

twelvebaskets



EPIPHANY 3B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Third Sunday After Epiphany - Year B
21st January 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

135 STF – I owe my Lord a morning song OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Mark 1:14-20

All Age Talk

Hymn:

272 STF – From heaven you came, helpless babe OR

440 STF – Amazing grace - how sweet the sound

Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Hymn:

247 STF – I danced in the morning when the world was begun OR

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

407 STF – Hear the call of the kingdom OR

404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

696 STF – For the healing of the nations OR

673 STF – Will you come and follow me?

Blessing

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Call to worship

God of all grace,
You have called us here, and here we come.
In worship, in prayer, in listening and learning,
In sharing and singing.

Come amongst us as we worship, Lord God,
By your Spirit,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

135 STF – I owe my Lord a morning song OR
416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

Opening Prayers

We wait in the stillness, our souls like water,
Pushed and pulled by the gravity of life's commitments.
We pour ourselves out, bend ourselves,
and distort ourselves for others,
muddying ourselves into something that isn't authentic.
Refresh and refill us God,

For you alone my soul waits in silence.

We wait in the stillness, keeping our faith alight.
May our faith be a fire that brings comfort,
one that radiates love and care to those around us;
A beacon to those around us.
Rekindle and fuel us God,

For you alone my soul waits in silence.

We wait in the stillness, the silence amongst the chaos.
The sounds of the traffic, the appliances, the crowds,
the all-encompassing dirge of life.
May we be aware of the still, quiet voice,
Speaking words of wisdom.

Our hope is in you God,

For you alone my soul waits in silence.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Annan-Hood

Reading: Mark 1:14-20

All Age Talk

So, today's Gospel reading - Mark 1:14-20 – starts with a bang!

We find Jesus saying "The time has come! God's special kingdom is here! Believe in this good news and turn back to God."

Wow, now, that might sound a bit fancy, but it's like Jesus is saying, "Something amazing is happening, and God's love is here for all of us!" How awesome is that?

Right after saying this, Jesus walked by a lake, and he saw some fishermen. Their names were Simon, Andrew, James, and John. They were busy fishing, trying to catch some fish to feed their families and make a living. Fishing was a hard job to do, it was long hours and tough work, and not always great pay – it depended on what you could catch. In society, those that were fisherman would be looked down on in society unfortunately.

We have similar roles that can often be looked at in negative ways for example those that are known as dustbin men or women. These people can sadly be looked down upon. But without these important jobs we wouldn't in this case, have our rubbish and more importantly our recycling taken.

So back to our story. Despite their place in society, Jesus says to these fisherman "Come and follow me! I'll teach you how to fish for people instead of fish." Now, that might sound a bit funny – people aren't fish, are they? But what Jesus meant is that he wanted these guys to help him tell everyone about God's love.

And guess what happened next? Simon, Andrew, James, and John left their fishing nets right there and followed Jesus. They became Jesus' special friends, His first helpers, and they went on incredible adventures with him.

Jesus is like our best friend, and he invites us to follow him on an amazing adventure. We might have to leave behind some of our "nets," like the things we're used to, but it's because Jesus has something incredible for us to do.

So will we join Jesus today and be a part of the team?³

Hymn:

272 STF – From heaven you came, helpless babe OR

440 STF – Amazing grace - how sweet the sound

Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Hymn:

247 STF – I danced in the morning when the world was begun OR

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Reflections on the readings

'That's the sort of person I am', 'sorry, but that's me, I can't change now'... how often do we hear – or say – these sorts of things? So often we seem to get stuck in a particular understanding of ourselves and we live as though any change is impossible. This is not the Gospel of Jesus! Two of our readings today make it very clear that change is not only possible, it is essential!

The OT prophet Jonah is most famous for his attempt to run away from God's call on his life, a rebellion which resulted in him being swallowed by a large fish. It's a story which feels ancient and perhaps a little remote from our experience. Jonah probably lived around 800 years before Jesus, with the story being written down sometime in the 500-300 years before the Christian era, yet it is a story which can still teach us things about God and about ourselves. The story doesn't end with Jonah being vomited back up onto a beach many miles away – it is really after that adventure that the story becomes even more fascinating. When God calls a second time Jonah obeys and goes to the great city of Nineveh to preach the message God gives him.

Nineveh has a long and significant history, it was an ancient Assyrian city of Upper Mesopotamia, located in modern-day northern Iraq. It was clearly an important city in the time of Jonah, as even God describes it as 'that great city' and our text today tells us that it took three days to walk across the city. Indeed Nineveh was thought to be the largest city in the world for approximately fifty years in the 7th Century BC. The message Jonah has been told to deliver is not congratulating Nineveh on its importance, however, quite the contrary; Jonah is told to declare that in forty days Nineveh will be overthrown! Perhaps we can understand why Jonah initially ran away from his task.

However, if he expected to be lynched for his words of doom and gloom, Jonah was to be pleasantly surprised. In a few simple words we are told that 'the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.' I imagine that no-one was more surprised at this than Jonah himself! The short passage chosen for today also includes v10 which tells us that on seeing this repentance, God rethinks the plan and doesn't, after all, bring destruction on the city.

So as we consider the possibility for change, it's an interesting point to notice that in this story from the Hebrew Scriptures, God is seen as having a change of heart and mind! Maybe from that we should deduce that we, made in God's image, are also created with the potential for change!

The reading from the first chapter of Mark's gospel, although also ancient, probably feels more familiar, and closer to our own experience. We may not be fishermen living on the Sea of Galilee, we may not have seen Jesus in a physical form or heard his voice calling us, but perhaps we do see ourselves as in some way the successors of these first disciples – people to whom Jesus has spoken, people who have been invited by Jesus to follow him.

Mark tells us that the story comes a little after the arrest of John the Baptist – we don't know how widespread that news would have been, but it's likely that a rumour of it would have spread even to the northern region of Galilee. So the men we read about in the story, Simon and Andrew, James and John, may well have heard something of this wild man of God, this prophet who seemed to have stepped out of the pages of their Scriptures, preaching repentance and a change of heart. Maybe too they were a little daunted at knowing what had become of him. All this may be in the background, but we can't be sure.

What Mark does tell us, is a succinct summary of the message Jesus brings; 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.' Two pieces of information – the time has come and the Kingdom is near – and two commands – repent and believe. It's a message which probably had more meaning for 1st Century Jewish men than it would for most folk on the street today. The Jews were waiting for a particular 'time' to come, sometimes called 'the Kairos moment' – the long-awaited time in history when God would again act directly and intervene in the affairs of humanity. This 'time' would mean that the reign of God, what we often call the Kingdom, would begin.

So it wasn't the sort of message which any self-respecting Jew could afford to ignore – although other parts of the scriptures tell us that over the years other false prophets had come claiming to be the Messiah, and forecasting the end times, so they would probably have approached it with a degree of circumspection and suspicion as well.

What we read, however, suggests that they were immediately curious, at the very least, and sufficiently so to leave their fishing nets and follow this preacher. Mark is a great fan of the word 'immediately; (in Greek it's 'euthus' - the one Greek word most people who have tried to learn the New Testament language remember, as Mark uses it so often!) Immediately Simon and Andrew leave their nets, then a few moments later, immediately Jesus calls to James and John as well and they too make their farewells to their father, Zebedee, and follow.

Whether or not it happened exactly like that, whether or not these men had already met Jesus or heard him preach doesn't really matter. Mark wants us to hear from his gospel that the coming of Jesus to Galilee with a message of repentance had instantaneous results.

These four initial disciples were fishermen – and Jesus uses that to frame the call – instead of catching fish, by following Jesus they will become 'fishers of people'. It's an interesting analogy, not without its problems if we choose to dissect the idea too closely, like a fish upon a cutting board... are we really to offer people a bait which they blindly swallow and then find themselves landed, away from the element which has sustained their life up until now? Surely not! Here lies the danger of taking picture language too literally, but there is truth and challenge in the idea that for people to hear the message and invitation of God to a new life others need to be willing to get out there with that message.

The change which this involved for these four Galilean men is the story of the gospels and of the New Testament. We see how these four men were transformed by their companionship with Jesus and how their lives were never the same again. Looking on into the stories of Acts, the Epistles and early Church History we know that they travelled, they preached, they took part in healings, they were arrested and beaten, at least three of them died as martyrs... A life as far removed from their initial work of fishing as they could have imagined.

Looking at these two stories today, towards the start of a New Year, do we find them exciting, or scary? Or perhaps a bit of both. How might God be calling us today? What are the things we are already good at, as the disciples were good at fishing, which Jesus might use in the way he calls us to particular tasks?

As we consider how we might respond, let's return to where we started and ponder for a moment what might have happened had the disciples replied to Jesus, 'Catching people? No, sorry, that's not really my thing – this is the sort of person I am and I can't really change now. Sorry'.

Let us pray: God of Nineveh and of now, Jesus of Galilee and of (*name of place where you are*), we hear your voice today coming down the years and calling us to receive and to share your Good News. We are not James, John or Jonah, we are not Simon or Peter, but we recognise that you do know who we are, you know us intimately, with all our skills and all our failures, yet you call us and have a part for us to play. Come to us afresh by your Holy Spirit, that we may not just hear, but have the courage to follow.

Thanks be to God,

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

407 STF – Hear the call of the kingdom OR

404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart

Prayers of intercession

[Particular places and names may be inserted as required.]

Gracious God, we cry to you today for all those places in the world which, like Nineveh, are on the road to destruction.

- We pray for countries where war is raging...
- We pray for governments seeking for power or control...
- We pray for systems based on greed and consumerism...
- We pray for all who exploit others for personal gain...

As we pray and hope for change, we ask you to come close to those who are victims of these pathways, holding in our prayers all who are injured, despairing, exploited, at risk...

Gracious God, we cry to you today for the church around the world, called to spread your Good News of a new Kingdom built on justice and righteousness.

- We pray for this congregation, as we seek to rise to the challenges of our community...
- We pray for our circuit and district, for the Methodist Church in Britain...
- We pray for the church in countries where Christians undergo persecution for their faith...
- We pray for the church where political powers seek to use religion for their own ends...

As we pray and hope for change, we ask you to come close to all who hear your voice today, calling them to follow, for all church leaders and members, for ourselves...

Gracious God, we cry to you today for all those in particular need, whether known to us or not.

- We pray for all who are sick in body, mind or spirit, that they may know your healing presence at this time...

⁴ Reflection written by Jill Baker

- We pray for all who are in the grip of addiction, that they may receive courage day by day...
- We pray for all who are bereaved, in grief, feeling lonely, that they may know your companionship...
- We pray for all who experience economic hardship, that they may be shown your generosity...

As we pray and hope for change, we ask you to come close to all in need this day, remembering that you have called us to share your Good News – may we receive the courage we need to follow you this day. Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Source of all love,
 God of peace,
 Divine energy of justice,
 Accept these simple gifts today, we pray,
 And put them to use to build your kingdom here on earth, we pray
 Amen.⁶

Hymn:

696 STF – For the healing of the nations OR
 673 STF – Will you come and follow me?

Blessing

The Spirit of God calls you out from this place,
 Out into a world that needs love, and hope and peace,
 A world that is full of encounters with God's grace,
 Waiting for you to notice, to discover, to share, to live.
 Go in peace, and serve the Lord, Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker