

## Uprooted

Well, I'm wondering if your week began something like mine did?

A kind of collective "holding our breath" to see how the week would unfold?

Will there be more riots and efforts at insurrection?

Would there be assassination attempts against our new president or vice president?

Or would we at long last have a peaceful transfer of power with the hope of a new day dawning?

No matter your politics, I think we can all agree that these have been times of tremendous, what shall we call it, uprooting?

What passed for relative peace and calm these last 40 years has been revealed to be something of a myth.

Certainly the privileged and powerful, folks like yours truly, enjoyed a great deal of peace and prosperity this last generation.

But what these recent events have shown is that a great many of our fellow human beings, here and abroad, have experienced anything but peace and prosperity in these last 40 years.

From needless wars in the Middle East to the continuing systemic racism at home, from the marginalization of high school educated white men to the continued relegation of women to second class citizenship, as evidenced by their substandard pay rates, this generation has not been a peaceful one.

Nor has it been a just one.

So it is no small irony this morning that our gospel lesson takes us to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

And Jesus begins by doing to his followers what recent events have done to us: they — and we — are being uprooted!

They and we are being uprooted from what we think we know.

From what we are sure is the best for everyone — and then suddenly being forced to acknowledge that, perhaps, we are wrong!

This process of being uprooted, whether from Peter and Andrew's fishing boat or from comfortable ideologies, or comfortable bigotries and prejudices, is at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus.

And thank God for that, because as painful as being uprooted is, once we surrender to it, we find ourselves heading into adventures and insights and depths that we would never have known — but for the uprooting.

Just ask Peter, who never in his wildest imagination dreamed that he would heal the sick, see visions that changed everything he thought he knew about God, and die as a martyr in Rome.

Or Andrew, who went on to become the patron saint of the Greek Orthodox Church.

So what has all of the uprooting of the last four years revealed to us?

And in what new directions may this uprooting push us to explore?

And there is this.

Should we thank the uprooters?

The Trumps?

The Proud Boys?

The Supremesists?

Because truth be told, they not only helped cause the division, they exposed what so many of us were blind to.

Much like that civil servant three years ago, who pushed the wrong button - sending us all into panic that a nuclear bomb was coming.

While lots of folks got mad at him, more than being the source of a panic, he revealed to us the panic we ought to feel - given the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the world.

And the ease with which they can destroy everything.

Being uprooted is nothing new in our faith.

It seems to be Rule One for any follower of God.

Jonah is uprooted as he's told to go to Nineveh and urge them to turn around.

We don't know what was facing them, but people in general are experts at getting themselves into a mess.

Of course, Jonah is Exhibit A of folks who resist being uprooted!

He is the world's most uncooperative prophet.

When God tells him to go, he runs away.

Because the Ninevites are arch-enemies of Israel.

And Jonah, like his countrymen, hates them.

Go on a mission to keep these arch-enemies from catastrophe?

Jonah says "Forget it!"

So he runs away, only to get swallowed by a whale, who lovingly vomits Jonah onto a Ninevite beach.

Then, after preaching the world's shortest — and most effective — sermon of all time, ("40 days to repent or else!"), (sorry to say a talent your Rector does NOT have!) lo and behold, the entire city listens!

They change their hearts — and are saved.

Uprooted Jonah uproots the Ninevites — and a whole people avoids disaster.

St. Paul too is hard at work uprooting the members of his newly formed community in Corinth.

Paul is a pro at uprooting, as you know, probably because Jesus so unceremoniously uprooted Paul from all that Paul thought he knew.

Whether as a Pharisee who hunted down the new Christ believers, or as the last apostle, thrown on his backside after encountering the risen Lord, this most fervent preacher of the gospel seems to have a knack for poking a stick in people's eyes.

Today, the community at Corinth is in a real mess.

It's made up of Jews and Greeks, rich and poor, insiders and outsiders.

What they struggle the most with is how to trade in their old ways of living, with its distinctions based on class and money and race and good looks, into this new way of living that sees every person, irrespective of circumstance, as a beloved child of God.

Paul insists that the old way is ending.

You hear the urgency in Paul's voice:

"The appointed time grows short; so those who have wives be as though they've none, the mourners as though they're not mourning, the rejoicers as though they're not rejoicing, and those who deal with the world as though they've no dealings with it.

For this world is passing away!"

In other words, because self-giving love is, in Christ, invading the world, let go of whatever keeps you from jumping on that train, because that train is bound for glory!

Which brings us to Jesus today, picking up where John the Baptist left off, encouraging folks to come to a complete stop in whatever they're doing, to take stock, to change direction, to enter into the larger mind of God.

For the Ninevites it took a barfed up reluctant prophet for folks to get the message and take it to heart.

For the Corinthians, it's a reformed Pharisee.

For the folks hearing Jesus, the outcasts and nobodies end up having the ears to hear what the big shots and holy rollers can't fathom.

And the question for us today is will the uprooting we have undoubtedly experienced these last years move us too?

Will we at long last dismantle the effects of our nation's original sin of systemic racism?

Will we pursue the necessary repentance of remorse, reparations and restitution to the African American people?

Will we take seriously the downward spiral of our climate, caused by human greed and insatiable human need, and change how we live?

Will we redistribute wealth so that the days when a handful of people own more wealth than half the human race becomes a distant memory, a profound embarrassment, a mark of shame on those who call themselves "civilized?"

To be a follower of Jesus is to be a willing participant in the adventure of being uprooted.

As Henry Nouwen came to see, having left behind a tenured professorship at Yale in order to look after a completely incapacitated young man in a care home,

"Keep your eyes on the one who refuses to turn stones into bread, jump from great heights or rule with great power.

Keep your eyes on the one who says 'blessed are the poor, the gentle, those who mourn and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; blessed are the merciful, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted in the cause of righteousness...'

Keep your eyes on the one who is poor with the poor, weak with the weak and rejected with the rejected.

That one is the source of all peace." World Vision magazine.

May your uprooting lead you to joy.

+amen.