

God's Word for this Week

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany



THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
Renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



There is a distinct underlying theme to our readings this week which links the three together – **the courage to follow God's lead**; If you have a moment, you might read through one of the shortest books in the bible – the Book of the Prophet Jonah. How many times have we read of a most unlikely person chosen by God to do God's work?! Things don't exactly go to plan for Jonah who listens to his own fear instead of God's guidance. No doubt Jonah felt very solitary in what God had tasked him to do – prophesy to the people of a very wayward Nineveh!

God 'grows' us by what he can place in our lives at any given moment. You can be sure whatever you encounter is an opportunity to grow and that your growing is not done alone. Jonah needed to take time to review the mistakes he had made before steadying himself for the task set by God. But God was willing to wait.

THE FIRST READING

Jonah 3: 1-5, 10

³The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' ³So 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. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

¹⁰ 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.



THE SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 7: 29-31

²⁹I mean, brothers and sisters,' the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none,³⁰and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions,³¹and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

As in the case of Jonah, following God requires a stripping away of previous understandings of the world and who we are within it. The short paragraph above shows us in no uncertain terms how to begin to imagine something completely different. It seems that the writer is urging us to reimagine everything that has deeply touched us and all that we think we need when it comes to this world; all that draws us within our human experience. What may be going to change for the individual is an increase in the spiritual within themselves. This is more difficult to achieve when we are distracted by the world.

THE GOSPEL READING

Mark 1: 14-20



14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news* of God,¹⁵ and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;* repent, and believe in the good news.'

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were

fishermen.¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.'¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The word 'immediately' is prominent in this short scripture. If we are to believe the workings of the Spirit in scripture then we are to assume that the word is used most deliberately. We get a clear sense that the men Jesus called took little time to think about their response but immediately left their lives and followed him. This is written so briefly it is often very easy for us to overlook the huge decisions that were taken so swiftly and the consequences for these men and their families in their absence. When we have a true encounter with the Christ there is no question but to follow. It is a journey of great uncertainty but we are promised the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the Christ as we move along the road with him.

Today, my prayer for you reader is for trust. Like Jonah and Jesus' disciples, may God provide you with the courage to step out of your comfort zone and all you have known and place your hand into the hand of the one who will call you forward into the very fullest version of yourself.