



The Jonah Principle
Jonah 3:1-10 & Mark 1:14-20

Sunday, January 21st, 2018
Frist Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.

The sound of a school bell.

If you go to any school in America you will hear that sound; the school bell.

It calls students to the start of a new day,
to and from classes
and home at the end of the school day.

Our Old Testament and gospel lessons are about call.

I will explore with you the elements of what makes up a call,
as well as something I call
“The Jonah Principle.

First, the nature of a call as it is used in Scripture.

John Winthrop, one of the early Puritans and leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony
talked about his “call” to leave the comfort of his life in England
for the wildness of the “New World,” saying:

“When God intends a person to a work, God sets a bias on his heart so as he be tumbled this way
and that, yet his bias draws him to that side where he rests at lasts.” (*The Puritan Dilemma; the Story
of John Winthrop*, Edmond S. Morgan.)

A call, then is an inescapable “bias” set in the heart
as much as it is an audible voice.

As a matter of fact,
more often than not,
it is more of a bias than an audible voice.

Marianne Williamson once wrote that
a calling is organic.

It springs from the deepest aspects of who you are.
It is the fulfillment of what God created you to be and do.

This calling

or vocation, is what you are born to do,

but this calling may not be what is called a “job”.

Your job may simply be the means to give you the resources to fulfill your calling.

In the gospel lesson we see six characteristics that are common to all biblical calls.

First, we are called into a community.

God created and continues to create in plurality.

In Genesis 1, the first Creation story,

God created humanity in the divine image simultaneously:

“Let us make people in our own likeness or image.

Male and female He created them.”

This is reaffirmed in Genesis 2, we find the first human being created out of the dust of earth and having God breathe the breath of life into that person,

God placed him in a garden we call Eden.

All of his needs were met

but still he was incomplete.

Completeness—

wholeness—only came when God created a second person out of the side of the first.

They complemented each other.

Israel,

as a people,

was called to be a “light to the nations”

showing them how to live in response to God’s love.

The prophets of old were called to speak to a people.

They were called from a people to speak to a people.

The apostle Paul had his sight restored only when he was led to and into the community of Faith.

Second,

our calling is not an invitation to greatness

but to servanthood.

Jesus called the first four disciples by promising them not that they would be wealthy, but that He would make them “fishers of men.”

They would fulfill the unfulfilled call of Israel.

Third,

our calling demands an immediate response.

In the reading the word “immediately” is used two times.

Responding “immediately” is the expected
and only response to God’s call.

Remember the parable that Jesus told about the king who sent out wedding invitations to his friends.

They all made excuses as to why they could not attend the wedding.

One just bought a field and wanted to check it out.

Another just got married.

A third had to bury his father.

The king,

enraged at being rebuffed by what we may call legitimate excuses

vowed to have the wedding banquet filled so he sent his servants out to the

highways and byways and invited

the least, the last and the lost.

The point of the parable is that there is a sense of urgency and missed opportunity in God’s call.

The time to respond is now,

not tomorrow,

or when you retire,

or when it is more convenient.

Time and opportunity wait for no one.

Fourth,

your call will draw you from your past.

In Genesis Abraham responded to God’s call by leaving his father’s house.

The Israelites reluctantly left the slavery of Egypt for an unseen Promised Land.

Reluctantly may seem like an odd choice of words but the truth of the matter is

that the devil you know is often preferable to

the angel you don’t.

Paul left his Jewish heritage behind

as did all of Jesus’ first disciples.

From their example we see that we have a responsibility to dismantle Traditions that conflict with Truth.

Fifth,

Our call does not come through mystical experiences—

though some may—

as much as through everyday events.

The disciples were going about their day,
doing their work,
cleaning and mending their nets,
when Jesus came into their lives
and called them into “active duty”
in God’s Kingdom.

And lastly,
once we have heard our call
and had it affirmed,
we cannot go back to the way “it was before”.

We are forever changed.

At the close of John’s gospel eight of the disciples decided to return to their nets
but the Resurrected Lord appeared to them on the shore,
and “renewed” their first call.

So it is with us.

We’ll look into that more deeply after Easter.

Now we get into “The Jonah Principle”.

Our life experiences prepare us for some future greater call.

For example, only Moses could lead the people out of Egypt because,
if you remember,

he was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter,

had his mother for his nursemaid,

and no doubt heard the lullaby's

songs

and stories of his

people.

He uniquely knew the ways of Pharaoh’s court
and the story of his people.

Only Esther could have saved her people from a pogrom.

As her uncle Mordecai said to her,

“Perhaps you were put in the position of the king’s favorite wife for a time such as
this.”

Only Paul could have been the pioneer ambassador to the Gentiles
because he was,
by his own words,
a Jew's Jew,
a Pharisee's Pharisee.

And only he had the dramatic encounter with the
Risen Lord
on the road to Damascus.

For whatever reason,
God chose Jonah to go to Nineveh to call that ancient city into repentance.
And here's where the Jonah Principle comes into play.

Once God has placed His finger on you,
you can run but you cannot hide.
God will pursue
and never give us.

The poet Francis Thompson captured this reality in his poem "The Hound of Heaven"

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I hid from him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
and shot precipitated,
Adown titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—
and a Voice beat more instant than the Feet.

You cannot arm wrestle God and win.
The call of God is persistent.
The bias of the heart that John Winthrop wrote about
is placed by the hand of God in the human chest.
Once God has called you,
you can run, but you cannot hid.

Once you feel God's touch in your life,
once you hear God's voice,
you are never the same.

Indeed, you can never be the same.

And is what is called,
amazing Grace. Amen.