

Epiphany 3B

January 22, 2012

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Jonah 3:1-5,10

Reluctant, but finally consented to go; God was about to act.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

The appointed time has grown short.

Mark 1:14-20

Jesus announces, "The time has come"; says, "Follow me."

There are times that I am the consummate procrastinator. I try to avoid them, or at least I try to deny that it is procrastination, but there are times. But some days a mood overtakes me, and I decide; this is the day. I am going to sort through my old clothes; I am going to clean up the junk drawer in my dresser; I am going to answer the letters that have piled up for the last six months. I think all of us have that procrastinator gene. But we also have something in us that gets us off dead center, and gets us moving to make a decision and take some action. I thank God for the spiritual jolt, like a spark from a hot wood fire that pops into my lap, and gets me hopping.

Jesus stepped out of his low visibility youth, and submitted himself to John's baptism. Now he was noticed and in motion: He said "the time has come"; HIS time had come. He told Andrew and Simon Peter, "Follow me! I will make you fish for people." He would give them some training first, but would quickly put them to work. And the response they gave was to immediately drop everything. They left their fishing business, their source of income for their families. They were giving up their occupations, at least for a while, to follow Jesus. This required a conscious decision to break with their old way of life and commit to a new life. And they made that commitment without really knowing where it would take them; or for how long; or at what cost. None of that mattered because they could see that this was a once in a lifetime chance to experience being in God's inner circle. God's spark had landed in their lap, and they were excited for what might happen.

What about the calls you and I get during our day to follow God? Are we like Andrew and Simon, ready to commit, or like Jonah, headed the other way, reluctant to take on any change, or risk, or inconvenience? Jonah finally yielded to God's call out of a realization, or more accurately, a resignation that he was never going to escape God's plan. But when Jesus called, those fishermen lined up; dropped their fishing nets; left their family business, because they were so excited – THRILLED – about the possibilities that were being offered to them.

I cannot get excited (in a good way) about the prospect of being swallowed up by a fish to learn God's plan. But I AM excited about my work in the church, learning how to fish for people. So what exactly does that mean; to fish for people?

You and I are the church. The church exists to be the sign of the K of G in the world. Yours and my job is to show the world what the K of G is like. We are TO BE the sign that points to the K of G. A sign always points to something beyond itself; greater than itself. If you see a sign on the road that says "vista point ahead", you don't photograph the sign; you wait to see the vista.

The church does NOT exist to bring focus to the church; our existence is to bring focus to the K of G. That is the action Jesus calls us to. As a community of faith, our actions, our interactions, our passions, our commitments, are all intended to point to the K of G.

There are times this seems like a formidable task. How could God possibly expect you and me to make a difference in the hearts of someone else; of people across Silicon Valley, or across this country, or in the world? Well, let me share a short story I found:

Anthony de Mello in *The Heart of the Enlightened* (N. Y.: Doubleday, 1991) tells of a great and foolish king who complained that the rough ground hurt his feet. So he ordered the whole country to be carpeted with cowhide.

The court jester laughed when the king told him of his order. “What an absolutely crazy idea, Your Majesty,” he cried. “Why all the needless expense? Just cut out two small pads to protect your feet!” That is what the king did, and that purportedly is how the idea of shoes was born.

Are we ready to go forth and take on Jesus’ mission to the world? Maybe we can’t smooth out the entirety of the world’s terrain to make it easy for the world to come to Jesus. But we can “mind the shoe-leather” of our own callings and take him with us as we go.

Our Gospel lesson tells us a lot more than how Jesus selected and recruited his first disciples. Those first followers of Jesus model that the choice to be followers requires not only belief, but also action.

There is the act of making a break with an old way of life, and committing to the new. How has your life changed because of your relationship with Jesus Christ? How do you want your life to change further? What decisions do you need to make, to convert that need to change into a reality?

There is the act of scrutinizing what we do as a faith community, making ourselves accountable to each other and to God, that what we do is always focused on leading people to the Kingdom of God.

How do you assess our balance between fellowship and worship?

Our balance between inreach and outreach?

Our effectiveness in fueling our own spiritual growth?

Our commitment to challenge the unchurched people we know to find out what being a Christian REALLY means? Does it all point to the K of G?

Third and finally; from the story about wearing shoes, there is the act of pushing against our own boundaries, deciding to do things we have not done before, finding confidence because we know that we take Jesus with us as we go.

There should be nothing boring about our living out Jesus’ call to faith and action. If you are bored, something is missing in your faith! If you are bored, pray for God to send a spiritual spark into your lap. Pray for that spark to fuel a decision for action that will give you;
new perspective,
new energy,

new goals,
new expectations,
and new life.

The Kingdom of God has come near.
Get excited over the possibilities!
Don't put it off.
The time has come.
Follow Jesus!
Amen!