

# SERMON SUPPLEMENTAL

Third Sunday after Epiphany  
January 24, 2021

Our Baptismal Calling

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++KEY IDEA OF THE WEEK++

IMMEDIATELY THEY LEFT THEIR NETS AND FOLLOWED HIM

This Week's Readings: Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 65:5-12; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20



## READINGS IN A NUTSHELL

This year, most of the Gospel readings are coming from the Gospel of Mark. Two Sundays ago, we read Mark's account of Jesus' baptism. Then, immediately after his baptism and His encounter with His Father through the form of a dove and voice, Jesus is sent into the wilderness. Today, we now read about some of the earliest activities Jesus engaged in the days immediately after his return from the desert.

We read that Jesus goes around the Galilean region, primarily the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and recruits young men to join Him in His nascent ministry.

Last week, we read that he called Nathaniel and Philip when he entered their towns. The residents of those towns wondered if Jesus was worthy listening to because of his humble beginning in the backwater hamlet of Nazareth. He was thirty, well advanced in age for man of that era and as far as anyone could tell, He had nothing to show for it. Yet, Nathaniel and Philip left their families and livelihoods to follow Christ.

This week, we read of Jesus calling Andrew and the sons of Zebedee, James and John. Interestingly, the name Zebedee means Thunder. Based on scant evidence available to us today, they paint a portrait of the brothers James and John as quite boisterous and obnoxious in their mannerisms and social skills. They truly were fisherman with very limited social acumen. Images of rough men from the oil fields of Alaska or longshoremen of San Francisco fills my mind's eyes when I read of them. Men that you wouldn't consider being close friends with since they were very rough and uncouth. Yet, Jesus chose them to be His accomplice in His new ministry. Amazing.

These fishermen Jesus chose to partner in ministry would provide some of the greatest and wisest disciples and apostles of Christendom. Perhaps in their humble state, they can hear the Words of God more clearly than most of us. It took Jonah to be alone with himself in the belly of a fish before he could accept God's calling to ministry and prophecy. What we learn from the fishermen is that faith comes easiest to those who don't need to protect their wealthy and power.



## THE CORE IDEA

When we read all four texts this week, I hope you conclude that baptism is a spiritual event that once it occurs to us, it is ongoing. The act is perpetual, never ending.

This week's Gospel reading is centered on the disciples' calls into ministry with Christ. They all leave their livelihoods and families to follow an itinerant preacher that promised a greater world of love, hope and grace.

These disciples didn't just leave, they "died" of their old lives and was reborn new creations in Christ, as the Apostle Paul would later wrote. Spiritually, they shed their old identity and became new beings. This is exemplified by Peter, who was known as Simon but upon becoming a close disciple fo Christ, he became Peter, the Rock.

Theologians have marveled the amazing dedication and commitment of the disciples and questioned if such a group of people could exist today.

We watch their evolution from mere fishermen and tax collectors to being proclaimers, preachers and prophets in the name of Christ.

It wasn't easy for them. Jesus had to live with them and teach them constantly. He watched over them like a hen over her brood. He preached a social gospel of service to the poor, neglected and forgotten. He spoke of equality and lifting the lowly to status equal to the powerful. In a matter of three years, these men (and women) were so moved and convicted by Jesus' theology and philosophy, they chose to risk death and preach the same Gospel that Christ preached.

What Jonah didn't get and what the Psalmists tried to tell us is that faith is possible in all and even in the least of these. The lowly fisherman and disrespected tax collectors were capable of faith and being open to it, they were able to see the saving Work of Christ and power of the message of the Kingdom of God.

One does not simply get faith at a young age and then it stays there. Sadly, in all congregations that I have served, the large majority of the people I serve rarely open the Bible, read about the Scriptures or engage in theology and give scant concerns to the very people Christ asks us to care about.

Let us deepen our faith and continue our journey that was started at baptism and allow ourselves to learn more of Jesus.



## THINKING MORE DEEPLY

The history of the Christian Church is riddled with theological arguments and divisions. We are always finding new ways to differentiate ourselves from other Christians. One of the greatest theological arguments since the beginning of the Christian Church has centered on the act of baptism. There are two primary arguments that still persist today. One, the method that is most biblical and efficacious and two, who can be baptized and how prepared must they be to be baptized.

First, the method: Some Christians believe that in order for baptism to take hold and have effect, a reenactment of the Jewish ritual *mikvah* bath has to be performed. Others think that simply submerging one's whole body under water and staying under long enough to recite a prayer is all that is needed.

And even others believe that a symbolic act is all that is needed and then, some believe that baptisms at a river is the only effective form of baptisms.

We, Lutherans, believe in merely dropping rivulets of water on the head is all is needed to make the baptism take hold. The Baptists believe in total submersion three times in a large pool and the Catholics believe in submersion also. If we were to follow the example of Christ's baptism, it would seem a total immersion experience is closest to being biblically correct. Yet, there is even disagreement over whether we are meant to perform baptism exactly like how Christ was baptized. Geography and climate can make being biblically correct almost impossible to certain groups of faithful Christians.

Then, once we move on from the how to the what of baptism, we realize there is a lot more to the act of baptism than what meets the eyes. For millennia, arguments have raged about what you say and how prepared a person should be to receive baptism.

During the early centuries of the Church, baptism was only done at the Easter vigil after a lengthy education (confirmation) process. The person had to be of an age to understand every aspect of the faith and baptism to be a candidate for it.



## AROUND THE TABLE

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.

Yet, what is implied in the arguments from the earliest years of the Church is that Baptism is a one-time event. However, we Lutherans, believe it is an ongoing and eternal event. Baptism didn't just occur, it is ongoing. After the physical sprinkling of the water on our heads and the smearing of the sacred oil on our foreheads, the spiritual aspect of it takes over from there.

Baptism is like the Big Bang Theory (the astronomy event, not the TV show). There was a moment in which there was a huge explosion that set-in motion the universe we know today. We are still living in that explosion and humanity will continue to do so for millennia to come. Our baptism is still happening.

It is important to celebrate the day of your baptism but it is much more important to recognize your baptism continues today.

And what is it that we should continue to recognize? We need to recognize that when we were baptized, we were called into Jesus' death and resurrection. We were called disciples of Christ and we are still called to be the workers in the fields.

When we were baptized and (for some) confirmed, we made a commitment to God that we would commit our life to a deeper spirituality by reading the Bible regularly, attending worship faithfully, engaging in study always and give voice to those the world has neglected and ignored. Lastly, we need to live a life that proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In Lutheran theology, baptism is the core of our life with Christ. Our sins are forgiven so that we begin anew without the burden of our past mistakes which allows us live freely into the ministry that Christ has endowed to us.

Please understand the centrality of baptism in our lives and the calling that it invites us into as we look for ways to bring forth the Kingdom of God in this world that is often filled with hurts, sadness and divisions. Let us be the light of Christ that gives hope to those in search of life, love and grace.

1. God gave Jonah and Nineveh a second chance. Who needs a second chance from you? (Jonah 3:1-5, 10)
2. When have you had to "wait in silence," remembering the power and steadfast love belong to God? (Ps 62: 5-12)
3. How does knowing the certainty of God's reign help us with present troubles in this life? (1 Cor 7:29-31)
4. God's call is always into an uncertain future. What call, job or relationship are you pondering? (Mark 1:14-20)