

## January 21, 2024, Third Sunday after Epiphany

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### Introduction

As we continue through the time after Epiphany, stories of the call to discipleship show us the implications of our baptismal calling to show Christ to the world. Jesus begins proclaiming the good news and calling people to repentance right after John the Baptist is arrested for preaching in a similar way. Knowing that John was later executed, we see at the very outset the cost of discipleship. Still, the two sets of brothers leave everything they have known and worked for all their lives to follow Jesus and fish for people.

### Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your Spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

### First Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” <sup>5</sup>And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

<sup>10</sup>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.

### Psalm 62:5-12

<sup>5</sup>For God alone I | wait in silence;  
truly, my hope | is in God.

<sup>6</sup>**God alone is my rock and | my salvation,  
my stronghold, so that I shall nev- | er be shaken.**

<sup>7</sup>In God is my deliverance | and my honor;  
God is my strong rock | and my refuge.

<sup>8</sup>**Put your trust in God al- | ways, O people,  
pour out your hearts before the one who | is our refuge.**

<sup>9</sup>Those of high degree are but a fleeting breath; those of low estate can- | not be trusted.  
Placed on the scales together they weigh even less | than a breath.

<sup>10</sup>**Put no trust in extortion; in robbery take no | empty pride;  
though wealth increase, set not your | heart upon it.**

<sup>11</sup>God has spoken once, twice | have I heard it,

that power belongs to God.

**<sup>12</sup>Steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord,  
for you repay all according to their deeds.**

### **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31**

<sup>29</sup>Brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, <sup>30</sup>and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, <sup>31</sup>and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

### **Gospel: Mark 1:14-20**

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

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

Prayers and introductions from  
[SundaysAndSeasons.com](http://SundaysAndSeasons.com)

## Prayers of Intercession

As we celebrate Christ embodied in human form, we pray for God's blessing on the church, the world, and all of creation.

*A brief silence.*

God our rock and deliverance, do not let your church be shaken. We trust you never abandon your promises to the most vulnerable among us. Give your church wisdom and empathy in its varied ministries. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

God our hope and refuge, you placed the fish in the sea. Guide our care of oceans and all creatures that live in them. Hold us accountable for actions that endanger water sources and the people who depend on them. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

God who proclaims judgement and offers mercy, be a model to the leaders of our nation and the world. As they lead, may they follow in your way of justice and truth. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

God who cares for the suffering, care for survivors of assault and sexual abuse and sustain all who minister to them (*as the martyr, Agnes, ministered to victims of sexual abuse*). Keep safe any who live under threat of violence, those living in poverty, and any among us who are ill or in pain. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

God of resurrection and new life, as the first disciples shared the good news, empower us and this faith community to be open to your call. When we are uncertain of your call, assure us. When we have strayed from your ways, redirect us. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

God who holds the saints against your tender bosom, we trust you welcome them into your care. Comfort those who grieve, even as we place our hope in your salvation. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

Knowing the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we offer these prayers and the silent prayers of our hearts in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

## **A reflection for this Third Sunday after Epiphany**

### **When Saying Yes Requires Saying No**

It was one of those thought-for-the-day-calendars you find in your Christmas stocking. The sayings mostly were trite and pithy, but every so often there was a truth worth repeating, for example: "Decide what you want and what you are willing to exchange for it. Set your priorities and go to work." In other words, if we're serious, saying yes to one thing often requires saying no to something else.

Jonah—after fleeing from the mission to which God was calling him (and three days and nights in the belly of the fish!)—now says "No!" to his former urges and "Yes!" to God as he sets out as God's prophet to Nineveh. Paul invites us to say "No!" to trivial matters and "Yes!" to the things of God that have serious and eternal consequences. Jesus calls the disciples to say "No!" to their boats and nets and families and much of everything else they have known and to say "Yes!" to his "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

We feel a kinship with Jonah's situation, because he struggles. He runs away from God and only relents after a huge fish vomits him onto a distant shore. The call-response stories of Simon, Andrew, James, and John make it all seem so easy. One little word of invitation from Jesus and these men turn in an instant from fishers to disciples.

But most of us live somewhere in the middle, not resisting God's call with the vigor of Jonah but certainly responding more slowly and ambiguously than the disciples. So a question for today is: To what is God calling us to say "No!"? Remember, it's not just the ugly stuff but often good things that must be denied for the sake of following Jesus. And then we must also ask in faith: To what is Jesus inviting us to say "Yes!"?



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