

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Jan. 24-25, 2015

Harriet Burke

Reflections on Jonah 3:1-5, 10; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

The incredible book of Jonah is sometimes whimsical, at other times satirical in its four short chapters. The first reading gives us the story of the “second” call of Jonah by God.

In an earlier chapter God had called Jonah for the first time to go to Nineveh and warn the people that they were about to be destroyed—a calling which was completely ignored by the prophet. He didn’t want anything to do with the people of Nineveh; they were Assyrians—infidels who had oppressed the Israelites many times with violent behavior. Why would he want to do anything to save the Assyrians? They were his enemy. In response to God’s first call, Jonah fled in the opposite direction, taking a boat to Tarshish.

Very quickly things went awry. A great storm came up, Jonah’s shipmates tossed him overboard, he was swallowed by a whale, and resided there for three days and nights until the whale spat him up on the dry land.

Is that what God does when we don’t listen to a call? How dramatic!

But God calls Jonah again, as we hear in tonight’s reading. God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh: “Speak to them as I do to you,” says God. Jonah does go to Nineveh and tells the people that in only forty days they will be destroyed.

Quite amazingly, they take heed. The Assyrians listen and the king proclaims that everyone, even the animals, should

be covered with sackcloth and repent; they are saved!

Even though this story is about a call to Jonah and his struggle to accept “why good things happen to bad people,” the writer also attempts to hold up Jonah as a symbol for Israel to reveal to them that they should get out of the warring game and instead become what they were called to be: a light to *all* people of God’s love. It is a story for the nation of Israel that God loves ALL equally. God is not on just one side. In fact, there are no sides with God.

The question for the Israelites was: “Could they let go of the need for revenge?” Could they reconcile with the idea that God could love the Ninevites as much as God loves the chosen people, Israel? (Pause)

The call in the gospel today has *different* aspects from the story of Jonah’s call. Jesus said to the fishermen, Simon, Andrew, James and John: “Follow me!” to which they responded “immediately,” abandoning their nets. It’s a bit hard to imagine, isn’t it? Their beloved friend just says, “Follow me!” He is a man they admired, but still a human like them. On one level maybe they believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. But it was all pretty vague, and still quite risky. To what were they being called? What was their role to be? Where were they going?

Surely their hearts were deeply touched by the new enlightened vision of

Judaism that Jesus gave. The words he spoke must have given them hope of life to be lived with a greater closeness to God and to all those they would encounter along the way.

Their immediate response was to say Yes! But it *had* to be followed by new understandings of *who* this person Jesus was and by the unfolding of the depth of the true meaning of his message.

One insight might have been seeing the Old Testament Jonah story *through* the actions of Jesus. Seeing that God's gift of salvation was not just for the Jews, but for *all people*, like the woman at the well, the man born blind, Zacchaeus, the tax collector—people one might label sinners.

In our day, they might be the ethnic, or political people that have been brought to the fore from the streets of Paris, Ferguson, New York and Cleveland. Or possibly they are people within the institutional church deciding:

- Who is in and who is out?
- Who is worthy to receive communion? To be a priest?
- Who can marry someone they love, in spite of gender or divorce?

Our Pope Francis calls us a *Community of Sinners*.

So, what is our call? I have been thinking of this quite a bit in the past couple of weeks. Does a call really happen just one time, as recounted in the Jonah story, or that of Simon, Andrew, James and John? My experience tell me *no*.

When I was quite young, attending Catholic school, I heard some things that rang true in my heart—not all of it, but enough so that I was set on a path. *Was that a call?*

Later, like many of you here, I married and I knew this was a vocation. But I certainly didn't know all the nuances or the sacredness of marriage – that had to be something lived and learned over the years. *Was that a call?*

Others of you here married and then were divorced. Something new was called forth in your life and discerning that must not have been easy. I wonder how many of us walking with you saw divorced life as vocation? do we now?

Others of you heard the call of religious life and that too was a vocation that possibly began in your late teens or early 20's.

Still others of us have chosen the single life or have become widows or widowers at the death of a spouse.

Of course, over the years, we have each made choices in our lives that brought us to a dramatic change in the direction of our path.

Aren't all of these a series of calls for us? or maybe a maturing in our call?—a maturing and understanding of God in our life?

Some call this “conscious evolution,” which Illia Delio writes so beautifully about. Some stirrings within tell us what we are living doesn't work anymore and so we move to a new path.

I am reminded of our recent community meeting when the talk turned to how we each made a decision, or had a call to be a part of this community of the Church of the Beatitudes. The call, the response, the challenges and decisions were different for each of us. Most everyone said it wasn't just a one-time thing, but something that grew and needed affirmation in different ways. I know for me, I was so grateful for the availability of many of you as I grappled with the depth of spirituality held in this crucible of faith here at Beatitudes.

I am eternally grateful to the Women of the Willing Disturbance who were the foundation of this community: for their endurance, tenacity, trust, bravery and sense of vision that brought us to this time and place. These are the women who saw the vocation in Suzanne to be a priest and called her to that. And I think of the richness of Suzanne and Jeannette deliberating their call to priesthood and the dramatic changes that that called forth in their lives.

As I look back over the last six plus years, it seem that this *call* thing has a lot to do with love—our love of the humanity and divinity of Jesus, most certainly. Love in the call we hear of Jonah, seeing our oneness with all the people—people that don't see things the way we do, who don't agree with us.

This love is also the call that is developed as we, here at Beatitudes, walk with one another and encourage each other. We gift one another with the chance to discover who we are, and by allowing the

call to fill us with new ways of living our faith:

- out in the community,
- in centering prayer,
- being involved with one of the many outreaches of this community,
- or being here at liturgy.

The song, “To Dream the Impossible Dream,” from *Man of La Mancha*, has been running around in my head the past couple of days, particularly at the end where Sancho Panza says to Don Quixote, “More misadventures!” And Don Quixote, the knight errant responds, “No, *adventures*, dear friend.”

The calls we experience in our life, I believe, are a marvelous mix of both adventures and misadventures. May we greet them with open arms, hearts and minds!

Amen.