

Our Scriptures for today are rich with reminders about the nature and character of God, and about our calling as followers of Christ.

From the portion of the story about Jonah, we learn that the mind of God is capable of change. Divine will is not static, but evolves in relationship with people.

From the Psalm, we have images of God as rock, as salvation, as stronghold, as refuge. For the Psalmist, God is worth waiting for, God is worth trusting, God is the source of both honor and safety. God is the one before whom we can pour out our hearts. Both power and steadfast love are God's, and so is the ability to respond to people according to their actions.

From the letter to the church in Corinth, we learn not so much about God directly, but about one pastor's ideas about how we are to live in light of our relationship with the God of the universe and in light of the nature of the universe itself: "For the present form of this world is passing away." (1 Cor 7:31)

This past week all of us here in the Portland metro area have experienced the truth of that statement. None of us can control the weather, and the weather brought disruptions large and small to all of our lives. We're all giving thanks that the ice is melting, but it hasn't passed away quickly enough for us to even be able to gather together safely in person this week! For myself, I welcomed the chance to slow down, to be home with my kids without the schedule demands of getting everyone out the door at particular times for school and sports. I am, however, supremely glad that schools should all be back in session again Monday morning! I'm also mindful that there are some local households that are going to be in states of chaos and disruption for months to come as they recover from damages to their homes and property. In both our personal and in our communal lives, sometimes we lament that our world is always changing, and sometimes it seems it just can't change fast enough.

Enter today's gospel. As we encounter the story, Jesus' cousin and friend, John, has been put in jail. Jesus comes with a message: the kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe the good news. Turn away from the lie that death is all there is, turn away from the lie that there's not enough for everyone, turn away from the lies that power, wealth and privilege tell, and turn toward the truth that God is close. Turn toward the truth that God is love. Turn toward the truth that God is generous and provides more than enough for everyone. Turn toward the truth that God loves you.

When Jesus says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news,” it’s almost as if Jesus is saying that John’s arrest is good news. I suspect that John’s mother, Elizabeth, received it as anything but good news that her son was in jail. And still, Jesus is sharing that God is close. People in authority putting John in jail means that people in authority are waking up to the changes that must happen in Jesus’ time. People with governmental authority and people with monetary authority are scared of having to give up some of the power they hold, they’re scared of the changes they see happening if more people follow John, and so they put him in jail. But Jesus doesn’t let his cousin’s arrest and imprisonment stop him from continuing his own mission.

If you, like me, can easily get distracted by or caught up in the distresses of the people around me, or the wider world – because there really is so very much that is awful in the world - this is an important point. The text doesn’t say whether Jesus actually visits John in jail. What we do know is that Jesus keeps on with his mission of calling people in Galilee. *He doesn’t let his family’s distress keep him from carrying on the work of God.* He comes across Simon and Andrew, and extends the invitation to spend their lives fishing for people instead of actual fish. I think it’s also important to note here that the text indicates that Simon and Andrew don’t actually leave their father in the lurch. They leave their father behind, but their father still has employees with him to carry on the physical work that needs to be done. If Simon and Andrew had not followed Jesus, but chosen instead to stay with their dad and mind the family business that was actually capable of running without them, the Church and the world – we - would have missed out on their participation in the work of God.

Maybe that’s a piece of what the letter to the church in Corinth is getting at. At first glance, I find this portion of the letter distressing, because it seems to be exhorting something of a disembodiment and rejection of physical life and emotions. In recent years, I have found life and truth and experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in embodiment, in acceptance of physical life and physical bodies as we are, in connecting with emotions and what realities emotions convey. But there is great truth in verse 31: “For the present form of this world is passing away.” It is true that life changes and evolves, and nothing stays the same forever. Pastor Paul is exhorting us to not hold too tightly to any version of reality, and to always seek God’s truth and God’s reality in all forms and expressions of every chapter of our lives. Thank God Simon and Andrew didn’t hold too tightly to being fishermen with their dad, but were willing to pivot and learn to fish Jesus-style.

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Jonah 3:1-5,10 Ps 62:6-14 1 Cor 7:29-31 Mark 1:14-20

And so, as we go about this week, I invite us all to hold onto the truths of God's character that our Scriptures offer us today, and to seek to evermore incorporate those truths into our daily lives. As God does in relationship with Jonah and the people of Ninevah, we can change our minds as people and circumstances change. We can, like the Psalmist, pour out our hearts before God – in private prayer, in a journal, on a walk, while doing errands. Wherever we find ourselves and whatever our circumstances, God is ready and waiting to hear us. We can find our safety and honor, our refuge and strength in God. We can stand on the truth of God's love for us and for each and every human being, and we can seek to live that love. Maybe you, like Jesus, have a family member in distress, and you have to carry your emotions about their distress in such a way that you still do the work that God has given you to do. Maybe you, like Simon and Andrew, will hear Jesus call to you, and will have to trust that your family will still be ok as you make a radical change in your life in order to participate in God's work. Whatever your particular challenges and joys this week, may you know that God has come close, and that Love enfolds every aspect of you. Amen.