

January 24, 2021 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Jonah 3:1-5, 10, Psalm 62:5-12
1 Corinthians 7:29-31, Mark 1:14-20

[Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus*, page 132.
Debie Thomas in Journey with Jesus for January 24, 2021 and posted on January 17, 2021, title I Will Make.
Rev. Jane McBride in reflections and sermon preparation for this date.]

Would you pray with me:

May the words of our lips,
the meditations of our hearts,
the exchange in this faithful community,
be acceptable in your sight, O God, our rock and our salvation. Amen

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ Jesus.

What a week.

I've said that before, and not so long ago!
In it all, I'm left a bit breathless, hopeful and yet my head is spinning.
Between the grief of the pandemic, the dynamics of race, the insurrection, and the start of the new
administration racing, rightly, into the first 100 days in this land of much strife, much pain,
to name the intensity of this time is an understatement.

Each of our readings this morning shares an air of intensity.

It's the fullness of time.
We—like Jonah,
like Paul with the people of Corinth,
like Simon and Andrew, James and John who we'll hear about soon—
we are called to respond.

Today our sermon is an I wonder, I notice sermon, and I promise to share a bit at the end.

This style of interactive preaching is familiar to some and new to others.
And, as you can imagine, it's adjusted when we do it on Zoom and live stream.
I'll share more about how this works in a bit.
For now, as you listen this first time to the Gospel,
listen with your curiosity piqued,
muse and wonder and notice.
After I've read the Gospel once,
I'll explain how this special kind of preaching works and how you can be involved.

READ Mark 1:14-20...

In an “I wonder, I notice” sermon, we’re all preachers.

We’re all called to engage the scripture.

You’ve heard me read the Gospel once already.

In a few minutes I’ll read it again, slowly.

Your job, then, is to interrupt me.

In the sanctuary, I’d ask you to interrupt me verbally.

Here in this weird Zoom virtual world, you who are on Zoom,
interrupt using the chat line.

Interrupt by **typing** a phrase that begins either

“I wonder... (whatever you wonder)” or “I notice... (whatever you notice).”

My colleague, Nick Tangen, from our staff, will amplify all that comes through the Zoom chat.

We aren’t able to amplify the YouTube comments but those using YouTube can certainly add comments.

Nick will do the verbal interrupting on behalf of the writers.

After Nick has interjected what is in the Zoom chat,

I’ll continue reading the gospel until I’m interrupted again.

Today it may sound like this at the beginning,

“Now after John was arrested...”

I notice that these must have been intense times for Jesus and for John.

Or, I wonder how Jesus reacted to John’s arrest.

Remember, only two rules...

1. There are no wrong answers, let the Spirit lead us as a community.

You may feel like you don’t know enough, but really those can be the best interruptions.

Your role is to add your typed interruption in the chat... It only works if people do.

2. Use the structure.

Begin your typed interruption with I wonder... or I notice...

Ready? Give me a wave so I know we’re together.

Fingers ready to type? Ready for some revelation?

God bless our wondering and our noticing.

READ Mark 1:14-20 SLOWLY...

(Note for those reading this online: People added A LOT of comments, many, many, right from the start, more than usual, pretty incredible.)

Thank you!

Let's continue in this same spirit,

still using the "I wonder, I notice" structure, still typing in the chat line on Zoom...

What else do you notice? What else do you wonder?

(More added here...)

Your wondering, your noticing, they make this rich. Thank you.

Particularly in these days,

let me offer a few things I found myself wondering and noticing
about the gospel, but also about the inauguration, and about our calling.

I noticed the power struggle subtly present in that initial phrase, "Now after John was arrested."

It's easy to miss, but it sets the stage, it clarifies the fight.

Which world will triumph? Herod's world so set on quieting the likes of prophet's like John? Like Jesus?

Where exploitation may be the most real thing?

Or God's world? Rooted in humility and equity, mutual love and service?

Where a God-given sense of beloved-ness and interdependence reigns?

Jesus is venturing out, calling his first disciples, in the shadows of this power struggle.

2000-some years later, that power struggle still pulls.

The chaos of these past years, and even these last weeks, has been, in great part, a terrifying mark of that struggle—which will win? and what will be the repercussions?

Then, on the heels of that power struggle, I notice urgency.

This is the MO of Mark's gospel, you'll hear it time and again through this cycle of readings.

Immediately this happened, *immediately* that happened.

The time is fulfilled, and now.

I suspect many of us know a thing or two about urgency, but we often don't root it in these verses.

We should. It's far too easy to go along, to complicity let the tide carry us.

But if not now, when?

I suspect that one of the things that drew us so strongly to Wednesday's ceremony and Amanda Gorman's poem was her urgency: She just kept going.

Did you notice the pronouns? How instead of the "I" pronoun, she chose "We",
In so doing, as Pastor Jane McBride writes, "She offered us a shared identity, a common narrative,
and a collective vision of the work before us
in a way that did not erase anyone's distinctiveness
or deny the importance of our differences."

The work is before us, the time is now, and in this moment, much to Mark's delight, we are alert.

I notice that line that many have heard a million times, "I will make you fish for people."

So often this has been understood as making us missionaries, bringing people to Christ.

Ched Myers in his book *Binding the Strong Man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus* offers some historical illumination..

This image comes from the Hebrew Bible, from the prophets Jeremiah, Amos and Ezekiel
(see Jeremiah 16:16, Amos 4:2, Ezekiel 29:4).

It's actually a euphemism for God's judgment on the rich and on the powerful.

As Myers says, "Taking this mandate [of the earlier prophets] for his own, Jesus is inviting common folk
[even these fisherfolk] to join him in his struggle to overturn the existing order of power and privilege."
I will make you fish for people, Jesus says, or I will make you work together to reorder this world.

Finally, I notice how in calling, change is inherent.

I notice how the brothers are called and they leave their father in the boat with the hired men.

I wonder about the dynamics of that moment, and of the quiet (or maybe not so quiet) conversations in the days that followed.

Calling, of any sort, involves change.

A new job or relationship, a shift in understanding of one's identity, a new administration with new policies, a fresh opportunity, a new direction. Change, all of it, change.

Some go through this quickly, others need to linger.

In typical Mark fashion, he doesn't dwell on what this might have felt like, but we can make some guesses about the emotions for the brothers, and also for their dad, and for those hired men.

In times of change, I take heart in Jesus' words: "I will make."

He says, "I'll make you fishers..."

There's that sense that we don't have to create all the change, but rather God is re-making us: each of us, the brothers, their dad.

I so valued and respected President Biden's words on Wednesday,

his honesty and empathy about the pain,
his clear call to be in it together,
his confession: "My soul is in this."

These are a powerful witness, a healing balm, and many heard it, many felt it, I know I did.

Friends, let me be honest, and I don't think I'm alone in this:

I find inaugurations, particularly in times when I'm hungry for hope, incredibly moving.

Yes, I wept on Wednesday, and I know I wasn't alone.

And, while so hopeful, at once, there is this little part of my brain and heart

that can begin to think of a president (any president) whose politics I resonate with, as a savior.

We're certainly hearing this about the former president and portions of his base

who believe him to be the Messiah.

This is dangerous territory, clearly dangerous for a democratic nation.

And dangerous for our souls.

Beloved ones, as Christians, we've got a Savior.

We have got a Savior in Jesus Christ who calls us on the lake shore,

whose reign is real,

whose way is justice love,

whose grace holds us in the winds of change, and calls us into faithful community and love of neighbor.

Knowing well our Savior's voice, then when crucial words and actions resonate,

we can find real hope,

we can be part of what is to come, what is so desperately needed.

Then we can follow the great poet's lead, "To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters, and conditions.

Knowing well our Savior's voice, we, too, can heed the call, can be part of the change.

Thanks be to God. Amen.