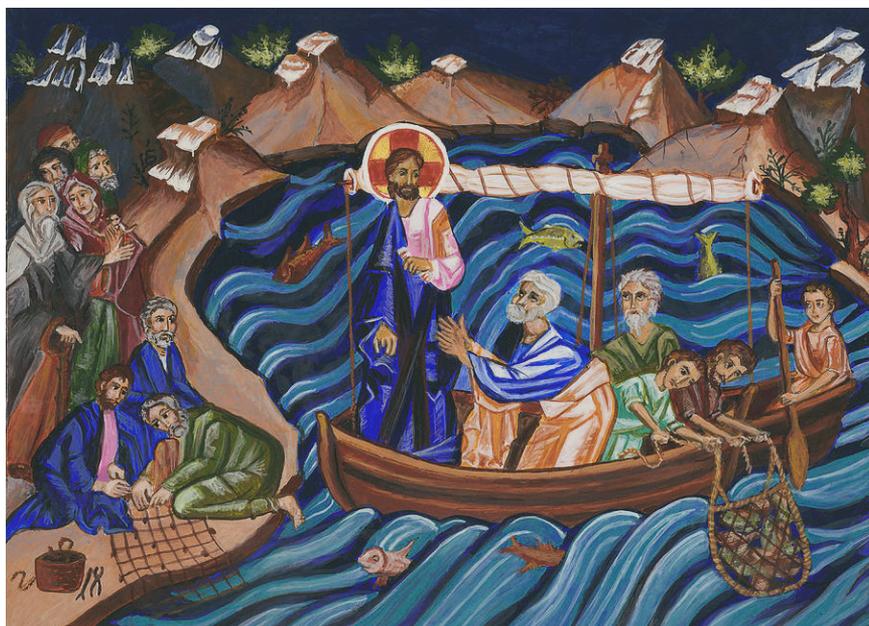


ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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JESUS IS TALKING TO YOU!

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

Text of a Sermón preached on the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

January 17, 2021

JONAH 3:1-5,10 | PSALM 62:6-14
I CORINTHIANS 7:29-31 | MARK 1:14-20

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

The calling of every Christian is to renew our mind and believe that God is in Jesus Christ bringing the healing, forgiveness, mercy and justice, that restores us and our communities to their fullest purpose and potential. After his baptism, after his wilderness testing, after the violence of John's arrest, Jesus said, “the time is now.”

And the first thing he did was to speak a word that moved four Galilean fishermen to take up a new task.

The kingdom of God draws near as Jesus walks up to us. The kingdom of God draws near as Jesus addresses us. The healing, forgiveness, mercy and justice, of restoration and renewal, is activated when we see – what once was a task is a calling, our abilities are purposeful gifts, our given circumstances are timely opportunities. Believe the good news. Believing is seeing these changes of perspective unfold in our lives.

Don't spend too much effort trying to guess why the disciples immediately dropped everything and followed Jesus. This story is not a hero's journey of four lucky lads who rose to the occasion and made the right decision. No. This is a miracle story of how every truly meaningful thing we end up doing comes from God. And how we get to see that by flexing the muscle of believing.

Believing in a living God means we don't make our own meaning, craft our own narrative, control our own destiny. To believe in God is to admit that the meaning of our lives unfolds in God's greater purpose. We live, as Paul said, from faith, to faith, for faith, not trusting in our own wisdom and strength, but in seeking to be surprised by God's purpose as it unfolds each day in our lives.

Close your eyes. Jesus is drawing near to you. He speaks. He says: it is time. Open your mind. If you must, empty your mind. Renew your mind. I am not leaving you with your old thoughts and certainties. This is the meaning of the word 'repent' here.

Change your mind. Then make your move.

Seeing is believing. Believing is seeing. If you can see the kingdom draw near, then you can believe it. That is why God sent Jesus, so we could see the kingdom draw near. Seeing is believing. Believing is seeing. Only then are we ready for faithful action.

This famous beginning of Jesus' work among us should remind us to step back and ask first: "What is God doing here?" I marvel at Christians, people of faith, who in recent years have spun wild theories about national and international events, about other people's motives, that in some cases led them to storm the Capital with Jesus

flags and in every case led them to dehumanize their neighbors and blind themselves by believing in more and more fantastic lies.

The book of Jonah had such wayward believers in mind. Our hero Jonah, of course, is no hero. The word of God comes to him “a second time”, because he completely failed to listen and believe that word the first time. And even though a whale has swallowed him and spit him out and gotten his attention, he still really doesn’t change his mind, he doesn’t repent. He runs up against something he cannot grasp: God’s unbending will to show mercy on the people of Nineveh.

Nineveh is a big city. He starts to carry out God’s orders, but only half heartedly. He gives the worst sermon of all time - “He cried out, ‘Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown’” - and turns around to walk out the city and sit under a tree to await its destruction.

God lets him stew under the tree. God lets him see that his plan is always to have mercy, always to bring life. God sends a wind to ruin the tree and disrupt Jonah’s repose. We get to laugh at Jonah. Most of all, we get to learn that God is in charge and it is a never ending task to keep up with what God is doing in the world.

At this moment in your life, can you answer the question, “what is God doing with me?” Maybe you are one of those Christians who need forgiveness, but never felt like it came to your house.

Well, then, the miracle of Jesus walking along the shore is that he comes right up to you and says: “Whatever you have done, you are forgiven.” If you are one of those Christians who has never believed in your own abilities as gifts that God would use, or are just now realizing that God has put you in a place, among a certain group of people, that only you can bless, that you can serve, then please please please, hear him say: “Come, follow me.”

We can too easily mistake the disciples for small business owners, entrepreneurs who left their nets and their responsibilities on a lark. Jesus’ words are more purposeful than that. “I will make you fishers of people.” The harsh reality of their world, at that time, is that every fish they caught belonged to the great Roman cartel, every fish belonged to Caesar. They could not go out on their own, they could not get out of a system of patronage and taxation.

When Jesus said, “I will make you fishers of men,” a light went off in their hearts. They had a transformation of mind. They realized their life was not feeding their family with fish. They realized their life’s purpose was about bringing food to each and every creature God had made. And they knew it in an instant.

If God has come near to us, then we cannot stay as we are. The presence of God demands a response. We must repent.

If we are truly forgiven or healed, how can we forget such things? If God has really called us to be a blessing to others, we can never let that go, we can never cease to serve. We must repent.

Indeed, Jesus is walking straight up to you: he speaks his word over your life: “Come, follow me. I will make you....” O Lord, fill in the blank, for each one of us, speak your word to me, today.