

1.21.2024 Epiphany 3

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

“Changing your mind about all things”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Jesus began his ministry proclaiming the good news, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.*” That little word “repent” comes with a lot of baggage. Rather than being understood as a positive change of mind about one’s life, it is often understood negatively as remorse for one’s misdeeds and failures. The word “repent” is often associated with “penitence” and “penance,” outward signs of self-punishment for one’s wrongs. It is easy to see why this little word is often misunderstood.

However, the word “repent” is a translation of the word “*metanoia*,” which means to change one’s mind about things. *Metanoia* means to change the direction of one’s thinking, opening us to God’s kingdom drawn near. This is the good news Jesus proclaims: there is a path that Jesus invites us to follow him on that leads us to the nearness of God’s kingdom.

*Metanoia* means changing our mind about ourselves and others; it means rediscovering God’s kingdom so near as to be within us. As we continue to live into a new year, we hear Jesus’ call, “*Follow me.*” Jesus called Simon and Andrew, and James and John in this same way. What does it mean to change your mind, leave all things, and follow Jesus?

To follow Jesus means *metanoia*, a changing of one’s mind about all things. This is, admittedly, difficult because many of us have made up our minds about things. We don’t want to change. We have understandings about ourselves and others, understandings about what we support, and most of all, a self-identity that we tell others about ourselves. We may say, “I am a mother, a father; I’m single, or I’m a wife or a husband.” We may say “I do this or that job; I’m retired; I’m a Republican or a Democrat; I’m an independent – and I’m independent-minded!” But is this who we really are?

Most of us, your pastor included work with a kind of “self-identity shorthand” based upon our background, education, career, and civic affiliations. But is this who we really are? Am I what I say about myself or what others say about me? Or am I who Jesus calls me to become in following him? Following Jesus involves *metanoia*, a changing of one’s mind about oneself, about others, and about the world, so that we might know God’s kingdom drawn near to us every day.

What does *metanoia* look like? Without using the word, Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians today, writing, “*from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, 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, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.*”

Paul is describing a change of mind that places all things upon Jesus. Paul is describing the *metanoia* of faith which leads to a liberating detachment from this world. It allows us to be in our relationships, to mourn and to rejoice, to possess things while also surrendering everything into God’s hands.

This is what Simon and Andrew, and James and John did when Jesus called them. They changed their minds about themselves, surrendering themselves to Jesus’ call and leading. Abandoning their old self-understanding, they discovered their new selves as fishers of people – people who want to share Jesus.

So often we think of Christianity as a theology that we must agree with rather than a relationship with a living Lord whom we follow in all things. This is why people may become upset when Jesus leads the church into new directions. We may say, “We’ve never done that before!” “That’s not what I agree with!” and so on and so forth. When Jesus called the disciples, and when Jesus calls us, he doesn’t hand out a prospectus asking if we agree. He asks us to a repentance of changing our minds by following him. He calls us to *metanoia* and faith. Jesus calls us to discipleship.

My own story is not unique. There are also many in this congregation who have also left something behind to follow Jesus’ call in their lives. Like Jesus meeting the disciples where they lived and worked, Jesus comes to us in our daily lives. It could be a new job, a career change, a marriage, or retirement plans. When I had just graduated from college, I followed Jesus’ call into global mission service to Japan. I left everything I had known until that point in my life to follow that call: family, friends, possessions, and I discovered a renewed self-identity as a disciple of Jesus. Like Paul’s words in today’s reading, I lived as if I had no family, friends, or possessions. This doesn’t mean that I stopped loving my parents, siblings, friends, and the land of my birth. Rather, it means I was learning to walk in this world with the detachment of *metanoia* that frees us to follow Jesus while loving and caring for all we have been given.

The journey of *metanoia* and faith requires prayer and time in conversation with Jesus.

Christianity is not simply a theology or a creed, it is a living relationship with Jesus raised and alive. To deal with this world as though we have no dealings with it, requires dealings with Jesus in prayer. Like someone lost in their work so that they become at one with their work and their calling, so too, Christians walk with and follow Jesus. Look to him. Pray to and listen for him.

I would like to share a story. There was someone who had become well-known as having a close relationship with Jesus. This person prayed constantly yet was also very good at their work. One day a traveler visited this person's farm. The traveler had come a great distance to seek this person's advice about faith. The traveler found the person they came to see absorbed in their work feeding and tending livestock in an outbuilding. The traveler knocked on the door, and getting no response, came inside, yet the person they came to see just kept working.

Finally, exasperated, the traveler said, "I have come all this way to talk with you about faith and Jesus." Yet the other person kept working. Finally, the traveler was about to leave, and the other person stopped working and said, "Jesus called you to follow him, and yet you come to me asking me for advice that you can follow. Why don't you simply ask Jesus. The one who called you will lead you on your journey and in your work."

Can you follow Jesus and leave yourself behind? Watch with him, work alongside him, pray with him, and live unreservedly in this world loving your family and your neighbor.

Jesus will free you from this noisy and broken world. Follow him, and others will know God's kingdom drawn near in you. Amen.