

Today we have two scriptures that depict aspects of being called. First, God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn them of the wrath God plans to unleash on them for their wickedness. Jesus' call to his first disciples is much calmer, almost as if someone had warned the disciples Jesus was going to come ask them to follow him and that they had had time to mull it over. But that's not what happened. Jesus sees Simon and Andrew who are fishing and asks them to follow him, with the puzzling promise of fishing for people, and immediately they drop their nets and follow Jesus. Not too far away, Jesus spies John and James and asks them to follow him - and they do, leaving their father behind. Wow! Just like that!

I think it's possible that there were others Jesus asked; others who wanted to know a bit more about what they were agreeing to; others who said yes but needed for a day to figure out what to pack; others who wanted to say their goodbyes first. There might even have been others who flatly refused; wondering out loud who this guy is and what the state of his mental health is.

I'm not sure which one of these people I would have been, but I'm not so sure I would be with James and John. I've heard it said that Jesus had such love and such kindness about him that people were just drawn to him - but Jesus was not Rasputin, nor the pied piper. Actually the crowds

began following him when he started feeding them with ridiculously small amounts of fish and bread. He may have had a pleasant demeanor but that wouldn't be much comfort to me when it started to get dark and I started to get hungry.

How did Jesus know who to ask? The ones who said 'yes' and were willing to walk away from their old lives into a new one. He is not asking us to leave one life burdened by worldly worries and goods for another. He is asking us to open ourselves to a new life - not a new job, or house, or spouse - but to a new life that can be lived in any circumstance of life you find yourself in.

There is confusion about this - answering Jesus' call IS about your whole life but not in the sense of becoming a nun or a monk; a priest or a minister, although it could be. Jesus' call is to follow him; and the only way to follow him is to put him first. Andrew, and Simon and John and James all did that. Kept their eyes on him and learned from him.

Jonah was the opposite of a follower - he wanted to get out of following God's instructions so badly, he booked passage on a ship going hundreds of miles away. But that failed - a storm caused the ship's crew to throw him into the sea - because they knew he was running from God and knew that was why God had sent this terrible storm. Curses! He's found me, Jonah thinks. And then God sends a whale. Jonah is swallowed and lives in the

belly of the whale for 3 days - only being released when he prays to God promising to carry out God's original request.

You might think that Jonah would be happy with how it worked out, he only has to say one sentence and everyone in Nineveh repents by fasting and wearing sackcloth and ashes. Jonah wanted Nineveh to receive what was coming to them - but, of course, God relents when all of Nineveh repents.

I think I know the feeling - that tinge of excitement I felt when I knew my brother was going to get into big trouble - Boy, are mom and dad mad at you! Eagerly awaiting the yelling and the punishment, all I hear is talk, and apology, and forgiveness. Grrrrrrrrrr.

It feels to me that we've seen both these reactions in the Call that was answered on January 20th. It's obvious to me that Joe Biden has a bit of the prophet in him - promising, exhorting us to unity. And it's obvious to me that unity is very far away when the Capitol is surrounded by national guardsmen, their rifles at the ready.

We can't think Joe Biden is like Andrew and the others - not knowing what they are getting themselves into - he's been there before. And like Jonah with Nineveh, he's got the world's biggest democracy to urge to repent - red and blue - there is repentance to be done all around.

So what about you? What about us? Are we being called? To follow? To repent? I'm just going to take a big leap here and assume that others are in need of repentance and reconnection as am I. So what about us? In some ways, it feels like we're in the belly of that huge fish - suspended between following and repenting - seeing each other in little boxes, little TV screens like Hollywood Squares. Seeing each other from the shoulders up. It hardly seems necessary to repent; It hardly seems possible to follow. We are so connected to the big gesture, the wiping away of all our sins, the giving up all earthly distractions to follow Jesus. I don't know about you but that's the sure kiss of death to repentance for me; and it is driven by pure ego. We forget that repentance doesn't have to be massive, it is the simple act of turning toward God and away from sin, and the key to following Jesus is to put him first. Repenting and following - both perfectly suited to this time in the whale. Repentance turns us away from something and turns us toward something. It puts us in the perfect position to follow. And once we put Jesus first again, we are in the right place again. Following, yes; following to learn and grow; and following to have Jesus always in front of us - comfort and company. And in following we relinquish the lead, we allow Jesus to lead us. We wake up - it's like washing a dirty windshield - a relief. Like the people of Nineveh, nudged toward God, we see our sin - and can therefore see God, again - whether we are inside the whale or not.

Quoting inaugural poet Amanda Gorman's words about call and response:

We did not feel prepared to be the heirs Of such a terrifying hour. But  
within it we've found the power To author a new chapter, To offer hope  
and laughter to ourselves." And I would add to the world.