

1/4 Holy Communion, 22nd January 2012

The Promise of God:
God's who thinks again

3rd Sunday of
Epiphany

Jonah 3. 1 – 5, 10
Mark 1. 14 – 20

What we are looking at, over the next few weeks
(in this general theme of revelation)
is how God's people
discovered new things about God.

Jonah believes in a God of Wrath.
But look at what God had already shown him.

God gave Jonah instruction - Go North to Ninevah.
Jonah disobeyed.
He set sail to cross the Mediterranean.
God was angry, and he stopped Jonah with a storm.

The sailors knew the way God worked.
Life-threatening storm => God was angry.
Who is he angry with - Jonah - throw him off.
And the storm calmed.
But Jonah has been punished for disobeying God.

What happens next? Does Jonah drown? NO.
God saves him, and gives him a second chance.
Chapter 3 - today's reading

*The word of the Lord came to Jonah
a second time
"Go to Ninevah ..."*

What sort of God does Jonah serve?
Not a God of insatiable wrath,
but a God of the second chance.

This is Good News!

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Now we turn to Mark's Gospel,
And we see that God's mind has changed again.

For years, for centuries,
God has spoken to his people.
"Trust me. Wait. And I will deliver."

But the prophets also said -
there is coming a day when the waiting will be over.
On that Day - God will do a new thing.

And so with John the Baptist, the message changes.
Wait no more. Now is the time.
God has begun his new thing.
Get ready now for the kingdom of God.

And the way the people are to get ready,
is the same as in Jonah's message -
Repent - and God will not punish you, but save you.

So here in Mark 1 -
Jesus is about to call his first disciples.
But why? Because the new thing is starting.

Mark 1. 14

*Jesus went into Galilee,
proclaiming the Good News of God.
"The time has come", he said.
"The Kingdom of God is near.
Repent and Believe the Good News."*

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So we find here a revealing of God's nature
He is unchanging - AND he is doing a fresh thing.

We see a revealing of God's purpose in Jesus.

He is the coming kingdom.

He is the promised king.

He is the Saviour, and Not Yet Judge.

And we see a revealing of God's purpose
for the church
in the calling of the disciples.

To share in the proclamation.

To catch people into God's saving net.

And we see also the response
of those Jesus called.

"Come follow me"

At once they left their nets and followed him.

Simon and Andrew, James and John.
last week, Philip and Nathaniel.

They had good excuses.

- Got a job to do.
- Can't abandon our elderly father to the business alone.
- I've got a sick mother-in-law

But they followed. No delay.

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This is the nature of faith.
Jonah's was weak, but growing.
The fishermen's was young, but strong.

If you are making a life-choice -
you weigh it all up, think again,
and make plans, maybe, to do something different.

If you are responding to the word of the Lord,
and if you trust the one who calls,
then you do as he says, when he says.

Remember - God changes - as we change.

If we choose to be independent
God lets us get on with it
but things are not as good as they could be.

If we surrender to God's call on our lives
God can make plans where we fit in.
God has had those plans for a long time
and he has been waiting for the right time.

Today is the right time
to do what God has been asking.

For the first disciples.
For today's disciples.
For you and me.

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Setting the Scene

Quick Quiz:

- ? **What happens when you drop an apple from a great height?**
It gets bruised / damaged.
- ? **What happens if you heat up butter?**
it goes soft, turns to oil, burns.
- ? **What happens if you don't do your homework?**
You fall behind - you get told off.
- ? **What if you don't look when you cross the road?**
You step into danger - maybe get hurt badly.

Lots of things in life are predictable. So,

- ? **What happens if you break an important rule?**
You get into trouble - punished!
- ? **What happens if you break God's laws?**
You suffer God's wrath!

That is what **Jonah** thought.

He was sent by God to speak to the city of Ninevah.

Because their behaviour displeased God.

He went, as God told him, and told them off!

He thought he knew God's mind.

- You are bad people.
- God is angry.
- He will punish you.
- Six weeks and you'll be gone!

He looked forward, maybe,

to seeing Ninevah go up in smoke!

But something different happened!

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The people of Ninevah, and their leaders,
heard his message, believed it,
and were grieved in their hearts!
They were sorry, and changed their ways!
They didn't scoff - they repented!

And as Jonah waited for the thunderbolt,
as he looked for God's punishment, it didn't come!

So he goes knocking on God's door.
"I told them you would punish them.
"And you haven't. WHY NOT!"

And God says - very surprisingly, but clearly:
"I HAVE CHANGED MY MIND."

Some things are not predictable.
God is not predictable!

God, unlike most people,
is not into punishment for revenge.
He wants to restore.
He wants to make things better.
He wants bad things to change.

And when we change - God's plans for us can change.
That's our theme today - God responds - God thinks again!

More later

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Birthdays and presentations

Testimony time and **Collection**