



ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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

A SERMON BY THE REV. BO REYNOLDS
JANUARY 24, 2021

On Wednesday, our nation celebrated a peaceful transition of power with the inauguration of a new president, beginning that mad dash for every administration known as the First 100 Days. A peculiarity inherited from FDR's presidency in which he summoned Congress into a special 3 month session in order to address the Great Depression, the First 100 days represent a period of time in a political administration ripe with unique potential and possibility: Media coverage is generally favorable at first, there are at least token mentions of bipartisan cooperation, and the success or failure of these three months and few days is viewed as a harbinger for what is to come from the rest of the president's full term in office. There is an urgency in these months, a desire to strike while the iron is hot, the possibility of seizing a narrow window in time and opening it onto a wider, new reality for the country envisioned by the president's political agenda. To sit on this moment is to surrender a hoped for future, to squander a fleeting, singular opportunity.

Jesus, after his baptism by John and John's subsequent arrest, after his temptation in the desert, inaugurates his ministry with a similar sense of potent urgency: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." The message is in the imperative: Act NOW. Now is the moment in which the

Kingdom of God is present, Now is the moment to repent, believe, and participate.

The first disciples called to follow Jesus today in Mark's Gospel, Simon, Andrew, James, and John, are called to act with urgency in deciding whether to follow Jesus or not; they drop their nets where they were, and in the case of James and John, they leave their father behind. Following Jesus requires a realignment of priority and allegiances; the statement 'Jesus is Lord' quickly became a watchword in the early church for precisely this reason. Elsewhere in the gospel narratives, prospective disciples who ask Jesus for time to deliberate or for a gradual on-ramp toward commitment are not counted as worthy to follow Christ.

It's a daunting standard that we're presented with, then, for discipleship. Even trickier is that Paul in his letter to Corinth extends the imperative for urgency to the church *after* Jesus; it's an ongoing standard not to be left behind in first century Palestine. "I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short... For the present form of this world is passing away...". He gives an enigmatic series of exhortations in this context: "...let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and 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...". At first glance, they seem nearly contradictory: How do you neither mourn nor rejoice?

When Paul says the appointed time grows short, he's speaking about Kairos, God's time, the fullness of time, rather than chronos, linear time that we measure with calendars and years.

He is carrying forward Jesus' invitation to his first disciples in Mark and issuing the same challenge for us as Christians. We are given this paradoxical window in time: the invitation is immediate (Now) and yet somehow not rooted in regular time. It's eternal. The 'Now' which comes to us in our own times, in our own lives, carries the same weight and the same urgency that it did for those disciples, it's an invitation into the same potential and possibility. However, just because the same moment is offered to us just as it was offered to Simon, Andrew, James, and John, does not mean that the call, the invitation simply hangs in the air until we're ready to accept; something is lost in the deferral or the presumption that we can act when we feel more inclined to do so.

Have you ever felt God's call to you, nudging you to do something outside of your comfort zone, urging you to make a deeper commitment in your life of

discipleship, to perform a particular act of service? It doesn't matter how big or how small the undertaking was, God called to you; it was a thought, a sense that was hard to shake. Did you do it? Or did you defer? Was it too out of the way, too much of a commitment? That was a moment in which the Kingdom of Heaven drew near to you and beckoned you to follow in pursuit.

Perhaps the biggest loss which comes when we defer on these appointed times in our lives is that it becomes much easier to defer the next time; God calls, God whispers, and we've long practiced the response of just continuing to tend our nets, to continue our regular dealings with the world, until that moment passes and our life stays the safely same as it was.

The appointed call to act 'Now' might come again, but we may be far too busy to even notice it for more than a split second.

The life of discipleship, however, is found in orienting your life in a different way, in such a way that you are sensitive to the potential and possibility of the call of the Kingdom of Heaven when it comes to you. We're no longer called to literally drop everything and physically follow Jesus around the Judean countryside, but are our hearts so tangled up

in the nets of everyday life that we're no longer free to respond when that appointed time, the invitation of 'Now' comes?

Then give us the grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation.

AMEN

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