

Sermon 3rd before Advent, 7 November 2021: Jonah 3: 1-5, 10, Hebrews 9:24-end, Mark 1: 14-20

Lord God fire us up with your Holy Spirit so that we choose to act this week to follow Jesus more closely.

Amen

- It's never too late to turn to Christ, to suddenly want to follow Jesus, or if you have been following for a while to suddenly get a rush of keenness to want to do more- surely that's the Holy Spirit working in us, firing us up to bring Jesus more into our lives!
- Maybe we have a sudden outpouring of love for our children or grandchildren to help them know the joy of following Jesus, of reading bible stories, learning the Lord's Prayer,
- Maybe we suddenly realise how blessed we are compared with people in countries at war, under oppressive regimes or living in places of danger - near a volcano, a floodplain, in the path of hurricanes.
- Maybe we suddenly want to know more about Jesus, the bible, prayer , the Christian faith and see how it can possibly fit into our daily lives.
- How amazing for those first disciples to be swept up by Jesus's message, authenticity and hope- Jesus proclaiming that the Kingdom of God had come near and calling his first disciples Simon and Andrew, James and John, from their fishing boats to follow him and become fishers of people- A call to them to let themselves be filled and moulded by God's Holy Spirit, to live to God's values , share God's love,
- *Just like you and I can be stirred by the Holy Spirit today as well.*
- Perhaps if we are longstanding followers of Christ, we need more than most to allow ourselves to frequently hear Jesus' call afresh.
- We might have got into a rut, be exhausted by events in our own lives or in the world pressing in on us, COVID, the Climate Crisis, job security, rising fuel and food prices, or think we've got it all sussed , we know our belief and traditions, which have sustained us over the years, surely there isn't a new take on things?
- But I think there always is - because God is a living God, moving among us, alive in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and whose values are still hugely relevant to us today. How do the bible readings connect with our lives today, now in 2021 in Baldock, in the UK or in the world? How do we choose to act?
- God is love and a belief in Jesus connects us completely with God, with the Kingdom of God, because Jesus is the bridge between heaven and earth, the gateway to the Kingdom because of his one perfect sacrifice made once for all taking our sins upon himself so that we could come into a right relationship with God and experience forgiveness and wholeness of life, We can be redeemed.
- Jesus calls us to follow him, just as intensely today as he called those first disciples who could see him in the flesh. Jesus calls to us out of the pages of the Gospels; through the letters of St Paul and other apostles and through the words and actions of many saints and Christians throughout the ages.
- We are in the season of All Saints to Advent - the season when we spend time remembering those who have died - in our families, in our armed forces, in our communities - and as Christians linking them through Jesus to us now. Jesus is the bridge between the Kingdom of Heaven and earth, between our loved ones there and those that live amongst us on earth.
- The kingdom of God has come near - heaven isn't just a place after we die, it is here on earth at times when we encounter Jesus , and the good news is that God's love transcends everything, if we throw caution to the wind and trust him, he can transform us and our lives - to be so much more fulfilling than if we just potter along how we always have, or think we know best and ignore God's nudges.
- In the Old Testament, it was the prophets who got very definite nudges from God and Jonah tried really hard to avoid his!
- The famous bit about him first running away from what God wanted him to do, ending up in the belly of a whale, repenting and being spewed out onto dry land has all happened before today's reading the word of the Lord came a second time , when Jonah finally agrees to go to the people of Nineveh and proclaim God's judgement to them. Mind you, he was very reluctant because he had thought the

bad people of Nineveh would in no way repent and be saved, so it seemed a total waste of time to Jonah to trudge over to this huge city and proclaim God's message to them.

- -How annoying then for Jonah to find, *his* assessment of the people of Nineveh to be totally wrong. *They did respond to God, they turned from their destructive and self-centred ways and God saved them.*
- You never know how people will respond to hearing the Word of God.....

- But I wonder if Jonah found things so tough because he had to try to do God's will on his own?
- Compare that with what Jesus did : the very first disciples of Jesus were called in pairs, 2 sets of brothers, and later he sent his disciples out in pairs on their first missionary journeys, this gave them a bit of moral support to each other.
- Maybe this can give us a pointer today and give us a boost.
- Sometimes it seems following Jesus is a very lonely path - especially if other family members are not keen, so your loyalties are divided - or if your tradition (after all, the Anglican church is a very broad church) or style of worship or music or prayer is a bit different from others, or if your feeling of where you think God is calling you is not mainstream (ha ha, I have felt like that with Eco things for years though hopefully that is changing!).
- But Jesus chose a group to be his main disciples and nowadays we have the church - the body of Christ, with Jesus as the head - here at St Mary's we have this body of Christians and we can take heart in being with other Christians.
- This is especially important if we are going through a tough time and need someone to share with; Jesus's compassion and love working through another Christian will surely help us feel comforted and valued and encouraged. Receiving communion or a blessing will empower us with God's incredible love through the sacrifice Jesus made for each one of us.
- As part of the body of Christ, we can support and encourage each other to discover how best to act for God in today's world, there are lots of ways to let Jesus rule in our hearts.
- Maybe you'd like to take a list of ways you can reduce your carbon footprint, maybe you'd like to give financially to support St Mary's, maybe you'd like to take part in and around the service in some way. Listen out and see how God is nudging you to follow the call of Jesus today.
- And will you respond immediately like the disciples in our reading or will you be more like Jonah and turn the other way and try to ignore nudges from God?
- I wonder if at the mid-point of the UN Climate talks, COP26 in Glasgow, you think we are each being nudged by God to act to stop the climate crisis? Each of us has a voice and we can choose how we act.

- Let's not lose hope that God will help us save our planet because he surely wants to save his amazing creation just as he saved the people of Nineveh- but we will have to change our lifestyles drastically as the people of Nineveh did, perhaps not sackcloth and fasting, but certainly living less wasteful and more sustainable lives. rather than drift further and further from God because it's not cool, a bit odd and frankly sometimes quite embarrassing to say you believe in God and want to follow his ways.

- How will you, how will I, choose to act in the coming week?
- We have a voice and we have a choice..... Jesus is asking us to follow Him more closely.
- *Be courageous, let his Holy Spirit guide you to live out your faith in a noticeable way!*
- It's never too late to turn or re-turn to Jesus and act for God.
- In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen

Katrina Nice, 7.11.21

Mark 1:14-20

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news[a] of God,[b] **15** and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;[c] repent, and believe in the good news

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. **17** And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' **18** And immediately they left their nets and followed him. **19** As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. **20** Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Jonah 3

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, **2** 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' **3** So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. **4** Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' **5** And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Jonah 3:10

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Hebrews

24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. **25** Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; **26** for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. **27** And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement, **28** so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.