



Third Sunday Ordinary Time 2006.

Jonah 3: 1-10 1Corinthians 7: 29-31 Mark 1: 14-20

This is probably a good time of the year for fishing stories. Today we have another account of the call of the first disciples, this time from the Gospel of Mark.

The first thing we notice is that the two stories, last week's and this week's are very different. Neither John nor Mark was writing history. They were both writing theology in narrative form.

(Theology: a way the community reflects on its faith in order to express as clearly as possible what is believed.)

Each had a different purpose in the way they structured the story. John's story began on the bank of the Jordan. In Mark's account Jesus is walking along the Sea of Galilee.

Let's begin at the beginning of the reading from Mark.

Jesus appeared in Galilee after John the Baptist had been handed over to Herod. We are given a statement of his mission. He has come proclaiming the good news of God. This is a graced moment the presence of God is discernible in the midst of humanity.

Jesus observes the activity of the fishers. Two men, Andrew and Simon, are casting circular nets into the sea. He calls to them inviting them to use their skills in a different, but similar, line of work.

Further along are two other brothers working from a boat, Jesus summons them as well.

Mark gives us a picture of a group of men who were in a prosperous business. They were inheritors of a family business. They were experienced in dealing with workers. The fact that they were fishers meant that they were in the business of feeding people. The other element of their profession that probably appealed to Jesus sense of humour was that they had to pit their wits against the fish. "Come I'll make you fishers of people."

The other fishing story comes from the book of Jonah. The book of Jonah is a short story so read the whole story. Chapter three begins with the fish rescuing Jonah. This is a funny reversal of the logic of fishing lore. Whale catches man! God had called Jonah to be a "fisher of people". Jonah was unwilling to the point of stubbornly refusing to act. His disobedience was shown up by the obedience of the fish. It reminds us of the storm story in Mark where the disciples say,

“Who is this that the wind and sea obey him!”

Having run out of excuses for avoiding the call of God, Jonah embarks on his missionary journey. In spite of his half-hearted proclamation the people of Nineveh listen and repent.

The two stories share some themes. Water is an important image in both stories. Jonah’s passage through water symbolises both life and death. The followers of Jesus are called from the water, which has sustained them, to the dryness of the life of an itinerant disciple.

Letting go of a known past for an unknown future is also a theme. Jonah was asked to preach repentance to foreigners. He resented the fact that God was concerned about non-Jews. Some of his spiritual identity was tied up in being *special*.

The disciples left not only a good livelihood but also probably subjected their families to *life on the road*. Discipleship has always had a price. Mark states that it has been this way from the beginning. The response from the disciples was whole-hearted. In following Jesus they accept not only a share in his ministry but the mandate to continue it. The calling of two sets of brothers seems to point to the mission of going out two-by-two in the spreading of the good news. Companionship is of the essence of the new community.

Community discernment is necessary for discipleship. In the past we have had some aberrations because of a too literal interpretation of witness. A group must wrestle with what the call of God means in their own time, their own culture and with their own gifts.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.