

January 21, 2018 – Soli Deo Gloria
By Wayne J. Schneider

“Can You Hear Me Now?”

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Fisher-people love to tell stories. Those I know who fish Puget Sound have caught some surprisingly enormous fish, but their fish are not as big as Jonah’s, even though they may claim otherwise!

This Biblical story is conventionally known as “Jonah and the Whale,” but it is actually a story about the “call of God.” Michael read for us, *“The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time.”* We discover God’s first call to Jonah in chapter one. There, God invites Jonah to go to Nineveh, and preaching God’s judgment and the need for the people’s repentance.

Jonah, however, ignores this first call. He runs away and boards a boat, and a serious storm erupts, and the sailors understand that God is unhappy with Jonah. They don’t want to, they try everything not to, but eventually they throw Jonah into the raging sea, and he ends up in the belly of a large fish. Most of us would groan and moan at this point, but Jonah praises God for being saved from the storm.

Finally, he is vomited onto dry land. God calls again and Jonah responds positively. He treks toward Nineveh proclaiming God’s coming judgment, and calling for the Ninevites to repentance before God’s judgment occurs.

Today, repentance is a throwaway word. Repentance: what is it, anyway? Many people have a different definition than the Bible’s explanation. A man felt guilty for cheating on his taxes. So he sent a check to the IRS with a note, *“I cheated on my taxes so I am sending this in. If it makes me feel better, I will send in the rest of the money I owe”*.

Repent has a ‘churchy’ sound and meaning to it. The word is so misused we want to, but we dare not, throw it out. And, just as the church universal has become ashamed of the word ‘repent,’ psychology and therapy have discovered it. If you don’t repent, if you don’t change, you die.

Richard Rohr writes, *“If you don’t repent of your past mistakes you repeat them. You repeat them again and again and become a sick person. The addictive society understands this better than the church does now.”*

Jonah scores! It’s a perfect 10! The king, every person, each animal repents with a time of fasting. God forgives and relents. The people and the city are safe, but Jonah is annoyed, even infuriated.

This is a story of hills and valleys, of ebbing and flowing waters, of waxing and (no pun intended) waning moons. He says no, then he says yes. He praises God in calamity and curses God in mercy. As with most disciples, Jonah finds following God is not exactly painless.

In the New Testament when we learn of Simon and Andrew responding to Jesus immediately, and we want to be just like them. When they leave everything behind and follow Jesus, we picture ourselves cut from the same cloth.

Yet, like Jonah, the twelve disciples did not have a laidback journey on the road to discipleship. James and John quarreled over who would have the best seats in God’s heavenly house, only to be rebuked by Jesus about servant-hood and humility. (St Mark 10:35-45) Andrew is nearly invisible in the Gospels after answering the call; named later in St. Mark to hear Jesus predict a torturous martyrdom the the disciples will encounter. (St. Mark 13:3-13) And Simon Peter denies Jesus three times as Jesus faces the cross. (St. Mark 14:66-72)

Whether we are like Jonah or like the Disciples, we are called to be a disciple of Jesus. And, when we answer in the positive, the journey will challenge and change us. We invest our time and talent in a ministry, only to discover the ministry is not what it claims to be. We drop everything to follow Jesus expecting joy and fulfillment. Instead, finding burnout and disappointment, when others don’t appreciate our hard work and generous service.

Discipleship is a lifestyle, a pilgrimage, a long journey filled with hills and valleys, ebbing and flowing waters, waxing and waning moons. Yet, Jesus is present

with us each step of the way. Following our “Day of Pentecost,” the Holy Spirit lives in us filling us with power to be ‘more than conquerors.’ (Romans 8:37) Jesus nurtures us with ‘living waters.’ We walk in the shelter of God, the mighty rock of salvation and hope.

We are never alone on this journey. Jesus walked it and walks with us still. God’s call continues today, and God is counting on us to answer the call, walking this journey with the Holy Spirit blowing through our lives, filling us with the power to say yes, and the strength to endure, in times of sorrow and joy. Alleluia. Amen.