

1/21/2018

“When Hearing is Believing”

Scripture: Jonah 3:1-5,10; Psalm 62:5-12; Mark 1:14-20

Sermon Series: Callings from God

Theme: Faith is demonstrated by responding to God’s call or invitation without hesitation

How many of you have ever watched an infomercial that was so believable and compelling that you called and purchased the product within the first half hour? Or when was the last time you heard something so impressive and moving that you believed it and acted on it right away?

Those are examples of when hearing is believing. And when believing is taking action.

Today’s Old Testament and Gospel readings from the Revised Common Lectionary again tell of callings from God.

You may recall that last week we considered hearing and answering God’s call. We saw Samuel first struggling to understand who was calling and then preparing himself to hear and respond to God’s calling him. It was a one-time call, but one that opened Samuel up to hearing and responding to God’s voice throughout his life.

We also saw Jesus calling two very different people to follow him, and we observed the two very different responses each gave. Both said yes, but how each got to yes was different. Philip responded openly and eagerly. Nathanael was, at best, a skeptic. Jesus made it clear he wanted and was ready to take on both. Follow him, he said, and they would see the kingdom of God breaking in, angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man – that is Jesus.

Let me thank again those of you who shared with me or someone else your witness of how God has called you in some way, and how you have responded.

This week we have two more calling stories, separated by about 800 years and nearly as many miles.

Most of us are familiar with the first – that of the prophet **Jonah**, usually associated with the first part of the story – his reluctance to obey God’s call and commission – and his adventure inside the belly of a large sea creature.

Today’s reading picks up with Jonah hearing God’s word again, and this time obeying it. He then arrives at the great city of Nineveh to announce a coming judgment of destruction for their great wickedness.

“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” he proclaimed. Then, much to his amazement, the Ninevites did what? . . . They believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.” as a sign of humility and repentance.

† **The prophet Jonah to the Ninevites**

They heard. They believed. They responded with action.

And because they believed and responded with action, what did God do? ***“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.”*** (Jonah 3:10)

The wonderful witness of Jonah, though somewhat to his dismay, is that **God is gracious and merciful to those who hear and believe, who turn their hearts and their lives to the Lord.** Let's be clear: God is not going back on any promise when sparing Ninevah. He pronounced, but did not promise, its destruction. Unless God has stipulated a specific covenant, God has the power and prerogative to change His mind and His word, whether we like it or not – especially when it comes to showing compassion and mercy.

The apostle Peter noted the delay of Christ's return and final judgment, because of his compassion for those who have not yet heard or responded to the gospel. He said: ***“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*** (2 Peter 3:9)

. . . Which brings us to our gospel reading for today from Mark 1:

† **Jesus went to Galilee, saying . . .**

“¹⁵ The time has come, and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe the good news!”

“¹⁷ Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

Jesus encounters Simon and Andrew just casting their nets into the sea for a catch. He calls them to follow, and they do immediately leaving boats and nets. Then he sees James and John, calls them and they even leave their father and hired men behind in the boat to follow Jesus.

The callings are different: Repentance for Nineveh; lives as disciples to a wandering rabbi for Peter, Andrew, James and John. But, the responses are the same – immediate and dramatic willingness to do whatever it takes to answer the call.

If we focus only on verses 16-20 in Mark, we may miss just how dramatic Jesus' call to discipleship would have been understood by those hearing him and immediately following.

In verse 14, we find that Jesus came to Galilee right after the arrest of John the Baptist. John had been operating in Judea, but he was arrested by Herod, ruler of Galilee. Jesus did not "flee" from the trouble that had beset John. Instead, he located his ministry in one of the leading trading posts in the heart of Herod's territory, in Capernaum. Jesus was a man with some nerve!

But even more dramatic than his decision to move into the "heart of darkness" was the message he proclaimed there: **“The time has come, and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe the good news!”**

Being called as a disciple by this man proclaiming that message in Herod's territory was either the most exciting or the most terrifying prospect one could imagine. Perhaps, there was some combination of both. But, for these four men on that day by the sea near Capernaum, excitement won. And they began to follow Jesus, not only with their minds and hearts, but with their very lives.

Now if we consider John's gospel account, we realize that Andrew and Simon had already been invited by Jesus to "come and see" where he was staying, while he was still by the Jordan River in Judea. Andrew, and most likely Simon Peter, had already been baptized by John the Baptist for the repentance of sins.

John's account does not recall the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness for forty days as does Matthew, Mark and Luke. In comparing the accounts, we can conclude that Andrew and Peter returned to Galilee and went back to fishing, until Jesus himself returned and began preaching and teaching in the synagogues there. He then came to Andrew and Peter and to his cousins James and John, the sons of Zebedee, while they were about their business of fishing with nets.

This time, when they heard Christ's words of invitation, they believed and they acted in faith. For them, hearing Christ's words of God's impending kingdom meant believing and following him completely.

For these four new disciples then, repentance also meant leaving behind their livelihoods and families to become disciples of Jesus, whatever that may involve.

So, where does that bring us in our lives today?

When we say yes, do we remain reluctant or do we go "all in"? In both of this week's texts, what precedes people going "all in" is a clear announcement that the world, as they know it, is about to be changed dramatically, whether for the worse (Jonah in Nineveh) or the better (Jesus in Capernaum).

When you think about Christian discipleship and following Jesus, do you feel as though you've gone "all in"? Have you not only heard his words, but believed? And in believing, have you responded completely in action? Can others see the gospel of God's kingdom lived out in your life?

Are we simply repeating the words, putting on a show or cheering for Christ or the church? Or **are we living the life and way of Jesus Christ having and showing love and compassion, holiness and justice?**

The NIVBC says: "*The Good News is both from God and about God. The gospel is the very best news ever to come to the hearing of humankind, because it contains the message of forgiveness, restoration, and new life in Christ Jesus.*" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17)

† **When hearing is truly believing, those who follow Jesus respond with thoughts and actions like his**

We acknowledge that God is the ruler of our lives. We receive God's blessings and love. We are God's humble and faithful servants. We extend Christ's love and compassion to all. We rejoice in God's Spirit and power at work in us and through us. And, we give glory and praise to God.

Although we are not limited to them, our church's ministries of nurture, witness and outreach offer some ways for you to respond to Christ's invitation to follow him.

As many of you already attest by your actions – when hearing **is** believing, we are truly blessed by God. Continue to share the good news of God’s salvation and kingdom. Live alive in Jesus Christ!

Jonah 3:1-5, 10: ¹ *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:* ² *"Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."*

³ *Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city--a visit required three days.* ⁴ *On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."* ⁵ *The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.*

¹⁰ *When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.*

Mark 1-14-18: ¹⁴ *After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.* ¹⁵ *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

¹⁶ *As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.* ¹⁷ *"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."* ¹⁸ *At once they left their nets and followed him.*