

**FOCUS:** The Good News is we are called to proclaim the Good News. (Second in a two-part series)

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last Sunday, when we gathered here to hear the Word proclaimed and to share in the Eucharistic feast, we heard the challenge of our presiding bishop, Mark Hanson, who recently told a gathering of area Lutherans that, “The church will not stop its decline until the leaders of the church start inviting the unchurched.” We heard this challenge in light of the Gospel text for last Sunday, when Philip invited his friend, Nathanael, to “come and see” what this rabbi named Jesus was teaching. Philip was a leader among the disciples of Jesus, even at that early moment, and even if he didn’t recognize his leadership role.

Today, in the Old Testament reading, we hear the reluctant leader, Jonah, who was sent by God to the city of Nineveh to proclaim its coming destruction by God because the king and people of Nineveh were acting in evil ways before the Lord, and the Lord was displeased. Jonah, as we know from the story, was a reluctant leader. He tried to flee from the voice of God, only to find himself aboard a ship being tossed by the rough seas. To calm the seas, he was tossed overboard, and the large fish—sometimes we call it a whale—was sent there by God to swallow up Jonah and keep him safe. It was in the belly of the fish that Jonah came to his senses, if you will, and realized that the Lord had called on him for a reason, and the reluctant Jonah then set off to do as the Lord called him, proclaiming the impending destruction of the evil Nineveh. For three days, Jonah walked across the city and proclaimed the coming calamity.

But much to Jonah’s chagrin, the king of Nineveh heard the message, and came to understand that he and his people were in serious trouble. In light of his revelation, the king ordered the entire city—people and animals alike, to don sackcloth and begin fasting. Even the *king* put on sackcloth and sat in a pile of ashes. Cattle and sheep were seen throughout the city with sackcloth on them as well. The city fasted and repented, because they heard the Word of the Lord from a reluctant leader.

When the forty days had come and gone, God decided *not* to destroy the city, but granted it His grace and mercy, just as Jonah had known from the start God would do. But Jonah wasn’t happy about God doing this. No, indeed, Jonah pouted and complained that God had made Jonah look foolish, because God didn’t do what He sent Jonah to tell the city. Jonah was upset because God showed His abundant grace and mercy! How foolish is that? Jonah was upset because God didn’t destroy the city. Can you imagine being upset because someone *didn’t* do something destructive or vindictive, but showed grace and mercy? Heck, God even made the large fish a *fisher of men* so that Jonah might be saved. Still, God used the reluctant leader to do God’s work—to make God known to those who did not live godly lives.

Our Gospel this morning offers Mark’s account of the calling of four of the disciples of Jesus—Peter and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John. These four were all simple fishermen. They weren’t well-educated, and had not completed autobiographies, been subjected to a battery of psychological testing, admitted to the seminary for four years of education, sent on internships, and questioned time and time again by a board of religious leaders and lay persons. No, Jesus didn’t have anything that looked like the candidacy process of the ELCA in mind when he called his disciples. Moreover, the men called to be disciples of Jesus didn’t know they wanted to be disciples in the first place.

Jesus sought out ordinary men—and ordinary women, too—to be his disciples. Also, he didn’t limit his teaching to only those whom he invited to come along, but let his message be heard by all who came up to hear it. Many of those who came to hear Jesus teach came because they were invited by people who had already heard Jesus teach and preach.

“Follow me,” Jesus said to the four fishermen. “Stop what you are doing and come along with me, and I’ll teach you how to do some even more important work.” Note that in both cases, the brothers *immediately* stopped what they were doing and followed Jesus. That’s quite a contrast to how Jonah responded to God’s call. Sometimes, when God calls us, it’s a call to serve God in a particular manner—as one called to be a pastor, deaconess, or other rostered leader of the church. Sometimes, we are called to serve in ways we don’t fully understand, or in ways we might not be fully trained.

This latter call is the kind of call that Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Philip experienced. These first disciples of Jesus had no idea what they were getting themselves into. What they did know is that a man came to them and invited them to come along with him, to learn from him, to work with him, and to share in his experiences as the man called on the world to prepare for the coming of the kingdom of God, to repent for their sins, and believe the good news that was proclaimed in their midst. This latter call is the kind of call most of us experience in our own lives, too.

This call to “follow me” and last week’s charge to “come and see” are the types of calls that come with our baptism. In baptism, God chooses us to be His own children, and in being chosen as God’s children, we become the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and as the brothers and sisters of Christ we are coheirs with Christ that all God has promised—including life everlasting. This alone should be enough for us to want to share the Good News and be witnesses of our faith to all those with whom we come in contact. But, thanks be to God, there is even more which we can share with others!

We can, and truly should, proclaim the news that God grants grace—unlimited, unearned, undeserved grace—to all of His chosen people. What does it mean to have God’s grace? It means that God forgives us all of our sins, faults, errors of omission and commission—in short, God forgives everything that we do which is contrary to the way in which we *should* act toward one another. This is not to say that in the secular world around us there are not consequences for our sinfulness. Those who steal are indeed forgiven by God for their actions, but they still face the consequences of their violation of the secular laws with some secular penalty. However, having God’s grace is to know that no matter what we do, God loves us, cares for us, and chooses us to be His own.

And how does this grace come to us? God’s grace comes to us by the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our brother, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. No work or act of any human being can atone for the sinfulness of any human being. So, God sent His only Son to die for us, so that we may never perish, but have everlasting life. This is the Good News, dear sisters and brothers.

So, as our Lord and Savior commands us, I say to you, “Come and see” what God has in store for you. Further, go in to the world and say to those whom you meet, “Come and see” what God is up to in our lives here at Abiding Presence. Share with those around you—those in your own family, your neighborhood, your school, your place or work or business—what God is up to in *your* life. Share with them the invitation of Jesus to “Follow me.”

This morning, we have joined together to publicly reaffirm our baptism in the presence of one another and in the sight of our God who loves us, cares for us, and fills us with His Holy Spirit. Let us go forth from here to exercise and experience that which we have affirmed, including our affirmation to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed. Thanks be to God!