

## Fishing

You need to watch out when Jesus asks you out for some fishing.

He doesn't like to fish in the shallows – he's always headed for the deep waters, always shaking things up.

None of the gospel writers tell us how Simon and Andrew's dad reacted to his grown sons abandoning him and the family business.

I have a feeling he was shaking his fist, yelling, "Get out of here, Jesus!"

And Simon, whose name Jesus would later change to Rock, (pronounced "Peter" back then), when Jesus turned completely upside down his vision of who the Messiah is, Peter erupts, "Get out of here, Jesus!"

Even after the unspeakable joy of the resurrection, Easter joy, Peter had the hardest time accepting that Romans and Greeks and even Polish people could somehow be called into the family of God.

Imagine if someone told Andrew that very first day when he is called away from family and job that in only a few short years, he'd be travelling to Romania, Russia and Afghanistan.

My guess, he would have joined his dad in yelling: "Get out of here, Jesus!"

It seems that first, Jesus gets your "yes," then he takes you into the deep waters – waters teeming with unfamiliar people, with new cultures, with different languages – as God over and over reminds us that we are all of us his children and he intends to have us all – every last one of us – to himself.

Jonah got that call, and hated it.

While this morning we have only a small piece of the wonderful story of Jonah, a short story that Mel Brooks great granddaddy probably wrote, it is a story that fits for us right here in Palama.

God wants to save the great city of Moscow, (or is it Tehran?); no, it's Nineveh, and God wants to save it from itself.

Nineveh is the capital of Assyria, Israel's neighbor, and not a friendly neighbor at that.

Assyria regularly invades Israel, leaving behind all the horror and wreckage that the folly of war leaves in its wake.

And while Jonah is a prophet of God, he is first and foremost a patriot who loves his country.

Jonah doesn't want Nineveh to repent; he wants God to smash Nineveh; so you can understand Jonah's reluctance to lift a finger to see God's forgiveness granted to that terrible enemy.

And so Jonah runs away, yelling every step of the way: "Get out of here, God!"

Jonah's story raises questions we might ask today.

Why do churches, including ours, allow national flags in the sanctuary?

Why do Christians vigorously argue for the supremacy of their country over all others?

Why do churches find themselves inhabited by people who all come from the same class or race or ethnicity or neighborhood?

The answers are not complicated.

We are most comfortable with our own kind, practicing our own customs, in the safety of our own language.

That's human nature.

That's Jonah.

And Jesus, the deep-sea fisherman, just as God does with Jonah, will have nothing of it.

"We are sending you to this old inner-city church," the bishop said to the newly ordained priest.

"Some wonderful people there.

Yes, they are old, been in decline for the last twenty years.

Just a handful of them left.

They won't expect much ministry from you, just go there, visit them, and do your best."

She gulped.

Her first parish was to be this.

She would make the best of it.

In her initial meeting with her vestry, she could see the reality of what the bishop had described – mostly older women, a room full of white hair and pastel dresses.

“I have previously thought I have a gift for working with children,” she told the vestry when they asked about her interests.

“Then the bishop has sent you to the wrong church,” responded one of the women on the vestry, bluntly.

“We are long past those years here.”

Yet in the days that followed, she noticed many children passing each afternoon outside her office, children on their way home.

They weren't the congregation's children, but they were children.

“God, show me a way to ministry here,” she prayed.

One afternoon, she was visiting with one of her parishioners, an older woman.

“Tell me about yourself,” asked the young priest.

She told a story about an earlier life, a career as a pianist in vaudeville in her youth.

“I played some of the best clubs around,” said the old lady with pride.

“Count Basie, Duke Ellington, I knew 'em all.”

A light went on in the young priest's brain.

“Would you play for the church ... on next Wednesday afternoon?”

“Sure, if I can get these poor old bony, arthritic fingers to work,” said the woman.

“I'll take an extra dose of aspirin and I think I can be ready.”

The priest asked two women to make sandwiches.

On Wednesday, the four of them rolled the old piano out the double doors of the fellowship hall, doors that had not been opened in a decade.

Gladys sat down at the piano, out on the front porch of the fellowship hall, and began to play.

She played a medley of hits from the twenties and thirties and then some ragtime.

By 3:30 a crowd of children had gathered.

The priest passed out the sandwiches.

Gladys moved from "In The Mood" to "Jesus Loves Me."

The children clamored forward.

The priest told them a story of a man named Jesus.

They promised to come back next week.

That was a year ago.

Today, nearly a hundred children crowd in the church every Wednesday afternoon.

On Sundays, Sunday school rooms are full, being taught by a group of older women who thought they were too old to have children.

Those children brought their parents.

Where there was once death, there was now life.

Easter joy.

And the vestry met the next year and asked the bishop -- to move their new priest.

"It's just not the same church," they said.....

Jesus calls us into deep waters.

And we in unison say: "Get out of here, Jesus!"

Willimon, Selected Sermons, 166-7.

It's the usual response to God's call.

Moses insisted he couldn't organize his people because he was a stutterer.

Jeremiah pleaded that his youth disqualified him from God's crazy call to tell the king that: "You king, are all wet!"

Jonah, like the folks in that piano playing church, was also slow to get the message: but God, my friends, will not be denied.

When the people of Nineveh heard Jonah, they did the unthinkable.

From the top man to the lowest servant, everyone repented, even the cows repented: which is why I think Mel Brooks great grand-daddy wrote the book of Jonah.

And Jonah is angry!

“Get out of here, God!” he pouts from under a bush.

And God says to Jonah, “Stop grumbling. I made *everyone*. I made *everything*. How can I not smile when 120,000 children, women and men turn around; how can I not be glad to save even their cows?”

We live in times when yelling at each other has replaced giving each other the benefit of the doubt; when pride of place or skin or origin sends everyone to their own corner, waiting for the next round to begin.

You and I are called to a different life.

It’s the life we will baptize these babies into in just a minute or two.

Their parents and godparents will come forward, and speaking for their children, as parents must do, these parents and godparents will make promises.

Promises to step into this parade of folks from all over the world, from Palama to Afghanistan, and all points in between.

Promises to learn, a day at a time, this new life that is so at odds with how I am used to thinking, so at odds with the dominant culture’s pushing and prodding.

And because this life is so different, we need the company of each other; it’s why we gather each week: to remind each other that when your instinct or mine cries out “Get out of here, Jesus!” you can remind me, and I can remind you, of the wonders that come with fishing -- fishing in the deep.

+amen

